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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 26 October 2010

Mardi 26 octobre 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 26 October 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 26 octobre 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Buddhist prayer.

Prayers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Apologies to our Buddhist constituents: that obviously wasn't the Buddhist prayer. It was a traditional prayer.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA RESPONSABILISATION DU SECTEUR PARAPUBLIC

Ms. Matthews moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act to increase the financial accountability of organizations in the broader public sector /
Projet de loi 122, Loi visant à accroître la responsabilisation financière des organismes du secteur parapublic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Debate?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm pleased to address the House today at this second reading of our proposed Broader Public Sector Accountability Act. This legislation, if passed, would raise the standard of accountability and transparency for hospitals, for LHINs and for other broader public sector organizations.

As you know, last year we asked the Auditor General to look at the use of consultants and external lobbyists at hospitals, LHINs and in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. We did so because we knew that the Auditor General would find things that need improving.

Speaker, I should have started my remarks with the note that I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Ottawa—Orléans.

We knew the Auditor General would find things that needed improving, and the Auditor General did not disappoint. He has done his job thoroughly, and we thank him for his work.

Our government responded immediately with a significant step forward to raise the bar on accountability and transparency. Our action follows the pattern of what we have done in government to continually improve transparency and accountability. This legislation is just

the latest in a series of steps we have taken since 2003, when we were told by the previous government that there was no deficit in the province of Ontario. As it turned out, there was a significant deficit. That will never happen again, because we have given the Auditor General the responsibility of signing off on our books prior to an election. That was the first step we took. We have expanded freedom-of-information provisions to cover Ontario Power Generation, to cover Hydro One, to cover universities, to cover Cancer Care Ontario. Local public utilities were brought back under freedom of information in 2004. With this proposed legislation, we are adding to that list.

It's clear that we have made significant progress to increase accountability and transparency in government. As well, we've reduced by half the money spent on consultants that have been working for government.

The Auditor General's report shone the light on practices that are completely unacceptable and practices that do not reflect respect for taxpayer dollars. We are changing that with this proposed legislation. Our government fully accepts the recommendations of the Auditor General and we are implementing each and every one of them.

In fact, we're going even further, to set even higher standards. Under this legislation, we're proposing to ban the practice of hiring external lobbyists with taxpayer dollars in hospitals, other large public sector organizations and publicly funded organizations that receive more than \$10 million in government funds. We're proposing to require large broader public sector organizations to follow tough expense and procurement rules. We're proposing to require all hospitals and LHINs to report on their use of consultants and to post online the expense claim information for senior leadership. We're proposing to require that all hospitals and LHINs sign attestations that they're in compliance with the new procurement requirements. And we're proposing to make hospitals subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, effective January 1, 2012.

I want to make it clear that although we are making hospitals subject to freedom-of-information legislation, the Personal Health Information Protection Act will continue to govern all files containing any type of personal health information. No identifying information will be released by hospitals through freedom-of-information requests.

Finally, if senior executives of hospitals or LHINs fail to comply with these tough new rules, their pay can be reduced.

The very day I introduced these measures, I spoke to hospital CEOs and hospital board chairs and I put them on notice: Change is coming. I told them they have to remember who's paying the bills. I also spoke with the LHIN leadership and told them that the Auditor General's findings were unacceptable and that I was deeply disappointed. I was very pleased that Tom Closson, the president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, acknowledged that these practices by hospitals were wrong and apologized on their behalf. Tom, like all responsible hospital executives, knows that we need every dollar possible going toward front-line health care and delivering the public services that Ontario families rely on.

0910

Ontarians are waiting less time to have key surgeries and diagnostic procedures done, and they wait less time to be seen in hospital emergency rooms. They have more access to family health care than ever before, and more than 900,000 Ontarians have found a doctor since 2003. There are 10,000 more nurses and 2,900 more doctors working in this province. This increase has far outpaced Ontario's population growth. Our investments and targeted initiatives are showing real results. It's thanks to a concerted effort by this government and its partners.

Health care is stronger than ever before, and we're turning our attention now to improving quality of care, putting the patient front and centre and providing evidence-based care to improve outcomes for patients. It is a concept that has been embraced by the health care community. I'm very proud of all these improvements in the health care system of this province and I'm proud that they were achieved in an atmosphere of improved transparency and accountability.

At the end of day, this action is all about respecting the hard-earned money of the taxpayers of this province. Knowing that Ontarians expect government to manage their money prudently makes me determined to get the best value for our health care investments. It's why we're driving quality and value into every corner of the health care system, and it's why we're raising the bar for accountability and transparency for the broader public sector with this proposed legislation.

When you have the responsibility of government, you can make a choice: You can choose to keep things in the dark or you can shine a light and make the changes for the better that people expect us to make. I urge all members to support this proposed bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I will expand on the comments made by the Honourable Deb Matthews, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, at this second reading of our government's proposed Broader Public Sector Accountability Act. As Minister Matthews has just said, our government fully supports and accepts the recommendations of the Auditor General in his special report entitled Consultant Use in Selected Health Organizations.

The auditor reported on practices by some hospitals and local health integration networks, or LHINs, that are

simply unacceptable to our government and, frankly, to the people of the province. Ontarians have every right to expect that their hard-earned tax dollars will be invested responsibly to provide the services for which they were intended. The auditor's report clearly shows that when it comes to LHINs, hospitals and other broad public sector organizations, there's more work that needs to be done to meet that expectation. That's why this government acted promptly and responsibly by introducing the broader public sector accountability bill.

We've already undertaken a number of initiatives to strengthen accountability and responsibility mechanisms within the Ontario public service and its agencies. The actions outlined in this proposed legislation complement those initiatives and would extend them throughout the broader public sector. Let me outline for you the measures already in place.

The government of Ontario's policies on the procurement of consultant services require all ministries and agencies to use competitive procurement processes when they require consulting services and restrict the payment of hospitality, incidental and food expenses for consultants. In the area of lobbying, the Lobbyists Registration Act requires lobbyists who wish to lobby public office holders to register with the lobbyist registrar, who is the Integrity Commissioner. All lobbyists' registrations are available to the public on the Integrity Commissioner's website, www.oico.on.ca. Failure to file required information in accordance with the act or making a false or misleading statement are offences, and the penalty is serious. Upon conviction, an individual is liable for a fine of up to \$25,000.

Public service employees are guided by the Public Service of Ontario Act, which restricts post-service lobbying activities by former public servants, including those employed in designated senior positions in a minister's office. For one year after leaving the public service, these former public servants are prohibited from lobbying any minister's office or ministry in which they worked during the 12 months before leaving the public service.

We've put in place strong conflict-of-interest rules for vendors involved in lobbying activities. Firms that bid on government work in areas such as public relations, media relations and commissioned research services must disclose the subject matter of their lobbying activities over the past 12 months, which ministries they have lobbied and on behalf of whom.

Our government revised the travel, meal and hospitality expenses directive to provide stronger and simpler expense rules for employees at ministries, employees and appointees at classified agencies, consultants and contractors to ministries or classified agencies and designated persons in all organizations prescribed by regulation under the Public Sector Expenses Review Act, 2009. We have also restricted the payment of hospitality, incidental and food expenses to consultants who work within the Ontario public service.

To demonstrate our own commitment to transparency, the public has access to online listings of expenses for the

Premier, cabinet ministers, parliamentary assistants, political staff and senior management in the Ontario public service. There is also a link to the expenses of the chairs; appointees; chief executive officers; presidents and vice-presidents or equivalent levels; direct reports to the CEOs; and the top five claimants at 22 of Ontario's largest agencies.

In November 2009, the Public Sector Expenses Review Act gave the Integrity Commissioner the authority to review expense claims of senior officials, appointees and the top five expense claimants in 22 of the province's largest agencies. This act requires these officials to abide by the same rigorous accountability and oversight provisions that apply to cabinet ministers and political staff who fall under the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act.

Our government has also been reducing spending on consulting services by focusing on strengthening the internal capacity and expertise of the OPS, and this strategy has produced great results. Consulting expenditures have dropped by more than 50%, from \$656 million in 2001-02 to \$304 million in 2009-10—more than half. Since 2003, 1,519 positions in the Ontario public service have been approved for conversion to replace work previously done by consultants. I'm pleased to report that this has resulted in an ongoing annual savings of approximately \$64 million.

In the context of the health care system, the proposed legislation reinforces the principles of our Excellent Care for All strategy: that accountability and wise use of health care resources mean better value and better patient outcomes. Ontarians want and deserve quality health care when and where they need it. They want better access and more choices. They want a health care system that is accountable and one that will be there for future generations.

When we came to power in 2003, we found a broken health care system. We've since made significant transformations to the system that have resulted in better access to front-line health care services and lower wait times. While our health care system has come a long way, we know there is a greater challenge looming: our growing and aging population. Escalating health care costs are the biggest threat to ensuring that the system will be there for future generations.

The Excellent Care for All Act, 2010, which received royal assent in June, is the first step in improving the quality and value of the health care system. This legislation means that health investments must produce evidence-based results and improve patient care. This means ensuring consistent standards, doing things because they have been proven to work and not doing things that aren't supported by clinical evidence. Improving quality puts patients first while making the most effective use of limited health care resources for us today and for future generations of Ontarians.

That same focus on value and prudent use of limited resources prompted our reforms to the provincial drug

system. Ontario is one of the largest purchasers of drugs in the world, and we deserve a better deal than the one we've been getting. In 2006, our government took bold steps to rein in the cost of generic drugs and expand patient access to medicine. Since that time, we've invested over \$1 billion and added 168 new prescription drugs to the formulary, as well as 45 new cancer products.

In June 2010, we started to further reform the prescription drug system to ensure the wider availability of more affordable drugs. That resulted in a reduction in the price of generic drugs by at least 50% across the board to 25% of the price of the original brand-name drug. That's a 50% price reduction for the generic drugs that we, the government, buy.

0920

We also eliminated professional allowances to make Ontario's drug system more accountable. These reforms are in the public's interest and Ontarians' interest. That commitment to Ontarians' interest brought about all our reforms across the health care system and indeed across the government to enhance accountability and openness, and operate in the light of day.

Our proposed legislation will raise the standard of oversight for all broader-sector entities and require them to adhere to the same rules as the Ontario public service and government agencies. I ask all members to support this proposed legislation.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's great to see you in the chair and it's always nice to see a female as Deputy Speaker.

I'll be speaking a little bit longer to this piece of legislation, because it is an important discussion for us to have in this chamber. I will make my remarks in a more fulsome manner later on this morning. But the reality is, I don't think this bill goes far enough. I'll go into that in a little bit. This chamber has been dealing, in the last year, with two major health care scandals that have come under this government's watch. Those are eHealth and what many would call eHealth 2.0, which is what the auditor uncovered just last week: the use of consultants and lobbyists at our hospitals and local health integration networks across the province.

Our party has called for the dismemberment or disbandment of the local health integration networks because we feel that so much money has gone into the bureaucracy, as opposed to front-line care. To make matters worse, those of us on the Progressive Conservative side of the House believe that a lot of that money is also going to consultants to help some Liberal insiders get rich. When you look at what the auditor has come out with and what the Ombudsman has said, I think that speaks to our view and I think it confirms the views that many Ontarians have that their tax dollars aren't being spent appropriately at our health care institutions across this province. We'd like to see more health care dollars go to front-line care. I look forward to speaking to this piece of legislation again.

As I say to my colleague, it's always nice for the female members to see somebody sitting in the chair who is like us.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaker, I find it nice to see you sitting in the chair as well. That's just because of who you are, whether you're female, as you are, or not. But please, Chair, will the Chair please use its authority and power to interrupt inappropriate language in the chamber, especially the incorrect use of the word "fulsome." It's like fingernails on a damned blackboard. I would hope that the Chair would perceive that as unparliamentary language and intervene when appropriate.

The NDP critic on this matter, our member for Nickel Belt, is literally fogged in up in northern Ontario, so during the course of the morning I will be asking for consent to have her lead deferred. I'll be speaking to the bill.

What I find truly remarkable is that the minister, of course, now insists that we don't need lobbyists to access this government, that this government is only a phone call away; just flip your Rolodex over to—I'm sure at some point Ms. Matthews—the minister, rather—is going to offer up her cellphone number and her home phone number so that people in fact can just dial her up or put her on speed dial and call her instead of employing high-priced liberally connected lobbyists. But at the same time, interestingly, people like John Matheson from StrategyCorp insist that lobbyists are the grease that makes government work. John Matheson from StrategyCorp would dispute every single thing that the minister has to say about the role of lobbyists. It will be interesting to see how powerful and effective lobbyists really are, because if lobbyists are as effective as they think they are, they will have persuaded this government to abandon this legislation before before it comes to third reading.

The committee hearings are going to be particularly delightful.

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to rise and make some comments following the minister and her parliamentary assistant on the introduction of Bill 122, the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act.

This act deals with a number of initiatives. Most important is the ban on lobbyists in the proposed legislation. It would prohibit certain broader public sector organizations from using public funds to hire lobbyists. I think this new legislation is well timed and something that the people of Ontario definitely are looking forward to.

Ontario's 259 classified agencies, such as the Liquor Control Board of Ontario and Cancer Care Ontario, are included, as well as hydro entities and the broader public service entities like hospitals, schools, CCACs and universities.

There will be procurement rules within this legislation. The procurement rules would be based on existing supply chain guidelines.

There would be expense claim rules. The government would have the authority to make expense claim directives to require rules to be set and followed by broader public service entities such as our hospitals, schools and boards.

There would be public postings of expenses. The proposed legislation, if passed, would require LHINs and hospitals to comply with directives issued by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care requiring the posting of expense claims information of designated individuals, such as CEOs, board members and senior managers, on the public website.

There's much more to this bill in its total, but there is an enforcement mechanism. The proposed legislation, if passed, would ensure that all funding agreements between the province and broader public service organizations incorporate these new accountability provisions.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to join with my colleagues on this side to say how pleased I am to see you in the chair. In fact, Madam Speaker, you're everywhere. I was watching television on the weekend, and there was this speech from the Dalai Lama. They panned the crowd, and there you were, front and centre. I said to my wife, "She's just everywhere." So I'm glad you're here today, I'm glad you're in the chair and I'm so pleased to be recognized to provide a few comments on Bill 122.

I was very surprised by the comments from the members opposite. It was a pretty historic day in the province yesterday. We saw a lot of voters cast their vote for change. I think it really sounded some bells in politicians' ears right across the province.

As the member for Nepean–Carleton talked about, this government opposite has a lot to account for. I can't believe that after the awful eHealth scandal, this government hadn't been more efficient in providing some checks on our system and the fact that the Auditor General came forward and presented a second report, which we have been calling eHealth 2.0 on this side, can come again in the province.

We had so many who came forward to call us and talk to us about their concern with the \$1-billion eHealth boondoggle. I can't believe that we're sitting in the House this morning and having the same type of discussion about the lack of accountability that the government has put in place. It's shameful; it's disgraceful.

I truly believe that as we move into the days and months ahead, the people of Ontario will again sound their bells loud and clear against this government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The Minister of Health has up to two minutes to respond.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank the members from Ottawa–Orléans, Nepean–Carleton, Welland, Chatham–Kent–Essex and Leeds–Grenville for their comments.

I've listened carefully, and I'm actually listening for some substantive response to the legislation that is before

us. So far, I have not heard anyone who is opposed to the substance of this legislation.

0930

Just quickly, I think it's very important to note that it was under our government that we gave the Auditor General the authority to look at hospitals. When the party opposite was in power, despite their sanctimonious stance today, they did not allow the Auditor General to look at what was going on in hospitals. We asked the Auditor General to look; we asked him specifically to look at the issue of consultants. We have addressed each and every one of the recommendations from the Auditor General and we are moving forward. It seems to me that this is progress in the right direction. Others may be more comfortable never exposing these issues to the scrutiny of the Auditor General. Our approach is to look, to constantly improve accountability and transparency, and, where the Auditor General recommends we make improvements, we do that.

This legislation addresses issues that have been going on for far too long in this province under all governments. It is under our government that these practices will stop. I think our responsibility to taxpayers has never been more important than it is today. People know that the health care system is under pressure, both demographic and fiscal. We know we have issues and that if we don't respond today, the future does not look bright in health care. So we are taking those steps—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a pleasure to be able to speak to this legislation on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservative caucus. It is no secret that this legislation marks the beginning of the end of the 39th Parliament more sharply than any other legislation or decision made by the McGuinty government since we have approached the one-year countdown to next year's election. It's the culmination of scandal, a sense of detachment from the public, and a growing sense of entitlement wrapped in a mea culpa that forms the basis of what I would call this apology bill. I believe it's also the closing chapter of a tired, worn out, out of touch and out of gas Liberal government.

This bill is nothing more than a grovelling knee-jerk reaction, a deathbed confession, some might say, by the McGuinty government, which once again has disappointed its constituents after another auditor's report exposed their penchant for getting consultants and lobbyists rich on precious health care dollars. This bill is the response to eHealth 2.0, where the Minister of Health has forced Ontario's hospitals to pay for high-priced, often hand-picked lobbyists to gain access to her and her decision-makers. Finally, this bill is another example of how this government has gotten too comfortable behind the big desks to do the small things right. The circumstances that led to this legislation have for many across Ontario become the final straw.

Had this minister and this McGuinty Liberal government truly been serious about greater taxpayer protection,

greater accountability by the public sector and more transparency in our public processes, then she would have supported my bill in May, the Ontario PC caucus bill on truth in government. It was a bill that would have prevented the abuses the minister is reacting to in the auditor's report of last week on hospital lobbyists, and I will just touch on the auditor's report. The auditor revealed last week that one hospital paid a consultant \$170,000 for expenses. When auditors asked for the receipts, the consultant asked for another \$3,000 to produce them. One consultant took a paid vacation to Japan and sent the airfare bill to Ontario taxpayers, while the whole time he was being paid his daily billing on vacation. Still another consultant expense: a bonus, a Christmas luncheon and a \$300 dinner to taxpayers. Essentially, the auditor revealed that the same waste and scandal that plagued eHealth also plagues the Ministry of Health, the local health integration networks and, sadly, Ontario hospitals, where Ontario patients rely on them for care.

I'd like to say that Premier McGuinty's promise to put a stop to this waste after eHealth and other scandals at Cancer Care Ontario, OLG and WSIB was genuine, but the truth is the McGuinty government only acts when it is to their benefit and not to the benefit of Ontario taxpayers. The Liberals only act when they are caught, and make no mistake: They have been caught time and again by Ontario's auditor.

Hence, we are now debating the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, an act, by the Liberals' own admission, that is a reaction to the auditor's report and thus, in many cases, does little more than issue weak and unenforceable directives and, in many more cases, only focuses on hospitals and LHINs when it should go toward the broader public sector.

I also note that the bill proposes that the minister can review the LHINs. This is utterly hilarious, given that this government has already broken its own law for a statutory review of the LHINs. Let's be clear: The Premier has broken his own law to review the LHINs and now he expects us to believe a new law, encouraging the Minister of Health to review the LHINs, will work. What was wrong with the old law? Why wasn't it enforced? And finally, why should we believe the McGuinty Liberals now?

The point is that the Liberals won't enforce the laws they already have on the books. Why should we believe they will enforce these new laws? We simply don't. We simply can't believe them, because the best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. The Premier used that language himself.

Furthermore, there are differences between the Liberal bill and the PC Truth in Government Act, and I argue that the Liberal bill does not go far enough to protect Ontario taxpayers. If the Liberals really wanted to span the entire so-called broader public service, they would have done so. But like so many of the Liberal bills of late, it's nothing more than a Band-Aid solution here and there.

I believe the starkest difference between the PC caucus' Truth in Government Act and this bill is motive. Where the Liberals propose a reactive apology bill to make amends for yet another health care scandal, the Ontario PC caucus put forward a thoughtful and reasonable accountability bill to prevent future mismanagement of tax dollars throughout the whole of government. In essence, the Liberals are trying to deliver an apology, while the PC caucus offered strong alternatives. Let me explain.

Last May, the Ontario PC caucus introduced the Truth in Government Act, which proposed five robust measures to create more openness and accountability across all of government. Specifically, our accountability legislation would have expanded freedom of information across all of government and would have ensured the disclosure of hospitality expenses, job reclassifications, as well as contracts and contributions over \$10,000 at all public sector bodies.

At the time, I sought all-party support, because it was a sensible plan that would cost nothing to adopt immediately, and it could have easily been done with information the government already possesses.

Having said that, the Liberals whipped their vote and, oddly, they stood against greater accountability and taxpayer protection at Ontario's hospitals, universities and government agencies, arguing at the time—and let me put forward a quote here. The member from Mississauga–Streetsville said that the bill was a “red-tape-bloat-and-spend bill,” while the so-called integrity czar, the Minister of Government Services at the time, said: “Our government has moved decisively to introduce greater accountability and transparency in the area of procurement. Our procurement policies ensure value for money by implementing open, fair and transparent competitive processes.”

The minister may want to reread his own Hansard. Had this government moved, as he said they did, to decisively introduce greater accountability and transparency, there would have been no abuses of taxpayers' dollars at LHINs or Ontario hospitals by consultants. Had they done what they said they would do, and had they followed their own rules, this wouldn't have happened.

They would also have no need for their own accountability bill if the Minister of Government Services was correct. Had they been decisive, they would have gotten it done. But they didn't, because they weren't decisive and they didn't follow their own rules.

Again, it begs the question: Why should we believe them now? Only now, after being caught again in scandal, does this Liberal government think it is appropriate to bring forward stronger accountability measures.

By the auditor's own account last week, both Liberal members couldn't have been further off the mark. One might even suggest that they misled this House, but then you would have to contend that either of them actually knew what they were talking about, which is highly unlikely. This is why I question the Liberal government—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would just ask the member to withdraw that comment.

0940

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

This is why I question why the Liberal government is acting now with the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act. Those same Liberals will now have to eat their own words, because their own Liberal government is now forced to finally act and put forward this apology bill for its actions, or the lack thereof, as was pointed out in last week's auditor's report. In fact, I believe that the Liberal apology bill introduced by the Minister of Health sells out the Minister of Government Services and the member for Mississauga–Streetsville because they have far less influence on the government benches. For those two members—and I'm loath to say “I told you so”—the remarks made in May for greater government accountability appear only partisan as best, and at worst it looks as if this government is actually facile, very weak, and attacking opposition legislation for petty partisan purposes. That's why their own bill, while drafted on the fly, actually adopts some of the PC caucus's recommendations, notably to open freedom of information to Ontario hospitals. I wonder somewhat facetiously if the Liberal member for Mississauga–Streetsville still contends that opening government to Ontarians will create “a monstrous, paper-shuffling, red-tape-creating, money-gobbling bureaucracy”, or if he is now just seeing the light.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Stop the clock, please. I would ask the House to come to order, please. I'm finding it difficult to hear the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Thank you. Continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The reality is this Liberal government doesn't want me to speak out. They don't want any opposition member, whether it's from the official opposition or the third party, to speak out about this because it speaks to how embarrassed they are that their government can't get it done. The embarrassing thing here is that this Liberal government actually thinks they can speak ill of opening transparency and accountability to all Ontarians, and then once they get caught they decide they're going to bring in legislation that will make it all better. Well, when you lose almost \$1 billion in health care funding because you didn't do your job, Ontarians are angry, and justifiably so.

Again, I think the reality is that the two members who spoke against the PC Truth in Government Act must now not want to show their faces, because they have egg all over them.

This Liberal bill stops well short of what is an acceptable government accountability plan and it stops well short of what is acceptable to Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus. Let me explain my major points of contention—and I hope the minister is listening. I also encouraged her staff this morning at a briefing to adopt some of these resolutions. We will be putting forward amendments.

We believe that this bill only opens hospitals to freedom of information, not all provincial public bodies. That is the first and probably biggest criticism we have of this legislation. It only requires expenses to be disclosed at hospitals and LHINs, not all public sector bodies, and it only requires reporting on consultants and not all contracts for goods and services at all provincial public bodies. Again, I must reiterate, it stops well short of what we in the Ontario PC caucus feel are acceptable transparency and accountability measures. This is why I feel that the bill is designed more as an apology for the Liberals who quietly masterminded a second eHealth scandal than it is for greater transparency and accountability for Ontario taxpayers.

The failings in this bill, I suppose, can be chalked up to a lack of commitment to taxpayer protection by this government and their loose regard for Ontario taxpayer dollars. If the Liberal government truly believes in protecting tax dollars, they will stop paying lip service to this bill, support our thoughtful amendments and incorporate the Truth in Government Act. As I pointed out, the Truth in Government Act had five very reasonable, achievable, robust measures for greater taxpayer protection. We feel that had they been adopted, we would have seen greater transparency and accountability at government agencies across the Ontario public service, but more than that, it would have prevented what we saw with eHealth 2.0 or, as we like to call it, the recent auditor's report.

Again, I just would like to reiterate: We were calling for expanded freedom of information across all of government. This bill, in contrast, only opens that up to hospitals. I think that to actually prove they want greater accountability and transparency, they would have opened it up to everything. Instead, this looks like a knee-jerk, Band-Aid reaction—

Mr. Steve Clark: They got caught.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod:—given the fact that they, as my colleague from Leeds–Grenville says, got caught. We would have ensured disclosure of hospitality expenses government-wide. That's not the case here. In fact, what will happen—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Did you do that when you had the chance?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If the minister would maybe listen for once, she would understand that her government is only going to issue directives that don't need to be followed. I think that that's actually insulting. I think that if she were to be serious about this, she would firmly adopt a protocol and policy to disclose hospitality expenses.

They've done nothing to talk about job reclassifications within the Ontario public service whereby those who are getting a new job classification and in some cases a new salary would have that posted online for greater transparency, but they chose not to do that. They have a narrow focus based on reaction and the apology that they want to give to Ontario taxpayers.

We also suggested all contracts over \$10,000 at all public sector bodies be posted online. This is happening

in other places across the country. It costs nothing to do. It would allow for people across the province, whether they're members of the opposition, members of the media or they're taxpaying citizens to go online and see what companies are making over \$10,000 in taxpayer money at various places across the province, but they chose not to do that. This is an easy, affordable and efficient way of communicating to the government.

We also have called for any contribution over \$10,000 that goes to any government agency or a transfer payment agency to also be posted online to ensure that those who are receiving public dollars in and outside of government are treating those dollars with the utmost respect. But the reality is this government is not interested in having a whole debate, a full debate. They just want this auditor's report to be buried so that they don't have to deal with the repercussions that the Ontario taxpayers are going to bring forward.

I urge the minister—if she wants to co-operate and wants to make this bill better and one that all of us in all of the political parties could work together on, she would listen to our reasonable and thoughtful proposals in the Ontario PC caucus.

The era for accountability is not new. I had the fortune of working on Parliament Hill and I remember the days of the sponsorship scandal. I know that the Federal Accountability Act was a direct response by the Stephen Harper government, trying to move federal Parliament into a greater era of transparency and accountability. We're four years behind the federal government right now because this government hasn't put forward a reasonable bill to ensure that all of our agencies, boards, commissions and transfer payment agencies adhere to a certain set of rules.

We continue to see different pieces of legislation, whether that's a Good Government Act, 2009, or a Good Government Act, 2010, which actually amends certain parts of the Good Government Act, 2009—I guess that means it's bad government. But the reality is, they've not put anything forward to prevent future abuses from happening. It's always putting something forward that reacts to an abuse that has already occurred. The question that many of us have in the official opposition, and I'm sure they have it in the third party, is, why aren't you following the rules that you already put in place?

The Premier promised us that 22 boards, agencies and commissions would post online. As of last week, 19 weren't up; 11 ministers hadn't posted their expenses online either. If they're not going to follow the rules they already have in place—and I use the LHIN example again—if they're not going to do that mandatory review that they promised us they were going to do that was actually in law and then they just sort of hid it and ignored it and broke their own law, then why should we believe that they really want to change? Why should we believe that the minister is going to issue a directive when all this bill says is, "She can do it; she's allowed to do it"? Nothing says that the minister is actually going to do it. Nothing actually says that the minister is going to

force government agencies, boards, commissions and other transfer agencies and hospitals to actually follow any sort of rules she'll come up with.

0950

In fact, it doesn't even say she's going to put forward rules; they're not codified in this piece of legislation. Think about that. This bill is so that members of the Liberal Party can go back into their ridings and say, "We're doing something about it." But if you read the fine print, no, they're not. They're not really doing anything about it. They're issuing the possibility of directives. She may do a review, she may do an audit, but it doesn't mean she will. It means that in a year from now, we're still going to uncover scandal, waste, bloat, all of that, by this Liberal government, because there is no desire to truly change. Until there's a desire to truly change and to make Ontario taxpayers believe that they've changed, we're going to continue to see bills like this: bills that are a reaction, bills that show that they have a sense of entitlement and that they've gotten caught.

I'm not going to read the articles that have been published in the last week by columnists and by others across the province in Ontario's newspapers. But, again, I think there was a real disappointment by many people across Ontario, and particularly by those who observe Queen's Park, that this government didn't do more to prevent these types of abuses, especially in this era of accountability. We saw what happened with the sponsorship scandal, the hotel Grand-Mère. The list goes on. And the taxpaying public in all of Canada at the time decided that we could do better, that the tired old Chrétien-Martin Liberal gang had abused taxpayers enough. There was a new era of accountability, and it appears that the McGuinty government didn't get the memo, and so we still see all these scandals.

It just troubles people to no end. One of the things I continually hear about in my constituency is this \$1 billion that seems to have gone nowhere for eHealth. In fact, many people in my constituency and across the city of Ottawa are still calling for a public inquiry into what happened at eHealth. They believe that their money was misused, in part because the auditor pointed it out, but in many cases they find that their tax dollars have no value anymore. I think that speaks to a broader problem in this government and to eHealth being a symptom of what people see as a broader problem with this government, which is that it has become out of touch. They believe they know how to spend your money better than you do. It also says that they know how to do your laundry better and all those sorts of examples.

What it all comes down to, when we look at this piece of legislation, the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, is that it's not going to solve anything unless they do it right and unless they adopt their own rules. I think that has been the biggest and most challenging example of this government's years in office. They were swept into office. They made 50 promises, none of which they either intended to keep or could keep. They raised taxes after

saying they wouldn't. They promised LHIN reviews; broke their own laws. They promised children with autism that they would help them and then they took their parents to court. I'm ashamed of this Liberal government's actions on that file.

I'll give you a story. This is how I knew how horrific this government was. In the 2006 by-election, in which I was elected, I ran against a lady named Laurel Gibbons, whose son has autism. She decided to run for the New Democrats because that Liberal government was taking her and other parents to court. She left her family—she has three children, one of whom has autism, and she decided to take on public life for that fight. If you want to talk about accountability in the broader public sector or even accountability in the broader public, there is nothing more heinous and nasty than what that Liberal government did to those families. They're lucky other issues took over in the 2007 election; otherwise, voter anger would have been squarely at their feet.

I must say, this next year when this Liberal government will have to go out and speak to the Ontario public will be a difficult one because they have forgotten to serve the very people who have elected them. I think that's why we're starting to see a critical mass each and every day of absent Liberal MPPs. In fact, we're seeing, on average, 30 to 40 a day—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would ask that the member not refer to the absence of other members. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I put forward a private member's bill yesterday that—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The government House leader gets so testy around here. It must be very difficult to have to defend this government's record.

I put forward a private member's bill yesterday that was put forward the first time by a young man named George Smitherman, when he was the member for Toronto Centre. He put forward a bill that said that truancy of cabinet ministers and the Premier would require a \$500 fine if they were missing two thirds of the time. I put forward that bill to highlight the fact that what we're seeing here in this chamber is a lot of absences and it's something we need to talk about. In fact, when you look at the Premier—and he's been missing 69% of question periods, given what was reported today in the Ottawa Citizen. That's why this bill—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would ask that the member not refer to the absence of people and get back to the government bill at hand, Bill 122. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Madam Speaker, I think it speaks to this bill because, again, if they want to talk about broader public service accountability, there have been and there continue to be pieces of legislation from the opposition that call for greater accountability of the government, whether that's the broader public service or ministerial accountability. We put these forward. I'm only suggesting that if the government truly is serious

about this, they would adopt some of the measures put forward by the Ontario PC caucus, whether that's the Truth in Government Act or the bill that I put forward yesterday. It's serious. They thought it was a good idea when they were in opposition. What happened after seven years? They thought it was a great idea to promise that he wouldn't raise our taxes twice. What happened? You promised you were going to do a statutory review of the LHIN. What happened?

This is a government that makes promises to the public and then doesn't follow through. What makes this broader public sector bill any different? They're coming up with new rules all the time, but they never follow them.

Again, I point to the fact that they put forward an accountability bill last year, and at the time—let me get the quote out from the Minister of Government Services, who basically said that it was all done, it was never going to happen again. Harinder Takhar, the Minister of Government Services, said, "Our government has moved decisively to introduce greater accountability and transparency in the area of procurement. Our procurement policies ensure value for money by implementing open, fair and transparent competitive processes."

Do you know what we're dealing with in this piece of legislation?

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Why don't you read the bill instead of the talking points your government is telling you to read? The reality is, this government did nothing. This bill is actually dealing with procurement. If the member from wherever she's from would read the bill, she would understand. The reality is that you've now got a government of MPPs who are sitting in the back and over here in the rump who are told what to do and what to say. They don't think for themselves—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They can catcall all they like. The reality is, the Ontario public doesn't buy it anymore because they never follow through with a promise. If you're going to make a promise, keep it. But you're incapable of that. You're incapable. You've got a track record of being unable to keep a promise.

1000

I've got a little sheet in my desk here. I'm going to read through them because this speaks to the priorities of this government.

Remember, he promised not once but twice not to raise our taxes. Then he immediately brought in the health premium and the single largest sales tax increase, the HST. Then he brought in the eco fees, but they backtracked on that. The Ontario public are still looking for \$85 million that they were scammed out of.

I was at the time the children and youth services critic for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The children's aid society, in my first year, was caught funding officials to drive gas-guzzling SUVs and take out \$2,000 gym memberships as well as take trips right across the province. Remember how they promised

accountability measures after that? And what happened? The scandals just moved from the children's aid societies. Where did they move to? To the LHINs, to eHealth, to Cancer Care Ontario.

That brings us to eHealth, a \$1-billion boondoggle—nothing to show for it. What came out of that? More rules on how to make government more accountable. And then we still have this piece of legislation.

We've got the Green Energy Act, in which the Premier reversed his decision regarding mandatory energy audits, and that was only after the public started to cry out. I guess in a sense they may have actually been considered accountable in that regard.

They had OLG scandal 1 and then they had OLG scandal 2. I can remember—you'll probably remember this too, Madam Speaker—when, in the midst of the recession, OLG decided it was going to advertise a contest giving away German-made vehicles. Meanwhile, we make great vehicles in this province. We make them in Oshawa; we make them right across this great province. That's what they've done.

We had another scandal, at the WSIB. They promised more rules.

We've got a deficit. I remember when I first got here how they used to cry; they used to squeal over there. A few of them on the front bench would squeal over a \$5.6-billion deficit, which was caused by SARS, mad cow disease and an energy blackout. Yet when they have a \$19-billion deficit because they're spending on all their little programs that create more social engineering across the province, we're not supposed to say a word. Well, the reality is, this is a government that taxes, it's a government that spends, and it's a government that has no priorities and always sets new rules because they keep breaking the ones that they promised.

We remember the tax collector severance. I could think of nothing more unaccountable than giving people \$45,000 to move from one job on a Friday to another job in the same office, at the same cubicle, with the same title, on a Monday.

We now remember the Ombudsman, the one person who wanted to keep these folks accountable and wanted them to follow the rules, and who was the first, by the way, to say that the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus was right on the LHINs. They wanted to get rid of him before his report came out. You'll remember that. They wanted to do a fear-and-smear campaign on him.

We can talk about the sex ed curriculum, which I think was appalling and was probably the greatest—

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I would like you to rule on section 23(b) of the standing orders. The member seems to be straying into sex education and other areas that are not directly related—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you, member from Peterborough. I'd ask the member to get back to Bill 122. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I guess the reality is, I am talking about accountability. I'm talking about this government's

track record and their ability to move forward on things that actually matter to people and to keep the rules. It speaks to how they do things.

If I'm going to stand here and talk about the rules that they're putting in place and that they never follow through on, it also speaks to their record, whether it's sex education or eco fees; the backtracking, like G20, the secret security law, which, by the way, showed how unaccountable this Liberal government and that cabinet are.

The reality is that they'll continue to have this discussion. We'll be talking about another accountability bill when we find out that they have to apologize for yet another scandal that's probably going to come down the pipe.

The reality is, again—and I can't say this enough—they always say that they've gotten it done, that they're doing better, but they're not, because they don't follow their own rules.

I remember, a couple of question periods ago, we were standing here. There's a common theme every single time that the Premier speaks. He always says, "We can do better," and it doesn't matter what it is.

Mr. Steve Clark: He says that a lot.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He says it a lot. But of course he can do better, and this bill can do better; the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act can do a whole lot better. That's why we're calling on the government to adopt the Ontario PC caucus's Truth in Government Act. That's why I think it would be a great idea for them to move forward on a bill that I put forward yesterday to increase ministerial accountability.

When we talk about these things, I'm sure they would want me just to talk about their bill, but we would like to enhance it and make it better. That's why we're talking and debating here today. But again, you want to stifle that debate, and it's unfortunate. It's unfortunate that you only want people to speak off of the talking points you've given the member from Guelph and that you'll continue to regurgitate.

I go back to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, how he behaved at the introduction of the Truth in Government Act, which was to get petty and partisan and call it a waste bill, when in fact it was trying to streamline accountability practices across government. That means all of its agencies, boards and commissions. It means all of its transfer payment agencies. It means all of its ministries. They didn't follow through. Obviously, he's going to have to go to caucus today and find out that more accountability is in vogue, that it's the right thing to do.

This government can't continue to spend people's tax dollars and waste them without repercussions. That's why we're standing here today debating this bill and talking about more value for money. We want to open more of government to the taxpaying citizens. We want to ensure that this government, if they're going to promise to do it, will follow through. Again, I can't say this enough: If this government is going to continue to

put forward legislation, they had better follow through on it. This is a common theme. The general recurrence that we continue to hear in this Legislature is that they make a promise, and they break a promise.

This bill—I have no hope of actually seeing them follow through on everything, given the fact that all it suggests is that the government may issue directives. Perhaps the minister could answer that question—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Stop the clock for a minute. I would ask that members who want to have private conversations have them in the lounge and not in the House.

Member from Nepean–Carleton, continue.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Again, there's government business, and they would like to do it so that they're not accountable, so they have to challenge the Chair—amazing.

As I move on today—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They're having a procedural discussion. I'm sure that they want to see how they're going to respond to my remarks.

This government has continually let down the people of the province. I think that they can do better. They have admitted as much on several occasions in the last little while.

I'll conclude by suggesting to them that they've got five solid initiatives in the Truth in Government Act that they can adopt. They've got one solid initiative that actually was conceived by their former Deputy Premier who, for all I know, might be back next year as the member for Toronto Centre; they could easily adopt that and just increase the fine. I think it speaks to where we've come in the province as of late, the government rot. They call it second-term-itis. They have it.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, I was struck by the participation in this debate by the member for Nepean–Carleton. She began her comments with a fervour and darned near had me speaking in tongues, and wrapped them up in the succinct way that she always does—a very powerful and effective member of this Legislature and, indeed, an effective critic of this government.

Although it's increasingly obvious that you don't have to be particularly good to be critical of this government. It's just—well, it's easy. It's a fool's pastime, if you will, because there's so much for this government to be criticized for. They lead with their chin inevitably, and they have a target that's the size of Ontario. That's how big the target is, and the bull's eye is the size of the GTA, if you will.

1010

We're going to be speaking to this bill in due course. Unfortunately, we won't have time this morning for the NDP to do its lead through our critic, the member for Nickel Belt, or for me to do my modest 20 minutes—and I regret that it's only 20 minutes, because I will be

addressing this bill, as I suspect every one of my colleagues in this NDP caucus will be, with great, great interest.

The bill is fraudulent. It's a phony piece of legislation. Indeed, it's rather pathetic because—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Excuse me; did I hear the member say “fraudulent”?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Yes, of course.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would ask you to withdraw that as unparliamentary.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I withdraw it, and I'll withdraw in advance anything else I might say that will be unparliamentary in the next 20 seconds.

So we have a fraud and we've got committee hearings that will inevitably flow. I'm looking forward to the delightful exchange between lobbyists, who insist that they're the grease that makes government work, and the minister, who insists that her phone is on your speed dial and just give her a call any time you want.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm reminded by my colleague from Essex of a Mac Davis song, “Oh, Lord it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way.” I think we were reminded of that song when we heard the member from Nepean–Carleton speak to this bill. We'll have a little contest: it's going to be “Name the minister, name the party.”

I'm reading from the Auditor General's report on page 25: In early 1999, the hospital single-sourced a contract. It's been worth \$60 million to this company—sole-sourced. Who was the minister? Liz Witmer, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. Who was the party in power?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Stop the clock, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I thought that we had a ruling here that we weren't supposed to name members. Again, unaccountable.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, I do correct it: It was the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

On page 25 of the auditor's report, the auditor speaks about another contract, started in 2002 and worth \$3.7 million, both contracts single-sourced. The party in power in 2002 was?

Interjections: The Conservatives.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: And the minister? The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

On page 28: At one hospital, a consultant has been engaged since 1999 as CEO. The hospital originally single-sourced the position to this consultant. The party in power was the Conservative Party and the Minister of Health was the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

On page 30 he talks about a contract dating from 2002: \$51,000 to a lobbying firm. Again, the party in power was the Conservatives; the Minister of Health was the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

It's hard to be humble, but you're not perfect in every way. We all hold responsibility.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: That was an extremely interesting attempt at a game show. It's just a typical Liberal response: They love to talk about many, many years ago; they love to talk about the past, but they don't want to talk about the fact that they're getting caught—and they have to continually get caught before they actually do something. Minister, you can talk about all the quaint little game shows. We can play the 1960s game show or the 1970s game show or the 1980s game show, but the fact of the matter is, we're talking about 2010.

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes, and this is the reality TV we're playing today.

The fact of the matter is—and I'm so glad that when I looked at the itinerary today, that the Premier will be here. I've missed him. I'm glad he'll be here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I caution the member—

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not talking about anybody who's not here.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's his presence, not his absence.

Mr. Steve Clark: Absolutely.

But again, had the minister and the McGuinty Liberals been truly serious about accountability, as the member for Nepean–Carleton mentioned, they would have embraced her Truth in Government Act, which was tabled in May, and provided that accountability for the greater public service.

I want to reiterate some of the things that she did mention. I sat beside her and I thoroughly enjoyed her address. Her riding is a neighbouring riding to mine and she's a great mentor to me. She has provided some wonderful discussions about accountability: the fact that she talked in May about expanding freedom of information across all government and the greater public service. I think that her bill back in May would have provided the accountability that we on this side of the House have been talking about.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: The hospital procedures were not developed over one or two or three years. These are procedures that have come from many governments, including the years that the opposition here now was in government. Some of those procedures certainly aren't very well-defined and aren't followed, but they had their own auditors and their own auditors were supposed to be looking after the shop.

This government has made a change. We've extended the purview of the Auditor General into the broader public sector. That's what we did, and of course we asked for this report. We asked the auditor to conduct spot audits on the use of consultants in the health sector, including the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the LHINs and 16 hospitals.

We asked for that because we know that the training that the hospitals have for their procedures came from

people like former MPP Chris Stockwell. Chris Stockwell charged Ontario Power Generation up to \$10,000 in travel expenses for his family vacation in Europe. Paul Rhodes, Leslie Noble, Tom Long and Michael Gourley shared \$5.9 million—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would ask the member, just as we've been saying before, to mention the name of the riding, not the name of the member.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Madam Speaker, I would do that, but these are public figures. Paul Rhodes, Leslie Noble, Tom Long and Michael Gourley were not members. They shared \$5.9 million in untendered contracts from Hydro One. That's why we asked the Auditor General to go into Hydro One when we got here.

So, we are looking at this. We have the Auditor General going in. We are coming up with the right rules. That's what we have to do. This will make sure that hospitals—LHINs are only four years old; they have to learn a lot of lessons in consultant procurement for sure, and thank goodness they're not learning them from the Tories—and the 16 hospitals. This is the right thing—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like a page to come forward, if it's possible, to bring something over to the Minister of Health. It's a piece of paper that says, "Why not blame Sir John A. Macdonald?" For honest to goodness' sake, this is getting a bit ridiculous. If you could bring that over, just so she understands it.

At some point in time—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Excuse me, if you could stop the clock just for a minute. This is a prop and it's out of order.

Member, please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a simple message. This is a government that continues to blame everyone as far back—in recent months, for the issue that occurred with the tax collectors—as Premier Robarts. They blame Premier Eves, they blame Premier Harris, they blame Stephen Harper for everything. Why not blame Sir John A. Macdonald?

The reality is, the buck stops with you, Minister. You've been in government for seven years; over seven years. You're changing it now because you got caught. You keep getting caught, Minister. You're an embarrassment to this chamber, you're an embarrassment to this province and unless you're going to make a decision—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Stop, please. I'd ask the member to withdraw that and ask her to speak through the Chair, please.

Thank you. Continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I withdraw, but the reality is, this government had an option. They chose not to do it. They chose consistently, time and time and time again, not to put forward any meaningful rules. This bill is no different. And until they're prepared to make change and

stick with it, make a promise and keep it, this government has not got the confidence of anyone on this side of the chamber. This bill is nothing more than a PR stunt because they've been caught again by the auditor, and I can think of nothing more atrocious.

The first thing you did that I remember as an elected member was taking parents to court whose kids have autism, and then you mismanaged, you misspent and you wasted taxpayer dollars intended for health care. That's wrong. You've done wrong and you've got to do better. The Premier says it every day. Learn to do better.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): It being 10:15, I declare that this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1019 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim Brownell: I would like to introduce Colin Munro. Colin is a resident of South Glengarry, in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and he's a second-year student in criminology and political science at the University of Ottawa. I would like to welcome him to the Legislature.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd like to welcome some very special guests from GlaxoSmithKline, one of our world-class pharmaceutical leaders in north Mississauga: Paul Lucas, the CEO and president; Rav Kumar, vice-president, regulatory and development operations; and Allan O'Dette, director, external relations, policy and national private markets. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to introduce Prem Sharma of Oakville; he's a family friend. With him are his daughter Neera Maini, a chiropractor, and his son-in-law Raj Maini, an ophthalmologist. He's a specialist surgeon trained at Cambridge University, UK. They are visiting us from Nairobi.

Mr. Reza Moridi: I would like to extend a special welcome to page Jonathan Antony's father, Joseph Antony; mother, Viji Antony; sister Cynthia Antony; grandmother Cecilia Antony; and grandmother Karuna Nathan in the public gallery.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We've got a very special school here from Mississauga East–Cooksville—actually, two—visiting today: Brian W. Fleming Public School, and joining them are teachers Jeff Rowat, Heather Childs, Ann Bick, who has been there for so many years and has done so much and is retiring this year, Shubhra Mathur, and Catherine Hooks-Hull. We also have students here from T.L. Kennedy high school. I want to congratulate them and thank them for joining us here today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to welcome to the gallery the Ontario Long Term Care Association. They're here today in recognition of Long-Term Care Week in Ontario and to celebrate advancing long-term care through innovation. Please join me in welcoming Christina Bisanz, Lois Cormack, David Cutler, Sheri

Annable, Dan Kaniuk, Brock Hall, Gary Loder, Patrick McCarthy and Robert Zober.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to introduce, in the members' gallery west, my executive assistant, Julian Warrick, who has been with me for some time. This is the first time that he has ever had the opportunity to view the proceedings from the members' gallery, so I'm very pleased to welcome him this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Minister of Revenue, to welcome Superintendent Michael Shea from the Hamilton Police Service in the gallery today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery the Consul General and Deputy Consul General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands at Toronto, Mr. Hans Horbach and Mr. Arie Plieger. Please join me in welcoming our guests to the Legislature today. Consul General, Deputy, welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Premier, there is one thing for which a Premier bears sole responsibility, and that is the naming of cabinet. The appropriate standard of conduct for a cabinet minister ultimately rests with the Premier.

I have now shared with you a comment directly attributed to the Minister of Research and Innovation and other comments he felt were appropriate to re-tweet on his Twitter site. Premier, whether it's through the social media, in a letter, in a scrum, the minister's comments were absolutely unacceptable and beneath his office. Premier, will you state categorically that you agree that this kind of libel is unbecoming of a minister of the crown?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me say a few things on this. First of all, this is in reference to the municipal elections, particularly those that prevailed here in the city of Toronto. I want to take the opportunity to thank everybody who presented themselves as a candidate and who removed themselves from the comfort and convenience of the sidelines and put their name on a sign and their reputation on the line—not an easy thing to do.

Second, I want to congratulate all the winners. On behalf of my government, I want to let them know that we look forward to working with them. We bring a tremendous amount of goodwill. We think our shared responsibility is to work on behalf of the people we are privileged to represent and to find common ground and a way to make progress. That's the tone that I will bring to this responsibility, and that speaks to the goodwill that I want all of my government to represent.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, it is precisely about that tone that you reference and your members applaud. All

of us who stand for public office understand that debate may get heated from time to time, but I think, Premier, you agree that there is a line. Your minister has clearly crossed that line. The accusations of the Minister of Research and Innovation were offensive and they're beneath the role of a cabinet minister. The fact that it appeared on Twitter is no excuse. The minister had the opportunity to deliberate on the words he chose. He had the opportunity to deliberate whether the message was appropriate to re-tweet as well, let alone those messages he personally constructed.

Premier, you have a very clear choice to make: You can show your disapproval, as Premier, of the minister's libellous comments. Will you call the minister to make a full, public and written apology?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's not unusual for things to be said in the heat of the moment that some of us might regret having said. I'm not going to purport to speak on behalf of any individual who offered any kind of comment during the course of this election.

I don't have the information in front of me but I do believe that at the end of the evening, when the results were in, the particular minister extended his best wishes on Twitter to the mayor-elect of the city of Toronto, Rob Ford. Again, I think that speaks to the goodwill and the genuine desire on the part of everyone in my government to find some common ground and find a way to make progress with the newly elected representatives, whether here in Toronto or from anywhere else across the province.

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

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, after seven years, you've changed. I knew a Premier McGuinty who would have said in the past that he would stand firmly against these types of libellous and negative attacks on Mayor Ford, on me personally and on Prime Minister Harper from a member of your cabinet.

At the Liberal convention last week, you insisted that you would not run a negative campaign. You said that it was not your style. But days later, that statement is being seriously undermined by a minister who has crossed the line in making libellous accusations.

It is well beyond the pale. You have them in front of you. It is unbecoming of a minister of the crown. Sir, if you don't call for an immediate public apology from the minister, will you then ask him to resign? This goes way across the line.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again—and I know my honourable colleague understands this—politics can be heated. It can involve a very healthy collision of ideas, contrasting perspectives and different ideologies, and by and large, that is healthy. But once in a while, people say things which they later regret. I'm not going to assign blame to any individual who offered any commentary of any kind, which they may choose to regret today in hindsight. But what I can say is that, as a government, we're bringing a tremendous amount of goodwill to the

table. We congratulate all those who won, we thank all those who presented themselves as candidates, and we will find every way that we possibly can to build on some common ground and make progress on behalf of Ontario families.

CONSULTANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm shocked that the Premier has missed this opportunity to show leadership as Premier and to set the tone for the conduct of the comments of a cabinet minister of the crown. Premier, with respect, this goes beyond ideology. These are serious accusations of bigotry, as you know. You can't hide from this; it is in the public sphere, the minister's comments on Twitter.

Let me ask the Premier if he will take on another test of leadership, since he has failed the first one. You have said that you will shine the light of day on the expenses of consultants discovered in the auditor's most recent report, eHealth 2.0. The auditor's report does not name names. If you are good to your word, sir, will you release publicly the names of the consultants who got rich off the sweetheart deals at the LHINs, the Ministry of Health and the hospitals in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to take the opportunity to thank the auditor for his work. I want to remind my honourable colleague and all of my colleagues in the Legislature here that the reason that the auditor was in fact enabled to perform this work was because, first of all, we gave him the authority to look at our hospitals; and, secondly, we then asked him specifically if he might look at these particular kinds of circumstances. He did that for us; we're very grateful. We're adopting each and every one of his recommendations, but we're even taking steps beyond that.

I would also argue that this is in keeping with the practice that we've had as a government, whether it's increasing the authority that we've given to the auditor and the Integrity Commissioner, whether it's increasing coverage for freedom of information and the sunshine list. In each and every instance where we uncover real issues that have to do with transparency and accountability, we move forward on those; we put new rules in place. And in each and every instance, they've been opposed by the opposition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, after seven years in office, you've changed. Your gut reaction on my first line of questioning clearly should have been to say that they were wrong, that the comments by your minister go way over the line. You failed to do so. You've changed.

Now, when I'm asking you to reveal exactly which consultants got fat and rich while Ontario families are waiting longer for services, waiting to get a loved one into a long-term-care home, waiting with their kid at emergency for 12 hours or more, you refuse to reveal the names of the consultants who got fat and rich while Ontario patients got left behind.

I'll ask you once again, Premier: Will you go public and let us know which consultants got these runaway contracts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is, again, a case when my honourable colleague is not prepared to take yes for an answer. We've had the auditor go in. We've had an independent, objective third party with tremendous expertise go in and perform a valuable public service.

The auditor specifically said—and I want to remind my colleague opposite of this—that party politics did not enter into the awarding of these contracts. He couldn't be more clear; he could not be more explicit.

There was a real issue. It had to do with how money is being spent, money received by the government of Ontario that is disbursed to LHINs, hospitals, and other public agencies and bodies. We have made some important changes to the rules. They are in keeping with what we've done as a matter of principle. We believe in accountability and transparency. That's why we've now broadened the rule base, which further reins in people when it comes to how they're going to spend taxpayer dollars.

I think the auditor again did a wonderful job on this, and that's why we've adopted every one of his recommendations—and we're going beyond that.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, this is a test of your character. It's a test of your leadership. It's a test of what has happened to Premier McGuinty after seven years in office. This is now my sixth request to you to take a stand and to say the remarks of your Minister of Innovation were way beyond the pale.

You also have an opportunity now, sir, to reveal publicly, to name names of who got rich off the insider contracts and deals at the Ministry of Health, at the LHINs, at the ministry itself.

We had to use freedom-of-information requests to get the information about eHealth, the \$30-million sweetheart deal to IBM, the incredible richness of the contracts handed out to the Liberal-friendly Courtyard Group. Premier, you're preventing us from doing that again. Why don't you come clean? Let us know exactly who benefited from these contracts and shine the light of day.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the questions that begs for an answer is, why is it, in each and every instance, the official opposition has opposed our measures to enhance accountability and transparency?

One of the things that we have recently done is extend powers to the auditor so that he can, in fact, take a look at our hospitals and deal with the matter of consultants. There were over 150 lobbyists hired by hospitals, universities and others receiving public funds under the former Conservative government. They were addicted to consultants. There was a 244% increase in the use of consultants between 1998 and 2002. So far, we have cut this in half, and obviously there is more work to do.

Once in awhile, it would be nice to have their support when it comes to cleaning up their mess.

CONSULTANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. This government promised change after the auditor exposed the billion-dollar eHealth scandal. The Premier said at the time, "I take responsibility for this." Last week's Auditor General's report showed that not much has changed at all since eHealth.

I'm going to ask very clearly: Does this Premier take responsibility for this mess, and will he apologize to Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I want to thank the auditor for the work that he's done. The principle here that he is upholding, and one that we embrace, has everything to do with accountability and transparency.

It may very well be that taxpayers give their money to the provincial government, and it may very well be that we transfer those dollars outwardly to LHINs, hospitals, colleges and universities. But the fact of the matter is, we remain responsible for how they're spent out there on the front lines. It became clear to us that they weren't being spent in keeping with the modern-day standards and values of our taxpayers and our families.

That's why we take responsibility for that. That's why we asked the auditor to go in. That's why we gave him authority over hospitals. That's why we're adopting every single one of his recommendations and even going further than that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The McGuinty Liberals have let well-connected consultants and lobbyists get rich while patients line up in hospitals in places like Thunder Bay and Sudbury. Hamilton families are losing an adult emergency ward in their community.

When will the Premier simply apologize to families for squandering their precious health care dollars in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think what our families are looking for is action, and I am pleased to say that we're taking action on a couple of counts.

First of all, when a problem arose, we asked the auditor to get in there, take a look at things and make recommendations. We've adopted all of those and, in fact, have taken a step further.

Beyond that, they've asked us to take action when it comes to improving the quality of their health care. That's why nearly a million more Ontarians have access to a doctor. That's why we have 10,000 more nurses. That's why we have 200 family health teams. That's why we have shorter wait times. That's why we're building 17 more hospitals. I think we have 120 major renovation expansion projects for our hospitals.

1050

So, again, our responsibility is to continue to make progress on two fronts: One is in terms of the quality of the health care to which families are gaining access, and secondly is to take those steps, as and when required, to make sure we're protecting their precious tax dollars, and that's what we are doing.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: While rape crisis centres in Ottawa hospitals struggle to retain the nursing staff that they need to provide services to women when they need them and while patients in Brantford face the loss of an award-winning mental health program, the Premier allows millions of health care dollars to get dished out to insider consultants and lobbyists. Why, with that context, will the Premier not simply own up to the mess and apologize?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've introduced a new bill—I think it's a very important bill. I think it represents real progress. I think it follows hard on the heels of other measures we've taken to enhance accountability and transparency.

But I think there's an important question that remains outstanding—we've introduced a bill in this Legislature—and that question is, will the opposition parties support this latest in a series of measures to enhance accountability when it comes to the protection of taxpayer dollars? I think it's very simple and it's very straightforward. There was a problem before us and we found a way to solve that problem. It represents, as I say, yet another in a series of steps to enhance accountability and protection for taxpayer dollars, so I put it to my honourable colleagues opposite: Will they or will they not be supporting this latest in a series of measures to better protect taxpayer dollars?

CONSULTANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. The Auditor General's report found that public health care dollars were squandered at each and every one of 19 hospitals and LHINs that he audited. Things were so bad that he concluded, "The fix was in," when it came to doling out contracts and cash. Does the Premier agree with that startling assessment? And if he does, does he also agree that families everywhere across this province deserve to know whether the exact same thing is going on in their local hospitals and their local LHINs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course, we accept the auditor's report. That's why we've introduced legislation that we are hoping the opposition will support, to address the very serious issues that the auditor found when he went in at our request.

Let's just remember. We are the government that actually gave the Auditor General the power to look at hospitals. The auditor found that under governments of all stripes, these practices have been going on. It's time to put an end to those practices, and that's why we've introduced the legislation. These are practices that have been going on for a long time, but they will end under our government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: From expensing bar tabs, to a vacation to Japan, to million-dollar sole-source contracts,

the Auditor General exposed a culture of squandered public health care dollars at 19 out of 19 hospitals and LHINs.

Will the Premier now instruct the Auditor General to conduct a spot audit at every single other hospital and LHIN, so that families across this province know that their health care dollars are going to front-line care where they belong?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When we asked the Auditor General to go in and look at what was going on in hospitals, in LHINs and in the ministry, he did it in a way that met the very high standards that we expect of the Auditor General. He found that there was work to be done to improve transparency and accountability. We are following each and every one of those recommendations.

I have spoken with the hospital CEOs and the hospital board chairs, and I have told them that this is to be taken very seriously. They need to go through all of the expenditures in their organizations to make sure that they are complying, and we are making that law.

The Auditor General can do whatever the Auditor General determines is in the best interests of this province, and we encourage him to do that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families have a right to know whether their health care dollars are being diverted to well-connected insiders and lobbyists. Since the Auditor General uncovered a series of problems at every single hospital he looked at, people are left wondering, is this just the tip of the iceberg? Why won't the Premier ask the Auditor General to investigate all hospitals and LHINs to make sure that public health dollars are in fact going to front-line care in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There is no question that these practices are going on throughout the province. When the member opposite says that the Auditor General found problems at each and every hospital he looked at, that's good enough for me. I know that we have a system-wide issue. That is why we are introducing the legislation that will prevent these practices from happening in the future. This is legislation that will apply to all hospitals. We are going beyond what the Auditor General recommended because we're extending this kind of accountability and transparency to the broader public sector.

We welcome the advice from the Auditor General. We encourage the Auditor General to do his work and do it well. I don't mind standing up and being accountable for the changes we are making. That's our job, to continually improve value for money for taxpayers.

CONSULTANTS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. The auditor looked at consulting contracts at University Health Network, Kingston General Hospital and Trillium health network. Documents uncovered by

the Ontario PC caucus reveal that John Ronson and the Courtyard Group were handed sweetheart consulting deals by University Health Network, Kingston General Hospital and Trillium health network.

But not only have you refused to reveal this information yourself, you won't shine a light on how much Ontario families paid your former election campaign chair. Are you refusing to shine a light on these deals to protect Liberal friends and insiders, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Auditor General specifically looked at the question of whether there were party politics at play, and here's what the Auditor General found: He said basically that party politics did not enter into the awarding of these contracts. He went on to say, "We didn't see any evidence that it was awarded based on party politics."

I would suggest that the member opposite actually reflect on the words of the auditor. I think it's only appropriate that when we ask the auditor to look at something and he comes back and reports a finding, we respect that finding. The Auditor General very clearly said that party politics did not enter into the awarding of these contracts.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Ontario families have heard all this McGuinty Liberal doublespeak before. Laurie Lashbrook has deep ties to the Liberal Party, having donated thousands to your party and to the health minister herself, but it wasn't your shining a light or leadership that exposed the sweetheart deal Lashbrook was given to spin your plan to shut down the emergency room in Wallaceburg. Ontario PCs uncovered it through freedom-of-information requests. What other Liberal-friendly consultants were handed sweetheart deals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Since the auditor released his report last week, I have tried to take the approach that this is a problem that belongs to all of us. There is no party that can say that, under their watch, these practices did not go on. In fact, it's very clear that, under all parties, the role of lobbyists and the role of the consultants has gotten to a point where we need to end the practice. We need to end the practice, and we're taking responsibility by ending that practice.

But to suggest that the Conservative Party is lily-white and Polly-pure when it comes to lobbyists and consultants simply does not reflect the fact. The member opposite, when she ran for leadership, had a campaign manager by the name of Andrew Boddington. His job—

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

OPTOMETRISTS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question, too, is to the Minister of Health. October is Eye Health Month in Ontario, and optometrists are frustrated. Almost a year ago, the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act received royal assent. This legislation gave optometrists prescrib-

ing rights which would move Ontario in line with virtually every other jurisdiction in North America, yet the government has still not passed the regulations that would allow optometrists to provide their patients with the care they need.

1100

The McGuinty government promised an expedited process but, instead, has been dragging its heels for nearly a year. Why is the minister impeding this important change?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We, as you know, have an organization called HPRAC, the health professional regulation—I should know what that stands for. They have come forward with recommendations. We have moved on many of the recommendations of HPRAC in the past so that we now have an expanded scope of practice for many of our professionals, including our pharmacists, our nurse practitioners and others.

This is work that we're doing. We do it carefully, but we do it in a way that expands our ability to care for the people of this province. When there is an expanded scope of practice, what that means is that more people will get access to that care. We do have to do it in a responsible way, and this is something that we're looking at very closely.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm not sure the minister answered that, but we'll try again. In 2004, the McGuinty government delisted optometry services, making this essential health care service out of the reach of far too many Ontarians. Now the government is dragging its heels about a regulatory change urged by experts, optometrists and patients. These delays are costing our health care system needless money and putting patients at risk.

In honour of Eye Health Month, will the minister commit to concrete timelines for the completion of this change? Just tell us when you're going to do it.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member for the question, and I know that this is an issue where people in the eye health world are very interested in seeing what we're going to do.

We are continually working to improve health care. I'm extraordinarily proud of the accomplishments of this government. We have almost a million more people with access to primary care. We've got almost 3,000 more physicians and more than 10,000 more nurses working. We're taking action when it comes to bringing down the price of prescription drugs. We're also taking action when it comes to the use of prescription narcotics. We've introduced legislation called the Excellent Care for All Act, which really starts to shine the light on quality of care across this province.

I'm proud of our record, I'm proud of where we're going, and I look forward to continuing to expand the scope of practice for the people of this province.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the Minister of Economic Development and

Trade and small business. You will know that in this province alone, there are more than 379,000 small and medium businesses; in other words, that means that 99% of all businesses in Ontario are either small or medium-sized. They employ nearly 2.9 million Ontarians. They account for \$250 billion in economic activity. That makes their success vital to the strength of Ontario's economy.

The recent global economic downturn has been hard on small business, and it makes it hard for them to do what they do best: to provide essential services to the people of Ontario and to grow and prosper. I've heard from a number of those small businesses in my riding. They've told me that they would be able to hire more people and be more productive if the government could assist. With October being Small Business Month—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm delighted to respond, and in particular to this member from Oakville, who has been a long-time supporter of small business, not just in his riding but, of course, right across Ontario in his work.

I am delighted to send greetings to all of the small businesses across Ontario. They are truly the backbone of our economy. This is Small Business Month, and in that regard, we are delighted to say that just the other day in this House, we passed the Open for Business Act. Open for business means that truly, we have taken a hard look at what we can do to make life easier for business in Ontario. We wish we would have had the support of the opposition parties. They like to talk about being open for business; the Ontario government today is actually doing it.

Yesterday, we had an opportunity to meet with the Small Business Agency of Ontario, representing all small business across Ontario. They are delighted to be at the table and engaged in making life easier—

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: That's encouraging news for small and medium business in Ontario. Small businesses create jobs for people all across this province, and for this reason it's important to make sure that they're equipped with the tools they need to thrive. Some of the most important tools at a business's disposal, whether they be a small or large enterprise, are tax breaks and incentives. It is for this reason that I rise in the House and ask the minister to explain to this House some of the ways in which government is working to lessen that tax burden on small and medium-sized businesses in this province so they are able to thrive.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: This question on competitive tax to the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you for the question. This government is committed to small and medium-sized businesses; they are the backbone of our province. We are so proud of all of them.

As a former small business owner, I can tell you that this tax package makes good sense; it's going to help

small businesses. Some of the ways we're doing that: We're reimbursing small businesses when it comes to their input taxes. We're cutting the corporate income tax rate from 5.5% down to 4.5%. We're also eliminating—we're eliminating—for the first time, the small business deduction tax, and we're also helping small businesses right now with the transition to going to the HST. We're helping with some transitional support.

I'm just very proud, and I want to thank all the small businesses in our province.

PREMIER'S RECORD

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier. It's official: Canada's worst government has Canada's worst Premier. In a peer-reviewed study, Premier McGuinty ranks dead last among the country's Premiers. It could have been because he says leadership means shining a light on transparency, but this Premier refuses to name names of who is getting rich off sweetheart consulting deals. It could be because he has backtracked so often, Ontario families have no idea what he stands for any longer. But the truth is that it is because he is the worst at managing government spending, taxes, debt and deficits.

When will the Premier stop dragging Ontario families down?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I am delighted to address this question. It is imperative that people in this House understand why Ontario, ahead of all jurisdictions in North America, is dragging the most foreign direct investment here to Ontario. If what this member says is true—it can't possibly be true. For two years in a row, Ontario has led every jurisdiction in North America, with more FDI related to job creation to Ontario—ahead of Texas, ahead of California, ahead of New York. That is the new Ontario, and that is what we fight for in the House.

We wish we had the opposition behind us, but we don't. They oppose every initiative for business or economic development that we have brought to this House. We will continue to fight for small business, and I expect that member in particular to be on our side.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. Start the clock. The members will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Notwithstanding what the grande dame of the theatre has to say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member—leave the clock running. Once again, I want to remind everyone about the importance of speaking through the Chair, and I say that to both sides, because it does take away from some of the confrontation that comes out in here. But we can't start delivering

personal attacks at one another. I did not feel that was an appropriate comment, and I'm going to ask you to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It was a compliment, but I withdraw it.

The authors of the study say that since being elected in 2003, Premier McGuinty "has been nothing short of a disaster at managing Ontario's finances and pursuing sound long-term economic policies."

The taxes on fuel and home energy that Ontario families now pay under this Premier have driven the consumer price index up a full point higher than the national average. He said that the HST would make business more competitive, but GDP data shows Ontario's economy shrunk last month. He said the HST would create 600,000 jobs, but we're up 23,000.

1110

How did every other Premier manage to avoid the messy legacy this Premier is leaving—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Let me say again to this member opposite—and I believe that this member wants what's best for Ontario and he wants people to have jobs and he wants to see businesses investing in Ontario, so let me just use automotive by way of example.

Why, in the last six months alone, have our five OEMs—Ford, GM, Chrysler, Honda and Toyota. Why have we seen a total investment of over \$2 billion in the automotive sector just in the last six months, my friend? That is very important, because it means 300 automotive supply companies that are looking at increased volumes, that are looking at getting back into business.

We know that the last two years were tough on Ontario, tougher than in any other province, but I will tell you this: Every other province is watching today the kinds of investment in automotive, in green energy, in ICT, in financial services, the likes of which the rest of the country is not seeing. We are seeing it here in Ontario because we have had good, sound economic policy, good, sound—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. New question.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, you will know that you're in charge of a railway in this province called the Ontario Northland. Here's the issue: If I'm a passenger leaving Moosonee and I buy a rail ticket to leave Moosonee to come down to Toronto and I miss the train, I don't get my money back and I can't even reschedule that train ride. Why is it that we're treating everybody south of Moosonee differently, where a

purchased ticket is good for 12 months? That's not the case for the citizens of Moosonee.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: As the member well knows, we are very proud of the support that we have for the ONTC, and I appreciate the question. I can't provide him with the details; I'm not even aware of that happening.

We know how important the ONTC is in terms of providing extremely valuable transportation and telecommunications services to northeastern Ontario. Certainly, the last five years, as the member would know, have been very productive for the ONTC. We have implemented a new Northlander train schedule that's resulted in an increase in passengers and improved the train's performance. We've replaced 168,000 railway ties; there has been some extraordinary work done in that regard. Obviously, the contract to refurbish the GO Transit vehicles is very important as well.

Certainly in terms of the day-to-day operations and decisions that are made by the ONTC, I'm quite willing to pursue that on the member's behalf. I look forward to the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It appears the minister of native affairs doesn't take seriously that First Nations people are being discriminated against and not able to use their train tickets like anybody else in this province.

My question to you, Minister, is: We've been dealing with the ONTC for some time. There was a promise to fix this discrimination so that any citizen of Ontario, no matter where they are on the rail line, would be able to purchase a ticket and use it within the 12 months, as is the case with the Northlander. I want from you a commitment that you are going to intervene and ensure that the citizens of Moosonee are dealt with the same as anybody else on the ONR line, from Cochrane going south down to Toronto.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Certainly I will commit to pursue this on the member's and the constituents of Moosonee's behalf.

We are indeed very proud of the service provided. Our government has been tremendously supportive of the ONTC and will continue to be. Certainly, decisions such as those—I'm not familiar with the details. I will find out about it and will pursue it on behalf of the constituency you're representing.

FAMILY LAW

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Attorney General. The family justice system is an area that touches many people's lives. It is used by people when they're already dealing with stressful and often difficult emotional issues like separation and divorce. Their children may also suffer from negative impacts if these issues are not addressed in the best possible way.

Over the years, I've heard from my constituents in Oak Ridges–Markham who have had experience with the family justice system. They feel they had little opportunity to inform themselves on the process involved and

how it would impact their children. They also told me of the difficulties they had once they decided to go to court and how they found it to be an interminable process.

Can the Attorney General tell this House what our government is doing to ease this inherently difficult time and make the process more manageable for people?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member from Oak Ridges–Markham makes a very important point. People who come before the family justice system in times of terrible stress—very emotional—need a system that works faster. It needs to be more affordable and it needs to be less confrontational.

Last December, we launched a four-pillar approach to reforming our family justice system. The first pillar is to make sure people get more information up front about the system, so we are instituting mandatory information programs for all who come before it. Second, identify the issues and get people to where they need to be to resolve them. Third, provide better access to free legal advice. Fourth, cut out all the paperwork and reform the rules so that we have less paper, less process and better resolution for those who really need a resolution to these very challenging issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I know that my constituents will be happy to hear that the government is moving ahead on these important reforms of the family justice system.

The justice system can be intimidating and costly for people. When people are already under so much stress in dealing with family issues, they are confronted with an unfamiliar system that they are required to navigate. They lack the knowledge that would allow them to make informed choices on how best to proceed.

Can the Attorney General tell the House how this government is making the family law process clearer and helping these families to get the information they need in order to make informed decisions?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Again, a very important point: The mandatory information program is designed to get people information about the system, about resources, about how to resolve these very emotional issues in a non-confrontational way, if that's appropriate.

Yes, we made it mandatory, because if it's voluntary, the people who don't need to be there will always be there, and the people who really need to be there will never be there. So we've made it mandatory.

We started in Brampton and Milton and we've already had 800 people go through. We'll be moving to 17 more sites by January 1. We're very excited about that. We're looking to see how we can move to the remaining 30 sites in the province of Ontario.

This first pillar is enormously important to the speedy, effective and less costly resolution of these very emotional issues. I thank the member for the question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday in this House, the Minister of Health com-

mitted to working with MPPs in a non-partisan manner on their local health care issues, saying once again that she thinks MPPs are the best lobbyists.

That being her stated belief, will the Premier inform MPPs today precisely when the government's long-promised 10-year plan for hospital capital projects will be publicly released?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can say that is a matter that's still under active consideration, still being developed. But what I can say is that we're proud of the progress we've been able to make so far. My honourable colleague knows that we're building 17 new hospitals in the province of Ontario. He may know that we have over 100, I think, substantive renovation and expansion projects either under way or already completed at our hospitals. We're making a massive investment in new capital when it comes to ensuring that families in all of our communities have access to the best possible health care.

What we want to do, of course, is build on that going forward, hence the rationale behind our 10-year plan. If my honourable colleague has any specific advice with respect to his community, obviously, that's the kind of thing that we want to consider.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the Premier for taking the question and not referring it. The Premier was quoted in June of last year in the Waterloo Region Record, saying that the list of hospital projects might be released that fall, now more than a year ago. Hospitals need to know where they are on the list so that they can plan their projects. The Groves hospital in Fergus needs the Minister of Health's permission to move to the next stage of planning for a new hospital. Georgetown has approval for a new CT scanner but needs a small capital grant.

We now know that millions of tax dollars were wasted on lobbyists at other hospitals, money that could have gone to hospital capital projects.

Will the Premier ask the minister to convene a meeting in the near future with Groves and Georgetown hospital representatives, listen to their plans and commit to helping them succeed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think families have come to the conclusion that we're on their side when it comes to their health care. Whether you take a look at the investments we've made in hospitals—hospital funding is up 50%; that's \$5.4 billion since 2003. It's up another 5% this year—the number of new doctors we've hired, and I think it's now up to 2,700, over 10,000 more nurses, new technologies or new drugs being funded, we keep moving the yardstick forward. There's always more work to be done. There are tremendous pressures when it comes to health care.

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One of the things that will not serve Ontario families is the continuing commitment on the part of the official opposition to cut \$3 billion out of health care. I don't

believe that's acceptable, I don't think that's helpful, and I don't think families will support that, either.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has told the Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex to cut the number of children it serves by 25%. Can the Premier tell us, what are the children at risk and the families in crisis supposed to do? Where are they supposed to go for help?

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to talk in this House about the incredible transformation and approach to finding sustainability that we have undertaken in the last year. We've put in place a commission of experts, who have travelled the province, spoken to more than 2,000 people and have met with every children's aid society. We're absolutely committed to making sure that our services remain steady and stable for the children and families who need them.

At the same time, it's critically important for us to find a pathway to sustainability for these important services so the phone will be answered, the door will be open and services are available in communities for families who need them. Over the past decade, investments have been continually made into children's aid societies, from \$500 million up to \$1.4 billion now. We need to find a way to ensure that those dollars are used to the best outcomes of children and families, and that's precisely what we are committed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, it's an incredible transformation all right: It's an incredible transformation that expects these agencies to provide services without any resources and refuses to acknowledge that they have mandated services they have an obligation to provide.

New Democrats used freedom of information to try to get an understanding of the exact details that the McGuinty government is requesting in terms of changes, but the government—go figure—refused to give us any information. So what does it look like? We could be talking about cuts that are significant, cuts to front-line services like the closure of the Gunn, Cheapside and Argyle Street homes for children at risk, reduction in respite services at Merrymount Children's Services and the loss of vital family support programs.

Why won't the minister disclose full details of the proposal she has for slashing programs for at-risk children and youth in London-Middlesex?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I am shocked by a question that says that we can't improve this system for kids in Ontario. The outcomes for kids in Ontario are not up to our collective aspirations, and it is our responsibility—and we take that responsibility seriously on this side of the House—to find a way to ensure that services are delivered in the appropriate manner, that kids get the

services they need and that all of our kids have what they need.

Let's give an example. At the Hamilton children's aid society, funding has gone up by 24%. At the same time, Catholic children's aid society funding has gone up by 17%. We need to find a way to ensure that children are at the centre of what we do. That is the work we are undertaking, and we are not scared of finding a new way to do this work if that means we will do better for Ontario kids.

I hope that the members opposite will start fighting for Ontario's kids instead of saying that we have to stay with the status quo.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: My question is for the Minister of Education. In today's world our students are going to require the skills needed to ensure their success in an ever-changing economy. They will need to have skills that meet the demands that will be placed upon them through a competitive job market in the future.

I'm hearing from constituents that it is harder and harder to get highly skilled trade workers. What is our government doing to help train workers in my riding to support the economy?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm very happy that the member has brought to this House issues that he is hearing from his constituents. I'm sure that others in the House have heard those same questions.

I'm happy to say that our government is absolutely committed to ensuring that we have programs in our secondary schools that will open the doors to trades for our young people. That is why our government has implemented the specialist high skills majors program. In the province of Ontario, we now have some 28,000 students in our secondary schools participating in these programs. These programs are being offered in disciplines like agriculture, business, the environment, health and wellness, aviation, sports, and the not-for-profit and energy sectors. We have participants from the communities, who are very happy to understand that there are—

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

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: A follow-up to the Minister of Education: Keeping students engaged and interested in school is of vital importance. Without an educated workforce, all of Ontario suffers. We need to keep investing in our most precious resources: our children. Our government needs to ensure that all students are receiving the attention they need and are being engaged in the classroom.

Minister, what effects are these programs having? What can I tell my constituents about how these initiatives are having an impact?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's important for everyone in this House to understand that our government is providing a range of programs that will enable students at the secondary level to be successful, so that they can go on and graduate and be trained for a post-

secondary career. Our initiatives include the expanded co-operative programs and dual credit programs, in addition to our specialist high skills majors programs.

As a result of our focus on enabling secondary students to be more successful and to meet a very high bar of achievement, the graduation rates in Ontario have increased from 68% in 2003 to 79%. Fully 79% of secondary students are now graduating. This is good news for the students, it's good news for our communities, and it's good news for our province. We need those students at their best.

PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO CALEDONIA

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: Today Christie Blatchford launched her book chronicling the sorry saga of the occupation of Douglas Creek Estates in Caledonia. Her book is titled *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, and How the Law Failed All of Us*.

Some questions, Premier: Does this wrap it up? Is this the final say on what went wrong down in Caledonia?

Another question, Premier: Now will you get to the bottom of this?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're working very hard with surrounding municipalities and with Six Nations, and we're working to engage the federal government more actively in a resolution of issues that have been around for more than a century.

I want to recognize the hard work that has gone into this already, but I say we need to find a solution for the future. The fact of the matter is, before the events that have given rise to some of my colleague's questions, people from all the communities lived together, worked together, played together, and they do to this day.

Although it will not be easy to find, there is a resolution here that we're going to work very hard to uncover.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Back to the Premier or the Attorney General. In her introduction, Christie Blatchford states:

"What *Helpless* is about is the failure of government to govern and to protect all its citizens equally....

"Over the ensuing four years—and then some, as the occupation continues to this day—the rule of law was utterly decimated."

Premier or Attorney General, these are serious allegations. Is this the final say? Is this how the record stands? Is this how the record will stand, or will you now call a public inquiry?

1130

Hon. Christopher Bentley: My colleague opposite will remember that there was a public inquiry. It was called the Ipperwash inquiry, and it was a result of a terrible tragedy that resulted from a different approach. That inquiry, which took several years and contained many recommendations, is really the starting point for a better, more fruitful approach to the resolution of issues.

Let's be clear that none of these issues are easy, otherwise they would have been resolved. The land claim issues, which the federal government must resolve, have been around for more than a century. There's no cookie-cutter approach; there's no cookie-cutter answer.

The Linden inquiry was good advice; we're following it. We're working with everybody to find a resolution to this very challenging situation.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. For the past several months, up to 150 trucks a day have been dumping contaminated soil from the Toronto area into an old gravel pit north of Whitby on the Oak Ridges moraine, endangering the water supply for a large area of southern Ontario.

Local citizens have been asking the Minister of the Environment to take action. The ministry has done nothing. Why won't the minister put a stop to dumping at 13471 Lakeridge Road and order a full site assessment and cleanup of the site?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question.

We take our responsibility at the Ministry of the Environment very seriously. It is our job. It falls to us 24/7 to make sure that we're protecting our air, our land and our water, so allegations that are made that come before our ministry are investigated. And I can assure the member that allegations that are made about any practice which is illegal under the laws of the province of Ontario are investigated. My ministry takes all of those situations very seriously.

I would ask my colleague—if he has information that he wants to share with me as the Minister of the Environment, I'd be more than happy to receive that information, I'd be more than happy to meet with him, and I'd be more than happy to meet and listen to the concerns that would be raised by the duly elected council members of that area.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm happy to meet with the minister any time, but there's a far more substantial issue here. Townships and municipalities lack the necessary bylaws and power to protect against the dumping of contaminated landfill. Even after the township of Scugog withdrew the operator's permit, dumping continued.

The McGuinty government has left it up to the local townships to regulate the dumping of such fill, even though townships lack the capacity to assess what is dangerous or to curtail the dumping if it is dangerous.

When will the minister take action to ensure that this sort of contamination, this sort of dumping, is stopped?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I say to the member that the question of the dumping of clean fill is something that is under the purview of the municipality.

But if there's anyone in the province of Ontario who decides to abuse those rules and dump fill which is not clean, then that is a matter that comes before my min-

istry. I can share with the House that that is an active investigation of our ministry, because we are aware of the allegations that are made in regard to Scugog. I have every confidence in my Ministry of the Environment inspection people and our enforcement people to take appropriate action.

Again, when it comes to clean fill, that is the responsibility of municipalities. But if a business decides to break the laws of Ontario, flout the rules here in Ontario and take contaminated soil and dump it, then we have a big problem with that. I can assure the member that appropriate action is being taken in that regard.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. Minister, as you are aware, the forestry sector continues to face significant challenges. However, our government has assisted businesses and industry in this sector by providing grants and loan guarantees for equipment and modernization. We've also provided electricity rebates, reduced stumpage fees, uploaded road costs and introduced a northern industrial energy program worth \$150 million a year.

Recently, you announced the reopening of the pulp mill in Terrace Bay, with \$25 million in support from our government, that will allow 350 employees to return to work. Last week, a new partnership was reached between government, industry and several First Nation communities in northern Ontario.

Minister, can you please elaborate on this new partnership and what it will mean for the parties involved?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks for the question. This is a tremendous story. About 10 days ago, Weyerhaeuser, a world-class forestry company, along with several other forestry companies in partnership with several First Nations under the Miitigoog co-operative, signed an agreement that transferred the single sustainable forest licence, SFL, of the Kenora Forest to a co-operative shareholder, chaired by Chief Eric Fisher of Wabaseemoong First Nation. This transfer is just tremendous news. Among other things, it advances forest sector business opportunities for aboriginal communities as full partners with industry. We're providing funding for this project as well.

We're certainly proud to work with Miitigoog Limited Partnership and Weyerhaeuser as we take steps to transition towards a modernized tenure and pricing system. This kind of partnership bodes very well for future co-operative endeavours and shows we can work well and successfully together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I appreciate that response, Minister. We appreciate hearing about this exciting news and this exciting partnership and how it will benefit the region's economy. The fact that these types of agreements are being forged among partners in the forestry sector demonstrates that our government, First Nation

communities and industry are serious about working together to oversee responsible management of our crown forests.

Minister, you previously referenced transitioning to a new forest tenure and pricing system. Can you please explain to the House the new forest tenure system, how it will work and why it's important to make these reforms in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, I think this co-operative that was put in place is a good example how we can move forward. The forest tenure reform we're working on is similar to the principles of this. The old system, the system we now still work under, gives mills, ultimately, the responsibility to manage Ontario's forests in essence in exchange for access to our wood supply. In some cases, this is not working as well as we think it should have, which is why we're moving forward.

We're now in the process where we want to move forward on testing the principles of our modernized tenure system, so we'll be establishing pilot projects for two local forest management corporations, probably one in the northwest and one in the northeast, that will work together to manage the forest with representation on their board of directors from local and aboriginal communities.

That's why we're so pleased that the sustainable forest licence has been transferred to Mitiigoog. It signifies, I think, exactly the type of partnership we will want to see occurring in the forestry sector, as we move forward with these new changes to the system.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, correcting the record of October 19, 2010, while I was speaking in the chamber: I was speaking about Warren Kinsella. I said that I like Warren Kinsella; that was accurate. I said he was an expert at mudslinging; that was accurate. I said I only wished he was one of ours rather than the Liberals'; that was accurate.

But I then refer to him as the American king of mudslinging. That was a gross misstatement on my part. Of course, Warren Kinsella is a Canadian. I apologize to Mr. Kinsella, to Americans and to Canadians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is a point of order; one can correct their own record.

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

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DALAI LAMA

Mr. Randy Hillier: Over this past weekend, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Toronto as he continues his fight for freedom, justice and democracy throughout the world. As you all know, the Dalai Lama was forced

to flee from Tibet following the Chinese occupation in 1959 and ever since has been on a global mission to promote world peace and tolerance. The Dalai Lama was awarded the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards a non-violent liberation of Tibet.

The purpose of the Dalai Lama's visit to Toronto this past weekend included the opening ceremonies of the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre, as well as a speech delivered to an audience of thousands at the Rogers Centre.

As a member of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet, I would like to personally congratulate the Dalai Lama for his persistence in promoting world peace, freedom and justice, and his pursuit of democracy.

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Mr. Jeff Leal: On Wednesday, February 27, 2008, I announced \$9.8 million to fund the creation of a new health sciences facility, to be added to Trent University's DNA building. This new facility would expand Trent's nursing and psychology programs and new research laboratories.

Ms. Bonnie Patterson, past president, said:

"This investment by the province will advance Trent University's vision for the expansion of its health sciences programs and strategically position the university to take advantage of emerging program opportunities in the growing health care field. We thank the Premier, Minister Milloy and our MPP, Jeff Leal, for their leadership and their generous support."

On Monday, October 25, 2010, I attended the grand opening of this facility, newly named the life and health sciences building. Our funding played a significant role in the building of this facility, which will be a driver to establish new collaborations with the college sector, the new Peterborough Regional Health Centre, the local health integration network, and emerging organizations such as ICAV.

The province's investment of \$9.8 million in Trent's new facility reflects the priority this government places on health and life sciences and their importance for our future prosperity in this region and Ontario. The life and health sciences building will become a hallmark for excellence in teaching and research. This is not only an investment in the university, but it's an investment in our future. The youth of today will be the health care providers and researchers of tomorrow.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Steve Clark: As every member of this House is aware, small businesses are the backbone of the economy in our ridings. That's why I'm always so proud to help these hard-working men and women celebrate a grand opening or mark an anniversary.

I rise today to pay tribute to a trio of businesses from my riding that have been honoured recently.

Jim Kafenzakis, owner of Luna Pizzeria in Brockville, will be celebrated as business person of the year at the

upcoming Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce Awards of Excellence on November 4. This family-run restaurant has served patrons in Brockville for 40 years.

In Augusta township, the winner of the business of the year at the municipality's first-ever business awards luncheon was Finucan's General Store and Supply in North Augusta. Finucan's has been a fixture in the village for nearly a century, and for the past 46 years has been operated by Jim and Betty Finucan.

On the same day, in neighbouring Elizabethtown-Kitley township, Atlas Block was saluted as business of the year at their 16th annual awards event. Owned by Don Gordon since 1989, the concrete block manufacturing firm employs 35 people.

Running a small business is certainly not an easy way to make a living. I want to offer my congratulations to these outstanding entrepreneurs in my riding of Leeds-Grenville.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I rose earlier today to raise in this House to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines a situation that I just found out about last spring that needs addressing.

I want to say upfront, I'm hopeful that the minister is actually going to address this issue, because we've had conversation and it would appear that he's trying to do his best to get the staff and the people at the ONTC to raise this issue and resolve it.

Here's the issue: Ontario Northland, as you know, is owned by the people of Ontario through the government of Ontario. That particular railway runs two trains: one from Cochrane down to Toronto and back, called the Northlander; and another one that runs from Cochrane up to Moosonee. If you, as a citizen, were to go to Toronto and buy a ticket to go, let's say, to Cochrane, Timmins or anywhere in between, you can purchase the ticket and know that if you miss your train, like any other travel agent and any other mode of transportation out there, your ticket is good for 12 months. But if you happen to live up in Moosonee and you're trying to get on what is called the Polar Bear or the Little Bear and you want a train from Moosonee to Cochrane, if you buy that ticket and you miss your train, not only have you missed your train, but you can't use that ticket because it's null and void. In other words, you can't get your money back and you can't travel within those 12 months.

The minister has told me sort of privately that he's trying to resolve this issue, and I take him at his word. I look forward to the day that the citizens of Moosonee and Moose Factory are going to be treated with the same respect as everybody else in this province.

JOHN RILEY

Mr. Mike Colle: This Saturday I had the honour of joining members of my community, along with Con-

stable Ojo from 13 division, to honour a great Canadian, Mr. John Riley.

Mr. Riley was honoured for being the oldest black resident in the area and for being one of the first black men to join the Canadian Armed Forces. Mr. Riley also believes he was the first black electrician to be licensed—like the member from Timmins-James Bay, who I think is an electrician.

John Riley has been a lifelong resident of the Vaughan Road area in Toronto and attended Vaughan Road Collegiate, where he was an incredibly great football player. He now lives on Jesmond Avenue in the same house he was born in 88 years ago.

It was an honour and a pleasure to present Mr. Riley with an honorary scroll marking this special occasion.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Riley was united with a friend of 60 years ago. Mr. Riley had worked with this friend and had not seen him in 60 years. They saw a picture of his friend on a storefront in the community. In the photo was a young John Riley, a good friend he had lost touch with and whom he believed had passed away. Thrilled to have found each other after 60 years, the two men had an emotional reunion, only to find out they'd been living one block away from each other for years and had never crossed paths.

John Riley is a great Canadian, a great electrician, a great football player and a great member of our community. Hats off to John and his 88 years of great life.

MARJORY LEBRETON

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is an absolute pleasure and honour to be able to rise today to celebrate one of my constituents, Senator Marjory LeBreton. This past Sunday at the Nepean Museum, Senator LeBreton was inducted into the Nepean Museum for her hard work and dedication to Canadian public life. She's often regarded by many of us in the Progressive Conservative Party and the Conservative Party in Ottawa as the senior member of the party, but more than that, I feel honoured to have known her for the past 10 years and to have watched her become Canada's most powerful female politician as the leader of the government in Stephen Harper's cabinet.

1510

I brought my little girl to that induction because I think it's important for young girls to have role models such as Senator LeBreton. I was so happy I did. My daughter was thrilled to be there to see the great legacy that this trail-blazing pioneer from Nepean, who now lives in the other end of my riding at Manotick, has done for our province and our country. She has served on campaigns for John George Diefenbaker, Robert Stanfield, Joe Clark, Brian Mulroney, Jean Charest, as well as for the current prime minister, Stephen Harper. Her work has been recognized by Prime Minister Harper by making her Canada's first Minister of State for seniors and certainly as his most capable leader in the government Senate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. I want to congratulate Senator LeBreton for a great career in public service.

EAST NORTHUMBERLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's my great pleasure to rise today to boast about our local high school in my hometown of Brighton in the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. This school and the community took on the quest of raising money to completely rebuild a track and sports field at East Northumberland Secondary School, or ENSS, as we call it.

As part of their fundraising efforts, they entered the TSN Kraft challenge. They won the competition against Elmvalle, which awarded them not only a \$25,000 cash prize but the opportunity to host a live TSN SportsCentre broadcast as part of the Kraft Celebration Tour.

On August 28, co-anchors Jennifer Hedger and Dutchy took the stage at King Edward Park for a live broadcast of SportsCentre Saturday, and they were just as entertaining in person as they are on TV. Thousands of people joined the ENSS celebration at the park. TSN and Kraft offered a full dose of fun for the whole family at King Edward Park. I even had an opportunity myself to flip and serve over 2,000 burgers and hot dogs to this excited crowd.

I would like to recognize Eleanor Guenette, Brian Todd, Tim Larry, Claude Thompson and Pam Mitchell. They should be congratulated for their leadership with the project. At last count, the committee had raised \$612,000, just shy of their \$850,000 goal.

I couldn't be more proud of this community, the people I call my friends and neighbours, and the place I call home.

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: Each year some 500 women in Ontario are diagnosed with cervical cancer. Almost 150 will die from this disease. Through Ontario's human papilloma virus, or HPV, vaccination program for grade 8 girls, we are preventing future cases of cervical cancer. Each year, some 77,000 eligible grade 8s can participate in the program.

Some 135,000 females have participated in the vaccine since 2007, which is delivered as a school-based program, administered by the public health units. The virus that the vaccine immunizes against increases a woman's risk of cervical cancer from 20 to 100 times. It is often a silent infection because many people with HPV will show no signs of infection.

Vaccination against HPV is voluntary. It is important that grade 8 students and their parents are aware that this vaccine is available. Cervical cancer week highlights the hard work that physicians and health care professionals do to improve access to and to encourage women to obtain pap tests. It raises awareness of cervical cancer

and reduces the unnecessary deaths of our daughters, sisters and mothers, whose lives are cut short by this devastating disease.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: It's my pleasure to recognize a very important time in the health care calendar. This week is Long-Term Care Week. It is an important time for all of us to recognize the hard work and dedication of the staff, volunteers and patients in the long-term-care sector.

The Long-Term Care Homes Act was proclaimed this summer, which is all about leadership and governance for quality. It's about putting the residents first. We are now using clinical guidelines and best practices in a way that measures results in quality improvement, as any quality improvement tool should.

The McGuinty government has made tremendous strides in providing the proper care to long-term-care residents. In conjunction with our local health integration networks, we are funding 6,100 new full-time staff, including 2,300 nurses who are delivering 12 million more hours of hands-on care. More importantly to the constituents of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, we've opened over 8,300 new long-term-care beds and we are adding another 1,690 beds in communities across the province by 2012. As a result, in the past year, Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital lowered its alternate-level-of-care beds from a high of 16 to a low of zero.

But there's always more to be done. We are rebuilding 35,000 beds over the next 10 years to better serve the needs of residents.

I'd like to thank all the hard-working staff and volunteers throughout the province for providing exceptional care for Ontarians as we celebrate Long Term Care Week.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

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

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

Bill 72, An Act to enact the Water Opportunities Act, 2010 and to amend other Acts in respect of water conservation and other matters / Projet de loi 72, Loi édictant la Loi de 2010 sur le développement des technologies de l'eau et modifiant d'autres lois en ce qui concerne la conservation de l'eau et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As Chair of the public accounts committee, I am tabling this report today in response to section 3.13 of the Auditor General's 2009 annual report, which was presented in December 2009. This report deals with the auditor's findings with regard to Telehealth Ontario and the telephone health advisory service. There are three main findings that the auditor put forward in his report.

First of all, the use of Telehealth is declining. One would have thought that, if anything, the use of a health care service would be increasing rather than declining. The reason behind the decline in the use of Telehealth has been really attributed to the fact that most people don't know the connection; they don't know what the number is. Therefore, one of the recommendations of the committee to the ministry is that they report back to us on analysis and state whether it supports the introduction of an 811 number, which they have in other provinces across Canada, and provide information on associated issues, including costs and cost-savings implications.

The second criticism he had was with regard to what it was costing us per Telehealth call. Our costs were, I believe, in the neighbourhood of about \$39 per call, as opposed to other provinces, which were almost half of that cost. The report from the committee asks the Ministry of Health to look at these particular costs, look at the contract that they have with the private provider of this, and report back to the committee on what they're intending to do with regard to this large discrepancy that occurs.

The third problem that was identified by the Auditor General was the fact that when Telehealth called physicians to go and visit a particular patient in their geographic area, only about 85% of the physicians were responding to that request, even though family health teams take that as an obligation in the formation of their family health team. Our committee made recommendations to the Ministry of Health in order to have 100% response, because it was felt very strongly that when the Telehealth operator recommended that this action be taken that the person calling, the person in distress, not be left, waiting for a physician who would never come.

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So, this report is very important to Ontarians. We believe that if Telehealth was in fact increased and improved, if the usage of it was increased and the service was improved, we would take stress off of our hospital emergency rooms and this would be good overall for our health care system.

With that, I'd like to adjourn the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated October 26, 2010, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

MOTIONS

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON ESTIMATES

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the Standing Committee on Estimates.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We move that, notwithstanding standing order 60(c), the Standing Committee on Estimates shall consider the estimates of the Ministry of Health before the estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade; and

That the Standing Committee on Estimates be authorized to present its report, pursuant to standing order 63(a), no later than Wednesday, November 24, 2010.

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I rise in the House today during Small Business Month to pay special tribute to Ontario's small and medium-sized businesses and owners for the significant contributions that they make to our economy year-round.

Small businesses across the province generate the lion's share of net new jobs and help grow and stabilize the economy. That's been critical in the face of global economic downturns from which we are now emerging. Small and medium-sized enterprises employ approximately 2.9 million people, representing more than half of all of the private sector jobs in Ontario. There are more than 379,000 small and medium-sized employer

businesses in Ontario, and they account for approximately \$245 billion in annual economic activity.

To help these businesses through the economic recovery process, our government has developed and is putting into action a comprehensive plan and policies to help Ontario small businesses prevail in today's economic environment. That's why, on July 1 of this year, Ontario implemented tax reforms that will save businesses more than \$500 million a year; that's just the paperwork cost alone. We've permanently cut the small business corporate income tax rate from 5.5% to 4.5% and we've reduced Ontario's general corporate income tax rate to 12% from 14%, effective this past July. The general rate will be further reduced to 10% on July 1, 2013. Imagine: A combined corporate income tax rate—federal, provincial—of 25%, giving us one of the most comprehensive and competitive tax rates in any jurisdiction we compete against in North America.

In total, the government is providing \$4.5 billion in business tax relief over three years that will lower business costs, enhance Ontario's competitiveness, support growing small businesses and ultimately, and most importantly, create jobs here in Ontario.

This week, more than 615,000 Ontario businesses will receive transition payments, between \$300 and up to \$1,000, as they adapt their point of sale and accounting systems for the harmonized sales tax.

We're also working to create faster, smarter and more streamlined government-to-business services. I'm very proud that this government's Open for Business Act passed this past Thursday. This act contains more than 100 amendments that will offer a range of improvements, such as making it easier for professionals like internationally trained engineers to work in Ontario by removing the citizenship and permanent residency requirements for a professional engineer's licence.

As a government, we recognize that we can do more to protect the public interest without creating unnecessary barriers to business. Through reducing the regulatory burden in Ontario, we're helping entrepreneurs and business owners to focus on what they do best: creating jobs for Ontario families.

We consulted extensively with clients and partners representing businesses, labour, and environmental, agricultural and professional organizations to develop the Open for Business Act. The legislation is being hailed by members of the business community for improving Ontario's economic climate. In fact, the Ontario vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Satinder Chera, said, "Whenever the government can reduce the regulatory hoops and hurdles that a small business has to face, that is a good thing. We think the Open for Business Act is a step in the right direction and look forward to working with government to continue creating the right conditions for the job-creating small business sector to succeed."

Our government provides many supports to small businesses. We offer a range of programs and services that help entrepreneurs establish and grow their busi-

nesses right across the province, with offices right through every region of Ontario.

In closing, I'd welcome this opportunity to extend official greetings and congratulations to Ontario's small business owners and operators. Our government continues to work with this sector to create the best possible environment for entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses, to innovate and create jobs.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to recognize this week as ESL Week. ESL Week is an annual celebration of English-as-a-second-language education that's supported by the McGuinty government, our communities, thousands of ESL instructors, learners and many learning institutions and school boards.

Newcomers come to Ontario with big dreams for themselves and for their families: dreams of a new life, a better life in a vibrant and prosperous and open Ontario. Newcomers arrive here with the education, the skills and the desire to contribute to our collective prosperity, and 70% of them have post-secondary education. That's important as Ontario transitions to a knowledge-based economy. As our population begins to retire, Ontario's labour force will increasingly rely on immigration in order to drive our economy. These are all reasons why we must continue to do all that we can to help our newcomers succeed.

Our experience has shown that one of the greatest barriers to our newcomers' success is limited English- or French-language ability. Even with the experience and education, a newcomer can't find a job without essential language skills. That's why our government is working with 38 Ontario school boards to deliver free English- and French-as-a-second-language training programs. In 2010 alone, the McGuinty government has invested more than \$65 million to help more than 120,000 newcomers get the language training that they require and need. Since 2006, we have also invested nearly \$10 million to help nearly 8,000 newcomers learn the language of their workplace or their profession. This investment is in addition to the language training Ontario already funds through our bridge training programs.

When language training is available in the workplace, employers also benefit, so it's a win-win situation, and we know that it works. Over the upcoming year, we will continue to work to improve both our ESL and FSL language training programs. We will, for example, introduce a minimum instructor accreditation standard and support these instructors with the training, the tools and the resources that they need. By continuing to improve our language training programs, we invest in the skills of people who are new to this province.

This week we salute both the learners who have benefited from ESL and FSL and also the instructors and the administrators whose hard work helps open doors for our newcomers. To them, I say: Thank you. You are

helping to shape Ontario's future, because when our newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

1530

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to respond. I rise today to respond to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on behalf of Ontario PC leader Tim Hudak, who holds the critic post.

Many newcomers to Ontario and Canada arrive with little understanding and comprehension of the English language. Today's newcomers need a variety of tools to assist them in becoming full partners in Ontario's economy. English-as-a-second-language programs are integral to a newcomer's success, and these programs need to respond to the needs of newcomers and reflect the needs of Ontario communities.

In May, Ontario PC leader Tim Hudak put forth a private member's bill entitled the Newcomers Employment Opportunities Act, 2010. The bill would provide a new 10% non-refundable tax credit to eligible employers that arrange for occupation-specific ESL training for their employees. It gives incentives to employers to help newcomers whom they hire down the path towards trades recognition.

Sadly, the McGuinty government has not offered an alternative for improving ESL and encouraging businesses in having a stake in the families who benefit from ESL training. Instead, the Premier and his ministers spend their time offering platitudes while picking fights with the federal government.

New Canadians and newcomers are eager to have their skills recognized so they can help unlock the true potential of this province. And more needs to be done. As Ontario struggles to recover from a recession, a new generation of leadership must do more than the last to tap into the education, energy, skills and experience of the people we draw to our province. That includes helping to level the playing field by providing ESL opportunities that respond to the needs of newcomers and reflect the needs of Ontario communities.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the PC caucus to respond to the minister's statement on Small Business Month and the Open for Business Act. We salute those small businesses that manage to keep their doors open in the face of a government that's actively working against them.

Ontario families and businesses have learned the hard way over the last seven years that just because this Liberal government brings in legislation and calls it the open for business bill or the good government bill doesn't make it so. The accountability act will not make you accountable. That's why the PC caucus will always stand up for Ontario's small business, call a spade a

spade, and vote against these hapless bills that do nothing to relieve the burden that this Liberal government continues to pile on them.

Here are the real facts: Ontario's economy is shrinking, and it is expected to languish for the foreseeable future. Ontario's inflation rate is a full percentage point higher than the national average. Unemployment remains far above the national average. Welfare rolls are up. Hydro rates are up. If the minister thinks she has done such a great job, then she can explain why what should be up is down and what should be down is up—way up.

In March 2009 the Minister of Economic Development and Trade announced a 25% reduction in Ontario regulations within two years. That deadline is coming in just five months, yet more than a year and a half later, this Liberal government doesn't even know how many regulations we have in Ontario, let alone create and execute a plan to eliminate a quarter of them.

Yet the BC government has managed to cut its red tape by 42% since 2001. That's the same government, I might add, that brought in the HST, as did we, in July but has a CPI under the national average—a 42% cut in red tape and elimination of 151,000 regulations that bogged down businesses and stripped them of their productivity.

A recent CFIB survey found that 26% of new business owners would not have set up operation in Ontario if they had known beforehand the red tape burden they would face here. This begs the question: How many business owners never bothered to even shop in Ontario once they learned how this Liberal government would bog their efforts down with red tape and take away any competitive advantage they might have?

The minister should pay close attention to my remarks because yesterday's municipal results sent a clear message in this province of change. After seven years, it's clear that this Liberal government cannot change its stripes when those stripes are made up of the thousands of miles of red tape that are killing Ontario's small business. The only change that's going to bring relief to these hard-working small business owners is a change in government in October 2011.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm going to be responding to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and also the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and their statements. I'll start with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Notice that there's no small business in her title, because the first thing I'll say about this government speaking on behalf of small business and to small business is that they have actually shuffled the small business ministry out of the cabinet. There is no such portfolio. That's number one.

Number two, let's talk about the HST. I came to have a press conference here, before the HST was passed, and brought John Kiru and a number of the executive directors of TABIA, which is the Toronto Association of

Business Improvement Areas, who represent about 30,000 businesses in the GTA: about a tenth, almost, of all small business in the province. He came to deliver a message, and his message was extremely clear: 80% of Toronto's small business community is opposed to the HST. And the government wouldn't even meet with him. He represents 30,000 businesses and he couldn't get a meeting.

I noticed that the minister talked about a quote from Satinder Chera from the CFIB. Satinder and I don't agree on everything, I'll be the first to admit, but certainly something we do agree on is how his membership feels about the HST: its impact on the economy, its impact on their clients and its impact on their businesses. And I can tell you that the impact is not good.

Bankruptcies are up. Hydro rates are up. The cherry on the poison sundae, in a sense, is the direct attacks by the McGuinty government on certain classifications of small business. We remember the direct attack on small, independent butcher shops, for example—it happened a couple years ago and drove them out of business—and the direct attack on pharmacists, independent pharmacists, many of whom wrote petitions that we read out in this House day after day after day—direct attacks.

Are they friends of big business? Absolutely. Are they friends of small business? Absolutely not. Remember, tax breaks are only good if you make a profit, and might I say that it's the rare small business right now in Ontario that's making a profit. They're hanging on by their fingernails through the recession. That's what they're doing, and yet they supply 90% of the employment in this province.

The McGuinty government should be ashamed, absolutely ashamed, of the way that they've messed up the small business file and the way that they haven't addressed it, and the arrogance with which they act towards small business, refusing to even meet with their representatives. Appalling is what it is. It's a lose-lose situation.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This leads me to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Talk about lose-lose: If you're an English-language learner in the city of Toronto, for example, or in Ontario—it's worse here—you will know that 26% of English-language elementary schools with 10 or more ELL students have no ELL teacher. That's over a quarter of schools that have up to 67% of ELL learners, and this is an increase from 22% last year. So under the McGuinty government, the situation is getting worse for English-as-a-second-language learners in our schools. It's there; it's in black and white. If they want to read more about it from the People for Education annual report, they will get all the details.

I draw your attention to the fact that organizations—wonderful, venerable organizations like CultureLink—have to beg, hat in hand, for funding from this government; that last weekend, when His Holiness the

Dalai Lama came to Toronto, the federal government anted up \$3 million to the building of that cultural centre. What did we get from the McGuinty government? Zero, nothing, despite repeated attempts from the entire membership of the Tibetan cultural centre for help from the provincial government—nothing. The feds stepped up, but the McGuinty government was absolutely absent on that file.

So again, I would like to say that on both files it's been lose-lose, both for small business and for those who would want to learn English as a second language in this province. Sad times. The times, they are a-changing, however, as we see from yesterday's results. I extend to both those groups, on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the New Democratic Party, the hope that we will certainly do better.

1540

PETITIONS

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I've received more petitions to do with "Support of Bill 100 (Paved Shoulders on Provincial Highways)." The petition 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.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a large number of petitions that have been sent to my office, as they say, after the fact, but nonetheless I will present them. They are from Muskrat Dam and many other First Nations communities from up north, and they say the following:

"Petition—protect our homelands:

"We oppose Bill 191 and call on Ontario to withdraw it. It violates the treaties and disrespects First Nations' jurisdiction. It is not a true partnership. It imposes a massive, interconnected protected area over Nishnawbe

Aski Nation (NAN) homelands without any compensation;

“NAN communities will make the final land use decisions. Ontario has an obligation to honour and respect treaty number 9 and treaty number 5 and First Nations’ inherent jurisdiction. All development and protection decisions within NAN territory require free, prior and informed consent of NAN First Nations;

“NAN First Nations will continue to work on local, community-driven land use planning initiatives based on NAN jurisdiction;

“We call on all interested parties, including environmental organizations and industry, to withdraw their support for Bill 191. Bill 191 fails to uphold the Premier’s promise of a new relationship with First Nations and new jobs and economic benefits for northern Ontario;

“If Bill 191 passes, NAN will not recognize it. NAN will oppose Bill 191 by any means necessary.”

I have a number of petitions to this effect.

BRITISH HOME CHILDREN

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition that 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 endured 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.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: I have a petition to save medical laboratory services in Stayner, Tottenham and Elmvalle.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the consolidation of medical laboratories in rural areas is causing people to travel further and wait longer for services; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of the Ontario government to ensure that Ontarians have equal access to all health care services; and

“Whereas rural Ontario continues to get shortchanged when it comes to health care: doctor shortages, smaller hospitals, less pharmaceutical services, lack of transportation and now medical laboratory services; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government continues to increase taxes to make up for misspent tax dollars, collecting \$15 billion over the last six years from the Liberal health tax, ultimately forcing Ontarians to pay more while receiving less;

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

“That the McGuinty government stop the erosion of public health care services and ensure equal access to medical laboratories for all Ontarians.”

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

HOME WARRANTY PROGRAM

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I’ll be reading a petition designed to support 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 (HVAC) 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.”

Of course I agree with this; it’s my bill. I’m proud to affix my signature and I’m going to give it to Nicholas to be delivered to the table.

PENSION PLANS

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

“Whereas the Pension Benefits Act (PBA) 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.”

I will pass this on to Jonathan for the desk.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS TREATMENT

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have here a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from a number of very concerned Thornhill residents, which reads as follows:

“Whereas thousands of people suffer from multiple sclerosis;

“Whereas there is a treatment for chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, more commonly called CCSVI, which consists of a corrective angioplasty, a well-known, universally practised procedure that is low-risk and at relatively low expense;

“Whereas, while more research is needed, MS patients should not need to await such results;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario allow people with multiple sclerosis to obtain the venoplasty that so impacts their quality of life and that of their family and caregivers.”

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it and give it to page Haadiyah.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, yet more petitions, this time from Sandy Lake in regards to Bill 191. Again, you get these petitions when you get them and you read them when you’ve got them. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we oppose Bill 191, the Far North Act, and call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to withdraw it;

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

“Bill 191 violates the treaties and disrespects our jurisdiction. It imposes a massive interconnected, protected area over our homelands without any compensation. It splits our northern First Nations from our southern First Nations.

“Ontario has an obligation to honour and respect our treaties and our inherent jurisdiction. All development and protection decisions within NAN territory require free, prior and informed consent of NAN First Nations.

“We call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately withdraw Bill 191 and, instead, initiate a respectful government-to-government dialogue with NAN First Nations.”

I’ve signed the petition and I’m passing this on to Priscile to give to the table.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today that was submitted to me by Mr. Vern Orr, who lives on Hatfield Crescent in Peterborough, Ontario.

“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 and give it to the page Kimberly.

1550

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) recently and unilaterally announced that it would euthanize all animals in its care at its Newmarket shelter, citing a ringworm outbreak as justification;

“Whereas the euthanasia plan was stopped in the face of repeated calls for a stay in the Legislature and by the public, but not until 99 animals had been killed;

“Whereas the Premier and Community Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci refused to act, claiming the provincial government has no jurisdiction over the OSPCA;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement the resolution tabled at Queen’s Park by Newmarket–Aurora

MPP Frank Klees on June 1, 2010, which reads as follows:

“That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislature call on the government of Ontario to review the powers and authority granted to the OSPCA under the OSPCA Act and to make the necessary legislative changes to bring those powers under the authority of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that there is a clearly defined and effective provincial oversight of all animal shelter services in the province, and to separate the inspection and enforcement powers of the OSPCA from its functions as a charity providing animal shelter services.”

I agree with the petition, will sign it and send it to the table with Marie-Josée.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Mr. Jim Brownell: I'd like to thank Walter C. McDonald from Iroquois, Ontario, in my riding for providing me with this petition, and it reads as follows:

“Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas there are up to 40,000 Ontarians living with Parkinson's disease, many of whom require speech-language therapy to retain essential verbal communication skills and life-saving swallowing skills; and

“Whereas speech-language therapy can make the difference between someone with Parkinson's retaining their ability to speak or not, and their ability to swallow or not, yet most Ontarians with Parkinson's are unable to access these services in a timely fashion, many remaining on waiting lists for years while their speaking and swallowing capacity diminishes; and

“Whereas Ontarians with Parkinson's who lose their ability to communicate experience unnecessary social isolation and economic loss due to their inability to participate as full members of their communities; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of the community care access centres to assign speech-language pathologists to provide therapy to people on the wait-lists, yet people are regularly advised to pay for private therapy if they want timely treatment, but many people living with Parkinson's are already experiencing economic hardship and cannot afford the cost of private therapy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to call on Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to intervene immediately to ensure that CCACs across Ontario develop a plan to ensure that all Ontarians living with Parkinson's who need speech-language therapy and swallowing therapy receive the necessary treatment.”

I shall sign this and send it to the clerks' table.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. John Yakubuski: I have a petition for provincial oversight of the OSPCA for the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) recently and unilaterally announced that it would euthanize all animals in its care at its Newmarket shelter, citing a ringworm outbreak as justification;

“Whereas the euthanasia plan was stopped in the face of repeated calls for a stay in the Legislature and by the public, but not until 99 animals had been killed;

“Whereas the Premier and Community Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci refused to act, claiming the provincial government has no jurisdiction over the OSPCA;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement the resolution tabled at Queen's Park by Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees on June 1, 2010, which reads as follows:

“That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislature call on the government of Ontario to review the powers and authority granted to the OSPCA under the OSPCA Act and to make the necessary legislative changes to bring those powers under the authority of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that there is a clearly defined and effective provincial oversight of all animal shelter services in the province, and to separate the inspection and enforcement powers of the OSPCA from its functions as a charity providing animal shelter services.”

I have affixed my name to this and send it down with Bridget.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SECURING PENSION BENEFITS NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA PÉRENNITÉ DES PRESTATIONS DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 25, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 120, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act and the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2010 / Projet de loi 120, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite et la Loi de 2010 modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I rise on this particular bill both from the perspective of our caucus, the positions that we have taken in regard to pension reform, and also as somebody, like everybody else in this Legislature, who has worked hard all of their life and looks forward to one day being able to have the benefit of some retirement benefits when you retire.

Let me start off with that point. We know that in the province of Ontario, two thirds—I repeat, two thirds—of people are going to be retiring with little or no pension whatsoever. We have to ask ourselves a question as

legislators: Is that a good thing? I think the answer, resoundingly, is no.

Clearly, what we want in the province is that if people are going to go to work in the morning and are going to decide to embark on whatever career or to move from job to job, whatever it might be, then after 30 or 35 or 40 years, even, of service to our economy through various employers or a single employer, people who work should have the benefit of a pension. I look at our pages here, and I'm sure that you're all excited about pension legislation because you know that one day you will work, and you want to know that at the end—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They look very excited. I'm looking for smiles now, smiles about pensions, pages. I got some over there. There we go. Some of the pages got it.

You want to know that if you work a period of time, you're going to be able to retire with some dignity when it comes to the ability to do what's important when you come out of the workplace and retire with enough income.

We are seeing more and more an onslaught of employers that are attacking private pension plans in this province. We saw, for example, with Vale Inco in Sudbury, the mean and nasty strike of over a year where the employer decided that they were going to make the number one issue for the workers at Vale Inco a reduction in benefits when it comes to pensions. They proposed and eventually got, unfortunately, a provision that said all new employees going to work for Vale Inco would not be entitled to the same defined benefit plan that every other worker at Inco has got and won by way of strikes some 25 or 30 years ago. We see it in places like Vale Inco. We see it in places like Xstrata, which used to be Kidd Creek. We see from all kinds of employers in the province that there has been, for the last 15 or 20 years, a move on the part of employers to remove pension benefits that workers have worked hard to negotiate within their collective agreements. What we end up with is a situation where less and less employees in the unionized sector are able to hold on to the defined pension plan.

For those of us out in the private sector, and the public sector even, who are not lucky enough to be unionized, there's probably no benefit when it comes to pension benefits other than maybe some RRSPs. Maybe the employer says, "Well, I'll give you \$1,500 or \$2,500 a year by way of an RRSP so that you can build up your own pension plan by way of RRSP for when you retire." All of us in this House know, because that's the system that we work under—we have RRSPs, more than \$2,500 a year, I think. We get \$1,000 a month, I think, as an RRSP, which is far more than anybody else. The point is, you can't build a retirement income on a contribution of \$2,500 a year. You just can't do it. You can hardly build a retirement income even on \$1,000 a month unless you're throwing your own money in on top of that and you're very successful when it comes to income investments that you would have within the market.

So what are we to do? I think we have to ask ourselves a very simple question: Should there be some mechanism to allow all workers in this province—and I say all workers, not just unionized workers, but all workers in this province, including small business people who work hard in this province and get very little in the way of benefits when it comes to the work that they do—to be able to pay into some sort of a pension plan that says, at the end, when you retire, there's going to be some sort of benefit that you can enjoy your retirement on? I think the answer is yes. I think all of us should have that ability to know that, when we come to our retirement age, there's going to be some kind of an income there.

1600

Currently, what do we have? If you're most of the workers in this province, the two thirds of workers who don't have a pension or have little pension, the only thing you're going to be able to retire on, quite frankly, at age 60 is your Canada pension, if you take a diminished pension at age 60, and that doesn't amount to a heck of a lot. That's five or six hundred bucks a month. Who there is able to retire on \$500 or \$600 a month? You know as well as I do that there are many people in our constituencies who are trying to survive on welfare benefits of \$500 and \$600 a month if they're single. The reality is, most people can't afford to do it, unless you have some supplementary income that you've managed to put away as a result of your own savings. Clearly, Canada pension doesn't cut it when it comes to employees retiring at age 60.

If you say to yourself, "You know what? I'm going to wait until age 65, and I'm going to take a full CPP pension at the time of retirement and I'm going to take my old age pension," that amounts to about 1,700 bucks a month. Now, 1,700 bucks a month is much more interesting when it comes to retirement income, but certainly on its own is not enough to be able to survive. Madam Speaker, you get the phone calls, as I do, from people in your constituency who say, "I own my own house, I've paid all my bills off and I don't owe a dime against my mortgage, and I can't survive on that \$1,700 a month."

The neighbour who lived behind our house on Middleton Avenue—the street over is Bannerman—I'm not going to use her name because she has never given me permission, but about two years ago, unfortunately, her husband died. He was on a Canada pension and a retirement benefit, but there were no survivor's benefits to his widow. When he died, she ended up having to survive on a very small part of his Canada pension, which was the survivor's benefit. She was not 65 years old; she was 62 or 63, and she had not worked long enough to get a full amount out of the reduced pension and the Canada pension. With all of this put together, with her income which was probably about \$1,400 to \$1,700 a month, she had to sell her house because she could not afford to keep her house going when it came to paying the taxes, paying the hydro bill and paying the various utilities. She had no money at the end of the

month to be able to buy groceries and do the types of things that she would like to do in her daily living.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Welcome to Ontario.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Exactly. The member from Thornhill says, "Welcome to Ontario." I think you're perfectly right. There are more and more people who find themselves in that position.

So what did she have to do? With tears in her eyes, she said, "I have to sell my house." She said goodbye to all the neighbours, and she moved on to another part of her life where she sold her house and took the equity from the sale of the house to supplement her retirement income. It's like a reverse mortgage but not being able to live in your house. There's something wrong with that picture.

Last week I got a call from a gentleman in South Porcupine. Again, I don't want to use his name because I didn't get explicit permission to use it. The gentleman gave me a call and said, "I'm 58 years old. I made a decision to retire when I was 55 on the basis of where I was at at the time. I looked at my income, I looked at what my costs would be, and I figured I could just about make it and pay my bills. My house is paid, and I've got no bills, no credit cards, and I don't owe anybody any money." As it turns out, he said his municipal taxes have gone up by about \$600 from the time he retired, not because the city of Timmins is trying to be mean and nasty, but because market value assessment has had the effect of raising his taxes. His hydro bill has almost doubled, as has everybody else's in Ontario, as a result of the policies of this government, smart meters and other things that have come along. Then the HST hit, and he had some unfortunate realities in his life where he had to help one of his kids who was having some problems. What does a father do? You help your children. He called me the other day and said, "Gilles, I think I have to sell my house. I'm looking at selling my house and moving into a mobile home, because I need the equity from my house to be able to continue living on an income that's about \$2,000 a month."

The point I'm making is this: If people who have between \$1,600 to \$2,000 a month in retirement income are having to sell their houses, the alarm bells should be going off in the province of Ontario, saying, "What's going on here? Let's fix this."

We need to have modifications to pension legislation, but more importantly, I think we need to be bold in order to move the pension argument forward so that workers are able to build a decent pension for when they retire that is adequate to allow them not huge luxuries, but the ability to retire with some dignity.

There are a couple of ways of going: The Canadian Labour Congress, as all would know, has put forward a very reasonable proposal to Minister Flaherty and Minister Duncan. They said, "Canada pension in this country has to be changed and we need to see a doubling of the benefit that workers get with Canada pension." That sounds pretty radical to some who don't know a lot about pensions, but go take a look at how much you're going to

retire with at age 60, because most people don't wait until age 65, if they have the choice; they retire before age 65, normally in their late 50s or very early 60s. What they're proposing wouldn't be a huge increase. It's a doubling of a benefit of about \$500 to \$600 a month. So adding that together would give you a little bit more money and it would allow you, with your retirement income that you might have put aside, to be able to retire—who knows?—maybe a little quicker with a little bit more dignity.

There was a motion in the House to this effect that was debated earlier this week and last week, and I'm supportive of that motion. However, I don't think that this government, quite frankly, has got it here in their gut to do the fight that needs to be done in order to do what the Canadian Labour Congress is proposing and to double the Canada pension. I don't think this government's prepared to do that. Yes, they're saying all the right things when it comes to the motion in the House, but what action is the Minister of Finance taking with the federal Minister of Finance in order to make that a reality? Ontario could do it. Ontario, as Quebec has done with their Quebec pension plan, could do something quite innovative when it comes to increasing the benefit you get from what is now known as the Canada pension plan.

The other option, and I think it's a very reasonable option, is to follow the path set out by New Democrats under Andrea Horwath. Andrea Horwath has proposed that Ontario step out on its own. Yes, keep the Canada pension plan, and if the federal government is not prepared to do the kinds of increases in the Canada pension that we think are important, create our own Ontario pension plan that is a voluntary system that people can contribute to in order to build the income they're going to need when they retire.

Some would say it should be mandatory. I understand that argument, but you have to always take the first step to get to the second step, and I think what we have proposed as the New Democratic caucus is a very bold but a very practical solution to moving this along the way to getting to where we want to go. If we're able to make the argument that in the end, an Ontario pension plan that's similar to the CPP and that's stackable is a way to go—in other words, one benefit adds to the other—I think it brings us a lot closer to developing a type of pension in this province that allows all workers to benefit and to be able to retire with some dignity.

I know there are those out there who would argue, "You know what? It's your responsibility to save for your retirement." I've heard that argument from members of the Conservative caucus and certainly members of the Liberal caucus, but I want to test the House. How many members of this Legislature out of 107 have really put away for their retirement? I would argue that we're no different in this House than the rest of the population of Ontario, because most people don't for a very simple reason: They can't afford to. They're trying to raise their kids, pay the mortgage, buy diapers, put their kids through school and do the day-to-day things that we have

to do as parents, and they don't have the money. Members of this Legislature, even with our incomes of a base—what's our base? About \$110,000 or \$120,000, whatever it is. Even at that income, we're having a hard time trying to put away for our pensions.

I look at my daughters: Julie, who is married to Chris, both of whom are professionals. She's a nurse practitioner; he's a teacher. I don't know the math, but they've got to be making between the two of them \$140,000 or \$150,000 a year, I would think. I look at my youngest daughter Natalie, and Shane—same with them: They're both professionals and they're probably making a little bit less than that but certainly over \$100,000 a year. I know that they're putting money aside to buy themselves some retirement income when they retire, but if they were to retire strictly on what they're saving today, it would not be enough to provide them with retirement when they each reach age 55 or 60. So clearly something's got to be done.

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Even those families such as my two daughters—our two daughters, I should say; Murielle and I—are doing everything that they can to save up for retirement. Even those who do put it away are not going to have enough to retire with. So it becomes a societal problem. I would say to the government across the way and I would say to my friends in the Conservative Party, who certainly have a different take on pensions than I do—they don't even believe there should be a guaranteed—what do they call it?—a guaranteed income—the one that insures pensions.

Mr. Norm Miller: We created it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yeah, I know. But you guys have been talking against it. You might have created it. Listen: The Tories have created all kinds of legislation while in power, pushed by New Democrats and others, but it doesn't mean to say they still support it, because I've heard the speeches in this House where they're saying, "Do away with it."

My point is this: It is a societal problem. It is a problem that we should not strictly put on the backs of employers because many employers, like workers, are not able to afford pensions paid for strictly by them. So I think that government has got to be part of the solution. Who is government? It's all of us: It's the workers, through the taxes that we pay; it's the employers, by way of the taxes they pay; it's all of us pulling together in order to try to devise a solution that, at the end, will allow workers at age 55 or 60, after 30 years of work, with some retirement income that they can go off on and do what needs to be done. Does that make sense? I think, absolutely, because if we keep people in the workplace far longer than they need to—we know we have a shrinking economy. We look around at what's happening with globalization. If the older dogs—older dogs, meaning myself—stay in the workplace much longer than we have to, we're not allowing the younger people to get into those jobs that we are now currently holding. I think it's perfectly healthy to say to people in their 50s and 60s, when they're ready—it shouldn't be mandatory—

"Here's an option. There's a retirement that you can take, and here's some income that you can go off on and retire." So, between Canada pension, an Ontario pension plan and whatever other investments that you put together, you're able to retire with some dignity. I think that's a good public policy on the part of all.

Here's the question: Should retirement income be strictly a problem for the private sector to solve? I think the answer is no. I think the private sector, yes, has to play a role, but I think the public sector—meaning we, the people; I don't mean the government, like school boards and hospitals, but I'm talking about "we, the people"—becomes important for us to all pull together towards a solution that allows us to build the kind of retirement income that people need to have when they retire.

I think that what our leader, Andrea Horwath, has put forward in regard to the Ontario pension plan is a great step forward towards moving to a day when there is a portable pension, where people are able to contribute to a portable pension that they bring with them from workplace to workplace so that, after 30 or 35 years of work, they're able to retire with some dignity in the end when it comes to that decision to leave the workplace.

As for the legislation that the government has put forward on Bill 120, I just want to say: Will I be supporting it? Yes. Is it exactly what I want? Absolutely not. Is it doing the type of thing that I think need to happen? No. But there are some parts of this bill that I can support. Overall, is this bill going to be the panacea that allows all workers to retire with dignity? Members in the opposition, as well as members of the government, know: absolutely not. There are some things in this particular bill that I think are a step in the right direction. When we deal with the issue of targeted benefits, I think it's a step in the right direction. Does it go as far as we need to? Absolutely not, but it's a step forward. When we look at optional benefits that workers are able to negotiate, it gives them the ability to go there. I think that's a positive step forward. The funding requirements in regard to pension plans being jointly sponsored, I think is a step in the right direction.

Contribution holidays: You flunk on that one. You've tried to do the Liberal thing, which is to fall on the fence. You're neither with them nor against them. So I think the Liberals have tried to play that one very cute, and I think that contribution holidays are certainly not what I would like to see in legislation, but it is a move from what was there originally. But it certainly does not give the bold-stroke move that I think needs to be done on contribution holidays.

On entitlement to surplus: absolutely not. If it was only for that, I would vote against the legislation, because the whole issue of entitlement to surplus is a real issue. Should an employer be allowed to take the surplus out of the plan? I take a very clear position, as all New Democrats have for a while, and that is: When you negotiate benefits, those are deferred income, and it is not for the employer to spend the money that I have invested as a

worker along with my employer into a pension. That money should be used for the benefit of workers, not strictly for the benefit of the employer.

Overall, Bill 120 is a step in the right direction. Does it fix all the problems? Absolutely not. Would I do more? I can tell you under Andrea Horwath and New Democrats that certainly we would do more than what is proposed in this bill. I just say to the members across the way, you will get our support, but don't look at it as being tacit support of what you have done wholeheartedly, or not—

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to rise and make some comments on the member's presentation here this afternoon. He really did capture a lot of the essence of survival in this day and age when it comes to pension plans, the various types of plans that exist today—and they are varied—and the challenges that people face in an ever-changing world when it comes to pensions.

He also described the various ages that people can and do retire at. In the past, there was a notion that people did not retire until they were 65 or more. At one time, there were no pensions, so people just continued to work throughout their whole life. But now, we see people who have plans that can afford them the opportunity to perhaps retire in their early 50s. I have acquaintances actually from high school who retired 10 years ago or more and that pension was there for them.

Now the question is, in this ever-changing world, will that pension be there for people in the future? That's what Bill 120 is trying to address. We're trying to implement almost 40 recommendations in this second round of bills on pension reform from the Expert Commission on Pensions. So we'll have about two thirds of the 142 recommendations of that report put in place, should this bill happen to pass.

The member talked about this being a good start and gives his support for the bill, which is good to hear, but he mentions that it is just a beginning in his mind, and that's fair for him to say that. But there will be remaining recommendations from that report that we would consider for inclusion in future reforms.

We've had one bill on pensions; this is the second one. The finance minister has indicated that there could be another one yet. So I appreciate his comments on this particular bill.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaking as a person who is himself about eight years beyond Freedom 55—and, may I also mention, without any defined benefit pension plan, because people out there think we have one here and we don't. I am not speaking from an elevated position when I comment either on the general question of pension benefits or on the comments of my friend from Timmins—James Bay.

This is a problem for the entire world on a variety of levels. We've looked recently at television news and seen rioting in the streets of France. Why are they rioting in

France? Because the French government, not capable of affording pension benefits at age 60, has decided to move them to 62. Would that it were so simple for us here in Canada and Ontario.

I listened with interest to the comments of my friend because, by and large, his general observations are things that I think all sides of the House can agree on. What we can't agree on is the how-to. The problem is, the more the how-to is considered and the more time ticks by, the more problems we have. Because again, speaking as a person my age, and many in this House are my age, and I'm sure many people watching today are my age, we have a difficulty, and that difficulty is—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Shurman: No, not you.

We have a difficulty in that we're living longer. We're living to 80, 90 years old, and most people have not had the foresight to think, "Well, I'm going to live that long, and I need to save money." So we have a national problem, we have a provincial problem and we have an individual problem.

It is my belief, and it is our party's belief, that ultimately the answer to this—and it's going to have to be soon—is going to come from the private sector, which has the imagination and the creativity to do this where governments do not. It is an easy solution to say, for example, that we should double the benefits coming out of the Canada pension plan. It's easy to do in terms of legislating it. It's a lot more difficult to do when it comes to where the money's coming from.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I was watching my colleague on the television downstairs because, every once in a while, it's good to see what the public out there sees. It's good to watch the members as they perform and to see how they look on television, how they speak and how they project their voice.

I was watching him, and he had a lot of important things to say. I know that he cares very much about this issue. I know he cares very much about where the government is heading or is not heading on the whole pension scheme plan. We have studied this a great deal in our party. My colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek is here, who is a bit of our pension expert. But what Mr. Bisson had to say was particularly—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'd just remind the member to refer to the riding.

Mr. Michael Prue: Oh, excuse me. Exactly, exactly—the member from Timmins—James Bay. We all lapse into that from time to time, especially with the familiarity, but I meant no umbrage. I did not do it in any kind of a negative way.

The member from Timmins—James Bay was talking about a public plan, about the necessity of having governments at all levels contribute to the idea of a successful pension plan so that all Ontarians and all Canadians

can have the kind of pension plan that will do them proud.

We in this country are very proud, I think, of the Canada pension plan. It has had its flaws over the years, but parliamentarians of all stripes have seen the necessity of working towards a universal plan so that a person, when they turn 65 years of age, or younger in certain circumstances, will be guaranteed a full pension. We in the New Democratic Party believe that everyone needs a full pension, and we look forward to a bill that's certainly better than this one and that will produce that in the future. But for the time being, I am in total agreement with my friend from Timmins–James Bay. I commend him for what he had to say and want to tell him that he looked pretty good on television.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to spend a couple of minutes to comment on our friend from Timmins–James Bay. I must say, just as a comment on the comments by the member from the official opposition, that they're more inclined to have the private sector look after this. Yet my good friend from Timmins–James Bay and his party ask if government can take a bigger role. There's a real contrast, and I guess, as we go through this process, hopefully we'll land on something that we can all live with.

I don't have a pension either, and the member from Timmins–James Bay alluded to that. He pointed out to some of us that maybe we didn't do a good job planning. We seem to be too busy making ends meet, and I say that having been self-employed all my life. Some of the equity that we put aside—sometimes it's not easy to trade it in for the dollars that you need to live with.

Do we need to move this process forward? Yes. In well over 20 years, two decades, there hasn't been much thought about pension reform. We kind of left it and left it because we knew back then that—and that's from governments of any stripe, who thought that General Motors would never fail, that Nortel would never fail, that Abitibi Paper would never fail, that those pensions would be there for those folks when they retired. We certainly learned that that is not the case anymore.

As the Minister of Finance has initiated, we passed a bill in the last session that we sat here to make certain steps towards some type of tax reform. This would follow in those footsteps, and I'd hope as we move forward that we'll bring the private sector, the federal government and the provinces together to have a pension plan for all in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Timmins–James Bay has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Speaker, only two minutes? How can I do so? You just work up a sweat in that time.

I just want to thank all members for the comments made. I think we all recognize in this House that there is

a problem when it comes to retirement income for all Ontarians in this province.

It's true, as was said by the member from—I forget the member's riding.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thornhill.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thornhill. Thank you. I know them all by name; I don't know them by ridings. Madam Speaker, I'm at a loss. That's why I would never—

Mr. Peter Shurman: That's the second time you've asked that question.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not good with riding names, as I just admitted.

But my point is, we all have different approaches to how to fix the problem. The Conservatives, the Liberals and the New Democrats approach it very differently, and that's what healthy debate is all about.

I think our critic, Mr. Miller, has put forward some very good proposals that are well thought out, that have been looked at, have been studied and have been dealt with for a long time. I find it a little bit sad that the government hasn't taken that and run with it to the degree that they should.

One of the members across the way—again, I don't know the riding names so I won't say who it is—Lou—

Interjection: Northumberland.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Northumberland, thank you. See, that's how you cheat, Madam Speaker; you just ingratiate yourself with your colleagues.

He suggested that, "Oh my God, New Democrats were there from 1990 to 1995 and they didn't fix the problem. Oh my God." I've just got to say to you that you've been the government for the last seven years, and it's getting really, really thick on the part of the public to listen to a government that keeps on blaming everybody in the past for all the problems of today. You know as well as I do, sir, that at different times in the political debate of this province, when it comes to issues, some issues are much more pressing than others. Pensions were a very different reality back in the early 1990s but because of the meltdown of the economy and everything else that has happened, this issue has become front and centre. I think the government should reflect and say—if you are the government of Ontario, take the responsibility that comes with being government.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to spend some time this afternoon on Bill 120.

I happen to think that we have two large and pressing public issues that it doesn't matter which party forms government, they're going to have to deal with them. One will be the long-term sustainability of our public health care system, and the second one is going to be the provision of pensions for our citizens.

Things have changed dramatically from many, many centuries ago when Otto von Bismarck in Germany decided that he would be a social progressive—and I use that in interesting terms—and that the establishment of the retirement age would be age 65 in Germany. When

one looks at the age of people, the average age of males to survive in Germany, at that time, was around age 40. So Otto von Bismarck, in bringing in 65, realized early on that the state would never have to provide pensions because of the age that people were living until back in that time. We all know that age 65 became the threshold level for retirement for many, many years. We've had debates in this House, and indeed in Legislatures right across Canada, that forcing people at age 65 was deemed to be discriminatory in nature.

It's interesting how the demographic profile has changed for pensions. My wife, who is enrolled in the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, and anybody who's in that plan get a quarterly bulletin about members. It's interesting that in the last bulletin that I read, there were about six teachers retired that were 100-plus; there was a significant number age 90-plus—because they break it down; there was a larger group age 80 and a larger group in their 70s and 60s. What's interesting about that is, if you take a teacher who would be aged 100-plus, who retired at age 65—you do the math: that would be 35 years that they've been drawing their pension. You easily reach the conclusion that their pension that they're drawing at age 100-plus today would be larger than their actual salary that they got when they were working as professional teachers. You just do the math with the indexing factor—teachers' pensions are indeed indexed.

This certainly is an issue that needs a lot of discussion, and I fundamentally believe that there's no party that will have a corner on this. We'll be looking at a whole variety of models to try to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

I know in my own case, I can share a bit of a personal story, which is that my father, who retired after 40 years at General Electric in Peterborough, had a pension that was funded through contributions both by the individual worker and General Electric. In his particular case, because my mother was enrolled in HOOPP because she was a nurse and my father died exactly one year after retirement—in those days there was a provision in there that you would draw one year's of unemployment insurance before your pension kicked in. So my father paid into a pension plan for 40 years and never drew one dollar of that pension plan because he didn't take a survivorship option because my mother was enrolled in HOOPP. People who have looked at pensions know full well that if you opt for the survivorship benefit, the actual pension amount goes down fairly significantly. That's often a factor that is taken into consideration.

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Another thing that was interesting about GE and their pension plan—my father's collective bargaining group was the United Electrical Workers. I remember being a young lad sitting at the kitchen table when this discussion was going on. GE, at that time, had a pension board that was made up equally of members from GE corporate and the union, and they would manage the pension plan. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, GE corporate wanted to remove the union representation on that pension forum, so they came up with the idea that they would fully fund

the pension plan on a go-forward basis. What was interesting in that was to see the dynamic within the collective bargaining unit. The younger workers were getting the opportunity from GE corporate to get a substantial amount of money due to the retroactive contributions that they made. GE corporate said, "We'll give them a cheque." If you were a young person of 25 or 30, you were getting a cheque for \$7,000 to \$10,000—that's great—perhaps to make a down payment on a new home or buy a new car. So there was that internal dynamic between the younger members of the collective group and the older members who were looking forward to keeping that mechanism in place for their retirement income.

As a government, we've certainly indicated that we would be advocating changes to the Canada pension plan, which has an interesting history of its own. Mr. Pearson, who was then the Leader of the Opposition, of the federal Liberal Party, had a thinkers' conference in Kingston, Ontario, in 1960. Tom Kent, who would become Deputy Minister of Finance when Pearson formed the government, was proposing in 1960 to create the pan-Canadian pension plan. Of course, that became a topic of discussion during a number of federal campaigns in the early 1960s. It was implemented by the Pearson government, in close co-operation with—there were five parties during that minority government. Mr. Thompson from Alberta was the leader of the Social Credit Party. Mr. Douglas was leading the New Democratic Party at that time. Réal Caouette was leading the *créditistes* in the province of Quebec. Mr. Diefenbaker was Leader of the Opposition, and Mr. Pearson was Prime Minister. They had to come up with the honourable Canadian compromise, based on specific principles, to put forward the Canada pension plan. Of course, we all know nine out of 10 provinces adhered to the federal CPP regulations. At that time, Mr. Lesage, who'd been a former federal cabinet minister, became Premier of Quebec. Of course, his motto was *maîtres chez nous*, masters of our own house. He was asserting through the Quiet Revolution that Quebec needed additional rights and were asserting those rights, so they came up with the side deal, the QPP, which is exactly the same as the CPP but allowed the government of Quebec to put their stamp on cheques that would be delivered to the province of Quebec respecting provincial jurisdiction.

We're now at a point in time—and all members have talked about this—to come up with changes, of course, to the Canada pension plan, which we all know will require a constitutional amendment, with seven provinces equaling 50% of the population.

I think it's incumbent upon us all to chat with our fellow colleagues in other Legislatures. I fundamentally believe that we need to make some changes to the Canada pension plan, bearing in mind there would be some additional employer contributions, some additional employee contributions and, indeed, the government of Canada—and we want to be cautious, I think. Payroll taxes are a delicate matter and we need to take that into consideration.

I want to take a bit of time today to recommend that all members of this House get a copy of the final report of the Senate's Standing Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce. The Chair of that committee is Senator Michael Meighen. The Honourable Céline Hervieux-Payette is the Deputy Chair. They have done what I think is a pretty extensive review about Canadians saving for a secure retirement. They have a whole series of recommendations, and I think I'll just make some notes. I'll note the report. They certainly indicate that there is a desperate need for Canadians to start saving more. It has been calculated by TD Economics that most Canadians would like to strive for a retirement income that would represent about 65% of the earnings that they had during their working careers, bearing in mind that if you're enrolled in RRSPs or other financial instruments, one of the things they like to advise people is that as you approach retirement, you pay down your mortgage to make sure it's as close to zero as possible when you retire. They also recommend for any major capital purchases that you may be contemplating, that you make those during the last few years of your working career so that when you get to that moment of retirement, you can survive on 55% to 60% of the income that you had during your active working days.

But what's challenging, of course, is that when you look at many middle-class Canadians today, they do not have the appropriate savings level. When you calculate for those 35% who still have a defined benefit pension plan or the other 65% who have defined contribution plans, we're nowhere near that particular threshold level of 55% to 65% that we need to be at to ensure a level of retirement income.

It's interesting. The Senate committee on banking, of course, had a lot of representations, and one of those they certainly looked at was from David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, who appeared on his own behalf and argued that "the most serious problem with the current RRSP system is that there is a dearth of easily accessible and efficient investment vehicles for individuals and, even worse, a lack of efficient or low-cost annuity vehicles for individuals. In his opinion, he said that "it is important that people have access to investment vehicles that provide reasonable risk-adjusted net returns on their savings during their working years ... but also access to appropriate annuity and other vehicles that provide a lifetime stream of income post-retirement...." He went to say that there are many ways that this can be accomplished, but that it is going to take everybody working together with a variety of models that can be used to achieve a better retirement for Canadians and Ontarians.

Of course, you've seen Gordon Pape on TV. Gordon Pape also appeared in front of Senate banking committee, and one of the things that he talked about—it was mentioned yesterday by the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek in his comments—was the level of fees that are charged for RRSPs. He went on to say:

"In characterizing high cost as a problem facing individual investors, Mr. Pape—an author and publisher—

spoke about mutual fund management expense ratios, which he said 'are significantly higher (in Canada) than they are in the United States.... They significantly erode the returns that investors receive within their RRSPs.' He compared the cost of exchange-traded funds, which may range from 0.2 to 0.55%, to the cost of mutual funds, which are in the 2.5% range, on average, for an equity fund...."

So he did talk about this issue that was chatted about yesterday in terms of the cost of operating some of these funds. He went on to say that there should be some opportunities for a wider pool of funds to be used to significantly reduce the cost of running these plans.

I think Bill 120 is a step forward, and I believe that over the next number of years, there will have to be more legislative initiatives, perhaps 100% implementation of what Harry Arthurs has suggested. But there is no doubt about it, when you contemplate that, in 2017, in the province of Ontario, there will be more people over age 65 than there will be under age 15. So that really indicates the challenge that we all have in terms of adequate retirement incomes.

1640

Bill 120, if passed, will strengthen Ontario's pension funding rules by requiring more sustainable funding of promised benefits and stronger funding standards for benefit improvements. It will provide a framework to permit more flexible funding rules for certain multi-employer pension plans and jointly sponsored pension plans, clarification of surplus rules, and provide a dispute resolution mechanism to allow members, retirees and sponsors to reach agreements on how surplus should be allocated on the windup.

It would also provide a more sustainable pension benefits guarantee fund by implementing a strategy to build reserves, increase revenues, limit current exposure and reduce risk to taxpayers in the future. It will further strengthen regulatory oversight and improve plan administration.

The member from Mississauga East was so enthralled with my speech, I think he just fell over there.

But you know, it's interesting: Contribution holidays have created great problems for all governments of all political stripes over the last 20 years in the province of Ontario. We've often looked at Stelco and other large companies too big to fail; contribution holidays were given and we know the results that have taken place with those contribution holidays.

One of the ones that occurred when I was a member of city council: OMERS negotiated with municipalities across the province of Ontario. It was effectively known as the OMERS holiday. It allowed municipalities for a number of years to not make contributions—their share—to the OMERS pension plan. It gave employees at the municipal level a holiday. One of the things we have come to realize is that while there was some short-term benefit to municipalities in terms of their fiscal position, we now know it would have been much better if that holiday was not brought in for OMERS, that municipali-

ties across Ontario had continued to make contributions during that period, and, correspondingly, that members of the OMERS pension plan would have continued to make those contributions.

I know, if you chat, and I'm sure you do, Madam Speaker, here in Toronto with those individuals who are employed with the city in Toronto who took advantage of those contribution holidays back in the mid- to late 1990s, certainly, if they had the option today, they would have not had those contribution holidays.

We have done a number of things, I think, to reform pensions in the province of Ontario. In the 2010 budget, we provided a \$500-million grant to stabilize the PBGF fund, which is the pension guarantee fund that was brought in in Ontario in 1980, recognizing that the province of Ontario would indeed be in a position to backstop pensions if a crisis developed. We did that. Talking to the actuarial people who are involved in this—and there was an advisory council on pensions and retirement that was established, along with the Canadian Institute of Actuaries, to help us come up with the need to make that happen.

We all recognize that a financial crisis was initiated on Wall Street through the greed of a wide-ranging number of individuals. I don't think all of us realize how close the whole world came to a financial collapse. There was a great run on financial institutions south of the border. Lehman Brothers was the largest bankruptcy in American history and, of course, we know what impact that had on investment and pension funds right out through the world. It's interesting to note that through that process, the central bank in Iceland actually went bankrupt because their capital base was made up of American subprime mortgages that they had bought 15 or 20 times down the line.

This debate about pension reform in Ontario I believe is an opportunity—I sincerely believe—to engage every person in our communities, because we all have a stake in pension income. So this is a real opportunity for members to be out in their ridings, to engage people in their ridings and to come up with ideas and suggestions that we may want to look at.

While this is not government policy, it's certainly my suggestion that pension reform would be a great topic for a select committee to look at. Having been a member of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions in the province of Ontario, that was a unique opportunity to look at an area and come up with a series of recommendations. It may be that this is one of those key topics that all members on all sides of the House have a real interest in, retirement income for our fellow citizens, because we know that we're an aging population and we know that to sustain our economy long-term, people are going to have to have a reasonable level of pension income to sustain themselves, to have the opportunity to keep living in the style that they had during their working careers.

This will be an interesting debate. It's a debate where I think all 106 members should take the opportunity to get

their comments on the record because, as I said at the opening of my remarks today, pension reform and the sustainability of health care are our two pressing issues.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to comment on the speech of the member from Peterborough on Bill 120, this pension bill. He did speak about the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, and I believe he mentioned that his wife is a teacher and may benefit from that.

There is, in Ontario, a growing disconnect between the private sector and the public sector as it relates to pensions. I will note that with the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, there was a line item in this year's budget where there was a \$500-million contribution from general tax revenues to sustain that fund. That's something that most businesses aren't able to participate in. I talked to individual business operators, and in most cases there is no plan. Some small businesses may have a plan where the business will contribute an amount toward an RRSP and the employer will match it, which is actually what we have here at Queen's Park. We have a defined contribution plan.

The private sector world is moving that way, whereas we have in the public sector a case where, in many cases, people are able to retire, with the various factors, in their mid-50s. They may very well live to be 95, so you have a 40- or 45-year period. You may work 30 years and draw your pension for 40 or 45 years. That is, I would say, not sustainable, frankly, and it is a huge disconnect between the private and public sector situations.

But this bill is about making those who have defined benefit plans able to count on them by strengthening the rules, and we have been supporting that.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I had the opportunity to speak for a long period of time yesterday about pensions.

I listened to the member from Peterborough, and he made some good points about the money that the government had to put into the pension plan to bolster it. There's no doubt about it, that was helpful. But I would ask anyone—in the government or members—what would you do if you spent 35 or 40 years in a plant and had signed a deal with the employer that, instead of wages, you would take pension credits that, at age 60 or 65, you could use to sustain yourself, to have a good, respectable, normal retirement, and that individual decided at the end of the day to break that agreement? What do people do? They turn to their government. They turn to their government for help. They ask the government to enforce contract law. They ask the government to help them out, because it wasn't their fault that the economy went into a spin. It wasn't their fault there was a world recession. But if the contributions had been kept up over the 35 years without any holidays or without any of the things that would be detrimental to the solvency funding, then that would be an argument, but it wasn't

their fault. So whoever the government of the day is, regardless if it's Liberal, Conservative or NDP, it's our duty to maintain the contract law and force these companies to live up to their obligations to the people who have spent their whole life working for them and given up a good part of their life to bolster their financial situation.

1650

I think it is up to us to be the watchdogs over pensions. I think we have the ability now to do that, and we certainly should take an active role in protecting people's lives in this province who have paid their taxes.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is one of those times where this Legislature is hosting a good debate among thoughtful members about something that's important to all of us, and while we may disagree on some of the details, we all seem to be headed in the same direction.

Here's where we are, roughly: the Canada pension plan is this country's national, mandatory-contribution, public pension system. It does provide a secure, indexed-to-inflation defined benefit pension to virtually all working Canadians, as well as survivor and disability benefits. What we all agree on is that, in and of itself, it's insufficient. In fact, CPP benefits are only intended to replace 25% of a contributor's career-average annual pensionable earnings—which is a mouthful of words that says the amount of money that you need to live on—up to an earning ceiling of \$47,200 in 2010. That's not a lot of money.

Very clearly, what Ontario has said is that we need to have a modest expansion of the Canada pension plan, fully funded and phased in, because if there's one thing that we agree on with both parties opposite, it's that this has got to be responsible.

Secondly, we need to have some pension innovation in the province of Ontario, ideally across Canada, to expand the types of institutions that can offer pension plans. We need to expand the range of working individuals who can participate in a pension plan and we also need to find ways to reduce the cost of pension plans. This is really important, because about two thirds of working Canadians don't have a workplace pension. Providing for a secure future for all 13 million Ontarians, and those yet unborn, is one of the things that our people, our electors, sent us to this Legislature to do for the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: This is quite an interesting debate in the sense that it's what I might call a great push-pull argument. On the one hand, if you take, as an example, a currently much-discussed group—that's the Nortel pensioners—who have a problem because of the disposition of Nortel assets and the disappearance, in effect, of money that they had a right to expect, they're looking for a safety net under the pension benefits guarantee fund. And the pension benefits guarantee fund,

essentially, isn't funded. This bill tries to address that in some degree but doesn't come close to being able to do that for Nortel, much less everybody else who has a claim on it or who ultimately will have a claim on it.

So we're put in a situation where we hear discussion of, "The government will help me." I heard that from my friend the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. The government doesn't help anybody. The government manages money that taxpayers put into a fund or any other thing that that government decides is going to address one issue or another. So our problem is: Do we help people through a pension benefits guarantee fund that doesn't have any money or do we help through welfare, because these people are not going to be set adrift? So we have that problem to reconcile with a bill like this that doesn't go far enough.

I do agree with the member from Peterborough on a number of things that he says. The greying of Ontario is a fact that is irrefutable. I believe the number was 2017, before the largest cohort is over 65. As I mentioned in an earlier comment, the concept of living to 80, 85 or 90 these days is not far-fetched. It is happening much more often than it used to. So the pension discussion is not one that will end with Bill 120; it is one that must go on and on.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to thank my colleagues from Thornhill, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Parry Sound–Muskoka and Mississauga–Streetsville for providing some commentary.

I'll just give you another statistic which I think is somewhat concerning. TD Economics, in a profile a couple of years ago, was talking about households where the primary earner is between 55 and 64 years of age. Only 65% of that group have an RRSP, and only half of those have more than \$55,000 in those accounts. So when you take what I would call those very sobering statistics into consideration, it becomes quite clear—a real freight train that we're dealing with here.

It will take all of us at our best, I think, over the next number of years to truly come to grips with this pension problem. Will there be one magic solution to this? No. Will there be a combination of approaches? I believe that will be the correct path that will be pursued. It will be an extension of the Canada pension plan. It will be a chance to look at the opportunities for some multi-employer plans in the province of Ontario, where we can significantly reduce the administrative fees that are of concern when some of these plans are initiated and where exorbitant fees are reducing the amount of return. There will be a serious look at the impact of contribution holidays, which have been referenced on several occasions.

I think that this is a real opportunity for us cooperatively to put in place something that's sustainable in the long term.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate? The member from Beaches–East York.

Applause.

Mr. Michael Prue: Oh, I have a fan, I think. I hope I still have the fan when I'm finished speaking.

Applause.

Mr. Michael Prue: And on and on he goes.

I looked at this bill when it first came out, and looked at what was being proposed. Although I really can't find all that much fault with it, I do consider it a very timid piece of legislation. I consider it quite timid in its scope, in what it intends to do and how it's being done.

I am reminded that the phrase I have heard most often, I think, from the government benches, be they Conservative or Liberal government benches, in my nine years here at the Legislature is, "We know there's a lot more to do, but this is a good first step." When I looked at this bill, it rang in my ears, because I think that's what is happening here: The government sees this as a lot more to do, but here's the first step.

I have to say that I am disappointed with the first step, because the Arthurs report was very clear on what needed to be done for pension reform in Ontario. We all know that this is a crying need. We all know that this is a generational issue. We all know that with the number of boomers who are fast approaching 60 and 65 years of age, the need for pension reform is going to be one of those great debates, and that the debate will be very similar in circumstance and scope to the debates of the 1960s around medicare; it will be very much the same as the debates earlier in Canada's history on other social programs. And they are based on a certain timing. They are based on the age and the occupation of people, the number of people who are in the country, from whence those people may come, if it's around immigration issues—a whole lot of stuff.

I look to the experts. I look to what Mr. Arthurs had to say. First and fundamentally, he recognized that the \$1,000 threshold was not sustainable. It is not enough for someone to retire on. It is not enough as a base-floor guarantee to ensure that a person or persons could live without being in poverty. We know that the poverty line for a single person in urban Ontario is approximately \$19,000 a year. Having a guideline, as we have here in the province now, of \$1,000 is tantamount to saying, "You are going to live for the rest of your life in poverty," because if you are a retired person or about to retire, you have no job prospects or reasonable job prospects, and your pension suddenly gets pulled out from under you and you are stuck with the bare minimum of \$1,000, which is the pension guarantee, that simply is not enough to sustain yourself in any kind of lifestyle that you would want.

1700

So Mr. Arthurs was quite right when he suggested that we have to increase that to an amount which is a livable amount per month in order that people not find themselves in poverty. He suggested \$2,500. Just doing the fast math, that would be about \$30,000 a year. It would be not a princely sum but a comfortable one. It would allow even a couple to live above the poverty standard

and to make sure that they were able to maintain themselves in a reasonable style without worrying about the ravages of old age. But this particular bill does nothing about that key Arthurs recommendation. It says nothing about raising the rate from \$1,000 to anything approaching a livable amount.

I listen to the finance minister as often as I can to see where he is going on this and other issues. The government likes to talk about the fact that to allow for solvency under the present \$1,000 per month limit, the premium would have to be raised 500%. When that was first voiced in this House, I thought: Wow; raising the premium 500% just to make sure things were solvent. How could anybody afford that? Then we went out and tried to find out how much people are paying per month right now, and they're paying \$1 per month into this fund. So if you want it to be solvent, if you want it to pay the amount of money it's supposed to, we would have to ask people to pay \$5 a month. That's the 500%. Just to put that into perspective, this is a \$4 increase.

I went and filled up my car with gas yesterday. It took about \$40 worth of gas, and, of course, there was 13% HST on that gas. Just doing the fast math, that was over \$5 right there. And, you know, I needed the gas, just like everybody else who drives a car, and when you have to pay for things in order to have things, you do it. If you were to ask me whether I would rather pay the HST on that \$40 worth of gas or pay an extra \$4 a month to make sure that the pension plan in Ontario was solvent, I would tell you that that is an absolute no-brainer. It is my honest belief that the majority of people, particularly the majority of people in their late 40s and 50s and 60s, who are now starting to be concerned about a pension and their retirement and what is going to happen to them in middle and old age, would think that this is not a lot of money to spend as well. This is \$5.

I'm sorry; I said "per month." I err. That's \$5 per year, not per month.

The minister also says that to implement the full Arthurs recommendation of \$2,500 per year, it would mean a 1,000% increase, but then again, that is but \$10 per year. Most people would think that is a pretty good deal, to pay \$10 a year in order to have a pension plan that is fully vested, that is guaranteed and that if anything, heaven forbid, were to happen to their plan, to the monies that were coming out of it, that \$10 would guarantee at least that they would have a pension of \$2,500 per month.

It was a long time ago when I started paying into a pension plan. I remember in my 20s getting a job with the federal government. There was a pension plan that was mandatory, that all federal civil servants had to avail themselves of. It was not a voluntary plan; it was the plan. And I remember those days, because the majority of the people with whom I worked were young people, fresh out of university. We'd got a job with the immigration department as it was expanding, working in exciting places like the airport and downtown Toronto and dealing with people from all around the world, and it was an exciting job.

I remember that a lot of people with whom I worked were very concerned that they had to pay for that pension plan. They were very concerned because they had to pay 8% of their gross salary. You can imagine, when you are 20-some years old and you were paying 8% of your gross salary every two weeks—and when you only earned, as I did in those days, about \$8,000 or \$9,000 a year, and you were paying—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, that's all. You remember. I see the Speaker laughing.

That wasn't a bad salary. It wasn't a great salary, but that's what it was. And when you were paying 8% of that for 40 years down the road, a lot of people didn't like it. I remember the discussions that we often had about how we would rather keep that 8%, how we would rather keep those 600-or-so dollars a year in our own pockets, about how we would look after ourselves when we were older. I remember those discussions, but there was no option to that. There was no option at all, because you paid and you continued to pay and you paid for the entire time that you were a public employee.

I also know that today when I talk to the same colleagues that I worked with nearly 40 years ago—and the majority of them are now retiring or contemplating retirement—they are very happy with that pension plan. They are very happy because they understand that it was necessary, for 30-plus years, to pay into that pension plan, to put in the 8%. Today, they have secure pensions.

I would wonder: If the government of Canada were to turn around one day and say, "We're not solvent; you can't have that pension plan," or, "We're going to change the law on something that you have paid into your entire working life, and you're not going to have that plan anymore," methinks there would be a riot of public employees, because that was part of deal with where we worked. Everybody understood that as public employees, we did not make as much money as people doing comparable jobs in the private sector. Almost everyone with whom I went to university, almost everyone I knew, went off to work in the private sector with the same or lesser qualifications than I, and they earned more money. But it was the pension plan, working for a government or working for a large corporation, that was the difference. Today, it seems to me to have been one of the wisest decisions that was made on behalf of federal public employees and employees in general, those who worked for larger corporations that were able to put the money aside and were able to give some kind of future to people in their old age.

I do remember my own father, who worked at a place called Dunlop's on Queen Street. It was a conveyer belt factory—a dirty, stinking, horrible place. I know that because I had the opportunity to work there for four or five summers myself, to see people with all kinds of infirmities because of losing hands and feet on the conveyer belts and machinery; people who died prematurely and oftentimes didn't make their 65th birthday to get their pension. There was a pension, albeit a small one,

and I do remember that when that factory shut down, the pensioners and the people who worked there were not well done by with that pension plan, because it was not indexed and because they were given an option—and too many of them took it—of taking a cash settlement and walking away, because the Dunlop-Pirelli company had closed down, semi-bankrupt, in Canada. It was a pretty sad time for most of those men—and most of the people with whom I worked were men. It was an incredibly sad time, and their pension did not benefit them, even though they had worked in a pretty bad place.

1710

I think that all Canadians, all Ontarians, deserve a full pension. I have listened to some of the arguments that are being made in this place, some people talking about defined benefit versus defined contribution, but we all know that a real pension is one that you get every month. A real pension isn't like what we get here as a member of the Legislature; I don't consider that a pension at all. It's not a pension at all; it's a forced saving scheme. I'm glad that someone forces me to save some of my money, but the pension that has accrued or that I see accruing to me after nine years in the Legislature is not yet one year's salary, not yet. But I guess I live in hope that at one time it may be.

We support the Arthurs recommendations, all of them. We support the Ontario pension agency. We believe that the pooling, administering, investing and disbursing of stranded pensions would be an important role for the agency, and we were disappointed to see that this was not in this legislation. Again, this legislation is very timid. But if it were in the legislation, if it were to be part of a great Liberal plan, such as other great plans in the past when governments got together and came up with medicare and other things that are universally appreciated in this country, then the Ontario pension agency would solve the problems that Nortel pensioners face, Nortel and AbitibiBowater and Canwest Global Communications. They would all be much better off.

We also think that the third Arthurs recommendation about emergency indexation provisions is something that should be studied and something that should be done, and unfortunately, again, it has not found itself within the four walls of this legislation.

In the five minutes left, I do want to talk about the more than 60% of Ontarians who have no pension. What they have is a Canada pension when they turn 65; that is all they have. That is all they can look forward to. Very often, they did not have times in their professional or personal lives to put away the kind of money that would make sure that they do not live in poverty. Sometimes because they didn't have good jobs, sometimes because the jobs in the cyclical runnings of the economy did not allow for them to save, and sometimes because of family obligations, they never did get an opportunity to have a pension.

This is particularly true of women, who oftentimes in the past—more so than today, but even still today—were the ones who stayed home, were the ones who looked

after the children, were the ones who were in my day, in my younger day, called homemakers. They didn't have the opportunity to accrue that kind of pension, and I want to talk about them.

We think that more needs to be done, and that more cannot be just a modest increase in the CPP, which I think is where this government is heading. A modest increase in the CPP will of course be welcomed by anyone who only has that as a source of income, but we could do so much more. There are places around this globe that have much more vibrant pension plans, where people do not look at turning 60 or 65 years of age as a time of penury. They do not look upon poverty; they look upon it as a time to fulfill those things in their lives that they have always wanted to do: to go back to school, to travel, to spend time with children, to take up art, to do all of those things that one can and should be able to do in retirement. We believe that this is what a really good pension plan would do. Certainly, we would like to follow what some of those countries have done, but we need to make sure in doing it that there are sufficient monies available to fund it over the long term.

We don't think that the issue of expanding the pension coverage is something that is anything other than urgent. We do not believe that the Harper government, not to mention Alberta and some other provinces, is going to move significantly to expand the coverage under the CPP. That is why we have ourselves talked about an Ontario plan.

This is not new. It is not unique. The grand old man of politics in Ontario, Leslie Frost, had the same idea 50 years ago, the same idea that Ontario should have a pension plan. He did not move ahead with that pension plan because the Canada pension plan came in and the Canada pension plan was doing what it was supposed to do. He didn't see the necessity for duplicative effort, and I understand that, and he quietly dropped the plan that he had been a champion of.

But perhaps it's time for us to look at what he thought and what he was prepared to do, because if the other provinces and the federal government are not going to do what's necessary, I would suggest that this province should. We have 13 million people, many of whom are getting older. We have companies that are finding themselves in dire straits and walking away from their obligations. We have laws in this province that allow for companies to pay off their creditors and the banks and everyone else before they pay off the pensioners who have contributed of their own time and of their own money to the pension plan.

We need to have a pension plan that is made in Ontario, that will help the citizens of this province to plan for a better future, particularly the 65% or so who have no pension plan. We need to give that option to pay into a plan. You can't just pick up the phone and phone somebody and say, "I want a pension plan"; you need to have a setup which allows for voluntary payments so that people can contribute to the pension plan and can look forward to having something when they get older,

something that they voluntarily pay into, if it is to their benefit, something that they can recoup at the time they retire.

It is not time for us to simply sit here and say that the CPP will be good enough. It is not time for us in this province to ignore the plight of the Nortel pensioners and all of those who have no pension. It is time for us to be bold. It is not time for an incremental approach. It is time for us to do what is right at the beginning and not talk about, "A little bit is being done, but we can do some more later."

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

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the comments of the member from Beaches–East York. My father was a customs officer. Your talk about being an immigration officer and paying 8% of your salary struck me as a story I'd heard many times over. But my great-grandfather was one of the first federal agricultural inspectors—I think his badge number was 12 or something—in the federal civil service. He died in 1935, and my great-grandmother lived happily on his pension until 1967. My grandfather, who was a private entrepreneur in the hardware business, said to my father, "Join the federal civil service. If you can get a job, get a federal civil service job," and Dad, when he came back from the war, within a very few years did that. It worked well for my father and my family.

The reason I point that out is that most Ontarians don't have those defined benefit plans. They don't have them backed up by the government of Canada. They have to fend for themselves. In that perspective, I come to this being a proud constituent of Algoma, from where the Prime Minister of Canada, Lester B. Pearson, brought in the Canada pension plan, and we know that it helps many people.

But here we are, in the year 2010, looking out across our borders and watching a general strike in France over the issue of when you can collect your pension. I think it highlights the difficulties of governments determining in a real way how you can guarantee this. I think this is a modest first step in this bill, but it's one that we need to take.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: You want to call me "Richmond Hill" all the time. It's Thornhill.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: Here's for Thornhill. Thank you, Speaker.

Now that we've got that squared away, this is—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You look more rich than thorny.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I don't know if I should like that or not. Was it a compliment?

Let's talk about pensions for a moment. What's interesting about today's debate is that the debate on the bill itself seems to have taken place in the leads yesterday,

and today this is a debate on ideological approaches to pensions, not on the bill.

I think we can all agree, Liberals included, that this is a step—but it's a small step—in a particular direction that doesn't resolve the issue that we have to face.

1720

Take a look, for example, at the pension benefits guarantee fund, which exists—or more correctly these days doesn't exist in a solvency state in the province of Ontario. There are only three jurisdictions in the world, according to my information, that have a fund like that one. One is the pension benefits guarantee fund here in Ontario. One is in the UK and one is in the United States.

For all intents and purposes, although these three jurisdictions are doing business on an as-usual basis, they are all in some level of bankruptcy. The UK has just gone through a tremendous austerity move; the United States, if China ever called the loans, would be in default; and the province of Ontario has a deficit that, were it in a position to have to be paid at this point, also couldn't meet—so we're talking about liabilities and assets. We can't do it. We're talking about pensions.

Back in 1965, when I joined Bell Canada in my first job, there wasn't a question about whether there were pensions. You signed the pension card. We haven't got that now, and we have to consider where we're going over a period of time on a number of levels—national, provincial and individual.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to reiterate yesterday's lead that I did that in the last few months, the Minister of Finance has tried to indicate to the people of Ontario, the federal government and the provincial government that the best way to go is CPP enhancements. Well, I agree; the NDP are in favour of CPP enhancements. Also, the old age security: We're in favour of enhancements, but I don't think it's going to cut it. If you saw the articles in the paper in Toronto yesterday, they said that Mr. Flaherty is backtracking now and saying he's not sure he can put it together; he's not sure all the provinces are on board; he needs two thirds of the population of Canada plus two thirds of the provincial governments to ratify it. He doesn't know whether he can do that or not. So I think this is just the first step in the backtrack that the finance minister has bet his marbles on, that the federal government is going to come through with CPP. If they don't, what happens then?

What should have happened is the Ontario pension plan, which would have addressed the 65% of Ontarians who don't have a pension plan. It also would have made them feel much better that they're contributing and being involved in pension reform rather than just supplementing the 32% of defined pension plans, so everybody would be involved. Everyone would be taking a place.

It's doable. I gave the numbers yesterday. It's a matter of \$1 to \$5 per plan member per year, which is not a lot. I think \$10 was the upside—\$10 a year to make it work. I don't know why the government doesn't entertain it. I

don't know why the government isn't looking at it. It's certainly going to come back and bite us if they don't come up with big improvements to the CPP, and I don't think they're going to.

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

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure to join in the debate and to comment on the words that were shared by the member from Beaches–East York. It was great to sit here and listen to his comments. It's always a pleasure.

He referred to the 13 million people in Ontario, many of whom are getting older, and we know that the baby boomers are moving to retirement age. So that's exactly why, knowing that over 60% of the people in Ontario do not have a workplace pension that was referred to by the member from Beaches–East York, we're here debating Bill 120 today.

Ontario is in the midst of a multi-phased reform of Ontario's Pension Benefits Act. The purpose is to modernize and strengthen the regulations of workplace pensions, which is exactly what we heard the member from Beaches–East York discuss. Is that it: Beaches–East York?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Good; Beaches–East York. I'll just keep saying it, and then we'll all have it. Thank you. Sorry, Speaker; I got a little sidetracked.

We're talking about a multi-phased approach that this government is taking. This is absolutely something that needs to be done. We recognize that. In May, Bill 236 was unanimously passed in this House. Again, the debate that we're having here today includes all parties in recognizing the importance of this pension reform. Today we continue to discuss Bill 120, which is the next step in this multi-phased reform for pensions in the province that the McGuinty government has proposed—this broad package of reforms. Of course, the reforms will strengthen Ontarians' pensions, address the concerns of workers, concerns of retirees, concerns of employers and, I always want to add, concerns of the self-employed as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches–East York, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to, first of all, thank my colleagues from Algoma–Manitoulin, Thornhill, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Kitchener–Conestoga for their fine and thoughtful comments.

What was said by the first two, the members from Algoma–Manitoulin and Thornhill, I think needs to be reiterated. The member from Algoma–Manitoulin did say that this is a modest proposal, and I think he is correct in that; it is modest. The member from Thornhill called it a small step, and I thank him, because I think that's what I was trying to say.

One of Tommy Douglas's most famous sayings was, "Dream no small dreams." I think that this is a small dream. What we should be looking at is a big dream. We should be looking at: What do we want for the people of

Ontario? What would be universally accepted? What would all people welcome? I would suggest that what all people would welcome would be a pension plan on the same kind of scheme as medicare. That is the most universally accepted and recognized hallmark of what it means to be a Canadian and an Ontarian. If we took that big step, we could be equally proud.

My friend from Thornhill talked about the liabilities and assets and talked about defaults in the United Kingdom and the United States, but I would suggest, with respect, that this is not entirely linked to pensions. The defaults in the United States and in Great Britain have a great deal more to do with fiddling in the marketplace than with pensions, a great more to do with corporate greed than with pensions. In fact, if there are any difficulties, as there are today in France, it's only because the marketplace has not been kind enough to the pensions as it should have and could have been.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: For many of those who are pensioners today, in their living memory they can remember when retirement used to be a descent into poverty for the vast majority of those who had left the workforce. For the generation of their children, those of the baby boom, like the majority in this House are, pensions began as a product of the postwar society, primarily in the 1960s, when we said, "We've got to be able to do better than this; old age cannot be a sentence of a slow drift into poverty." So the Canada pension plan and various private sector pension plans came into being. The current generation of seniors are perhaps one of the first in our country's history to know that they can retire and live at least a comfortable, basic existence.

Our challenge at this juncture in time, as legislators, as representatives of the people of the province of Ontario, has been to say that those assumptions that were made 40 and 50 years ago don't stand the test of time in the 21st century. We find ourselves looking at the reasonable prospect of a drift back into poverty with a public pension that's not adequate for the job.

That brings us to where we are today, with a bill that's designed to be a step in the process of strengthening the system by which older adults who have left the workforce can retire on a combination of their savings and their pension and live a life of dignity and reasonable comfort.

One of the things that differentiates us from this debate 40 and 50 years ago is that as a society, all across the world but especially here in North America and most especially in Canada, we're living longer. I can remember, as I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, you would shake open the newspaper, and if you happened to read the obituaries, there would be something saying, "So-and-so passed away on such-and-such a date surrounded by family and friends. He lived to the ripe old age of 72."

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Men were expected to live into their early to mid-70s; women, somewhat longer. There weren't that many

people who lived to be octogenarians back in the days when we grew up and back in the days when the fundamental pillars of the Canada pension plan and many private sector pension plans were first cast in legislative or legal concrete.

That takes us to where we are today, because, very clearly, we're living longer. It's normal now for a man to live into his late 70s and early to mid- and sometimes late 80s and for a woman to live normally through her mid-, maybe late, 80s and into her 90s.

God knows, in my home city of Mississauga: Congratulations, Hazel McCallion; at age 89, you have been elected mayor. Hazel McCallion is a vibrant, with-it 89-year-old, and she's not drawing a pension.

One of the conundrums, one of the challenges, faced by this Legislature in considering the options open to us is in defining what it is we would really like to do. There's one side of the debate that says that what we really need is a universal, publicly funded, defined benefit pension that's indexed to inflation, that will allow people to draw on a comfortable income, paid for by the taxpayer, for as long as they should live. Presumably you can work as long as you wish to work or can work, and you'll pay into it a modest sum and, after retirement, you get to draw on it.

In considering this, which sounds like a wonderful, golden ideal, we have to ask ourselves: Who's writing the cheque for such a defined benefit pension? The answer to that is: You are; the taxpayer is. It's something that's drawn from tax revenues now and in the future. With the baby boom bulge on the cusp of beginning to turn into seniors themselves, next year, 2011, marks the transition of the very first baby boomer to the age of 65. For about 20 years, the population of seniors in North America, and particularly in Canada, is going to grow hugely.

Let me give you one metric to give you an idea of how quickly the population of seniors is going to grow. For every senior alive today, by the time we, the baby boomers, have ourselves mostly become seniors, there are going to be two seniors. For every octogenarian, a person aged 80 or above, alive today, by the time we, the baby boom generation, are ourselves mostly into our 80s, there will be three.

Consider, for example, not merely the impact on providing a decent living income for men and women who are probably looking at upwards of 20 years or more of retirement; consider also the impact on social services, on health care and on the fact that fewer and fewer working people will be paying more and more money to support more and more elderly people. That will include me and that will include most of my colleagues and most of my friends and neighbours.

This is a serious challenge. While taking the option that, "Oh, that will be paid for out of future tax revenues," is one way of assuming it away, another way of assuming away the challenge is to say, "We think, frankly, this is something that the private sector should manage, so this matter should be sent to the private

sector, and the private sector will look after it,” and that’s equally unrealistic.

So where, between these two extremes, should the province of Ontario be leading our great Canadian nation into landing on a sustainable, long-term solution for all Canadians and certainly for all Ontarians to live a life of dignity and comfort in their older years? That’s where our Premier and our Minister of Finance and, I am going to assume, where all three parties in this House in the end are going to land and say, “This is where we’re going as a province. This is something that will define us during our time representing the people of Ontario.” Regardless of which party sent us here, regardless of which community we speak for, if we can come up with a workable solution, this is something that years hence we’ll be able to elbow somebody and say, “Hey, I did that. I stood up and voted for that. I helped promote that. I helped put that together.” That’s the challenge before the House today.

Now, we’re considering a number of different options as we begin our examination of pensions, and let’s just have a look at some of the objectives of this legislation. This is sort of like, what is your strategic objective here, and where are you going in broad brush terms? So I’m going to give you the five points that delineate where the province of Ontario is aiming to land in terms of its pension reform.

The first point: strengthening Ontario’s pension funding rules by requiring more sustainable funding of promised benefits and stronger funding standards for benefit improvements. In other words, when somebody makes a contractual agreement with their employers, what we’re saying is, you’re going to actually do what the agreement says you’re going to do.

Number two: providing a framework to permit more flexible funding rules for certain multi-employer pension plans and jointly sponsored pension plans. We’d like this to be something that is wider and broader. We want more types of organizations participating, and indeed there are more types of organizations today than there were 40 and 50 years ago when we first began to consider the notion of pensions. And RRSPs are not a one-size-fits-all solution.

Number three: Clarify pension surplus rules and provide a dispute resolution process to allow members, retirees and sponsors to reach agreements on how surpluses should be allocated on winding up a pension. As the name suggests, it does come to pass that an organization will fail, merge or whatever, and there’s a group of people who say, “This is my pension plan here. How do we wind up the pension plan so that I’m not left in the cold and somebody doesn’t simply abscond with the funds that are supposed to pay my pension in retirement into which, in good faith, I paid during my working life?”

Number four: Provide a more sustainable pension benefits guarantee fund by implementing a strategy to build reserves, increase revenues, limit current exposure and reduce risk to taxpayers in the future. Well, as the name suggests, the pension benefits guarantee fund is one

that’s administered by the province of Ontario—I believe we’re the only province that has such a pension benefits guarantee fund—and the pension benefits guarantee fund says to pensioners in the province of Ontario, “If something unforeseen should happen and your pension fund manager has invested badly, your equity has dried up, your company has gone out of business, the pension benefits guarantee fund will guarantee your pension payouts up to a certain limit.” So it basically says that there’s an insurance policy on your pension, and it’s limited to the amount in the pension benefits guarantee fund, and the maximum payouts.

And finally: Further strengthen regulatory oversight and improve plan administration, which is self-explanatory. As pensions become broader, more diverse, more complex, and as there are more flavours of pensions than there are now and with more people coming to be eligible to draw pensions, we certainly need to clarify these notions of regulatory oversight so that we can watch you and make sure that something doesn’t go wrong and plan administration which is good governance; in essence, quality assurance at the regulatory end and quality control at the governance end.

These are actually the very simple objectives, five objectives of what the province of Ontario is trying to do with this particular resolution. I’m going to go into a little bit of detail on it. One of the first things that people say when they sit down and start reading about pension plans is, “Frankly, I don’t understand it” or “I can’t stay interested in it,” and, honestly, who can blame you? Because often a lot of these things are written in language that in and of itself is a wonderful, powerful non-prescription sedative.

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Let’s take it from the top and talk about the two fundamental types of pensions. There are defined benefit plans. A defined benefit plan means that however long you may have served in your job and contributed to your pension, when you retire, your benefits are defined. Most people look at this and say, “Hey, that’s what I want. I only want to work a couple of years and I want to draw a defined benefit plan for the next 35 years.”

Interjection: Teachers have that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Many types of employees do have such a defined benefit plan. They’re quite common in the public sector where, very frankly, a lot of times the defined benefit plan is a blend of current taxation and the assets in the plan itself. It’s been pointed out that teachers have such a plan, and the teachers’ pension plan is probably one of the best-administered pension plans in the country, if not in the world. If there’s anything of significance in Ontario that the teachers’ pension plan doesn’t own, it’s because the government of Ontario has probably not chosen to sell it.

One of the challenges facing many pension fund administrators in our country, and certainly in our province, is that they have a big pot of money which they’ve got to invest and earn a good return, and they’re often looking to say, “What assets are available for me to buy, admin-

ister or participate in, in the equity end, so that we can deliver better-than-average returns and in so doing, pay the benefits to our pension plan members?" That's sort of a side digression, but it's one of the challenges for governments of all stripes, which is to make sure that your pension plans are actually able to invest in assets that are at home, and they don't have to go abroad to invest their money in order to provide benefits at home.

Defined benefit plans come in a number of different flavours. There are what are called flat-dollar plans, which provide a fixed amount of retirement benefits based upon each year of service, and the benefit rate just reflects the current economic situation. So, in other words, you'll get this amount of money from your pension plan regardless of the circumstances.

Another are career-average pay plans which provide retirement benefits each year based upon the pay for that particular year. Again, these plans don't often fully reflect the economic situation at retirement. However, the plans usually get career-average updates at regular intervals. So in terms of defined benefit plans, that's another option.

The final one is final-average pay plans, which represent the majority of non-union plans. Each year the participant earns retirement benefits which reflect pay very close to what you were getting at retirement.

The other type of plan is the defined contribution plan. A defined contribution plan provides a definite amount of contribution into each individual's retirement account each year. Most times, this is a blend of contributions from the individual and from the employer. This pooled money accumulates investment returns, be they equity returns or interest or a blend of both. It's usually invested by a fund manager and well-diversified so that one bad investment doesn't take the entire pension plan down. This account accumulates with your contribution and with the funds' investments each year, and on retirement the accumulated fund is used to provide lifetime pension retirement income to the participant.

In Canada, for example, the typical type of defined contribution plans include money-purchased pension plans, deferred profit-sharing plans, registered retirement savings plans—which are the ones most people are familiar with—locked-in retirement accounts and registered retirement income funds. That's probably a lot more than a lot of people ever knew about the pension plan, which, in the end, you may be drawing upon for your own retirement in a lot of years, a few years, or imminently.

Many employers like these arrangements because their obligation is only to contribute into the individual account each year, so how the account grows depends on who's administering it. You can have, for example, as some of us do, a self-administered RRSP, or your bank, your financial institution, your employer or your life insurance company can administer the RRSP fund for you. So from the vantage point of the employer, the cost is then easier to control.

In fact, sometimes for an employee, they also figure that the greater degree of control gives them the oppor-

tunity to maximize their own retirement benefits, and should the fund or the retirement plan do very, very well, it would allow an employee, for example, who happens to be an astute trader to say, "Okay, I am where I need to be. I'm going to retire earlier than my planned 60, 66, 70, 62"—whatever your magic age is. If you've been a successful investor, you might say, "I'm going to take my retirement from the workforce at such-and-such an age"—in your 40s, in your 50s, in your early 60s, whatever is the case.

So there are some strengths and weaknesses with each particular type of plan, and which one is better for you depends very largely on your circumstances with your employment and your own personal preferences. A lot of people say, "Well, I would like to have the security of a defined benefit plan into which I pay a modest amount and am able to collect pretty much for the rest of my life."

One of the risks in looking at the type of legislation that Ontario is contemplating can come from some of the countries that have a public unfunded pension plan. For example, in Chile, they have a means-tested universal pension that provides a declining supplement to low-income pensioners. It's financed from general tax revenues and also from a sovereign fund. In Denmark, they have a universal pension plan financed from general tax revenues. It exists to supplement low-income pensioners, and both benefits are subject to clawbacks, depending upon your particular income level. In Sweden, they have a contributory public scheme that operates as a notional defined contribution plan, whatever that means. It provides a minimum pension guarantee, and it, too, is administered by the state. In Switzerland, they have a contributory defined benefit plan which is subject to very tight maximum and minimum limits, and it's partly financed from general tax revenues.

So in the course of this debate, we're going to be considering many different types and models of pension plans, but it's worth looking at the experience worldwide, and it's also worth considering the amount to which either the individual or the company is expected to carry the load and the degree to which general tax revenues are expected to carry the load.

To the degree that this House comes up with an acceptable, fair, equitable and economic plan will determine our success in this legislation. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to address this issue. It's an issue that I find many, many people, including myself, have difficulty either getting their head around or have difficulty perhaps getting interested in. Or perhaps—and I think of, for example, a Nortel pensioner who finds themselves in the unfortunate position that they and their family have to become cognizant of what's going on here, something that they never really had to think about. They worked through their career, a career based on trust that they had a

defined benefit pension arrangement, and then, in spite of the fact they worked very hard—and I know my office has spoken with people, for example, who worked with Nortel and came to find out that everything looked great and that a defined benefit guaranteed these kinds of stipends on a regular basis when they retired; however, the money had run out.

We know that there has been considerable pressure on this government to review that particular situation. We know there was a by-election in Ottawa where essentially, in the middle of that by-election, as I recall, this government made a promise—and I'm always concerned when we hear of this government making a promise—to offer relief to Nortel pensioners through the pension benefits guarantee fund. We know of that fund through the somewhat up-and-down history with respect to our steel industry. Money has been transferred, as I understand—I hope this money has been transferred and I hope all of us are in a position to explain to the Nortel people that perhaps they can sleep a little easier in the evening.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand to comment on the member from Mississauga–Streetsville. He spoke for 20 minutes quite eloquently and he gave, I think, a pretty good, almost professorial account of pension plans and what is happening around the world.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: The comment over here was that that would be Professor Bob. That is not my comment, Mr. Speaker.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville obviously has done a fair amount of research on this particular topic. He spoke wisely, but at the end of all of it, for the 20 minutes, I was unsure—perhaps he can explain to the Legislature when he gets his two minutes—precisely where he thinks this government is going on all of those issues, because the plans that he has outlined from Sweden, the plans of other nations, the differences between defined benefit and defined contribution plans, I don't really see in this particular bill.

Although I welcome the research that he has done, it did not leave me any the wiser in the end precisely where the government is going on this bill or whether or not he, as a member of the government party, thinks that they are going in the right direction or in a timely fashion to the right direction. So I would ask him, in his two-minute response, if he would deal with that so that we might be better educated, not necessarily on all the pension plans that are involved, but precisely where this government intends to go. As some members have already said, it is but a very modest step. We're trying to figure out how modest that modest step is.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: All through the evening I've been listening carefully to the comments about Bill 120, and I have to say, to a person, they've been measured and

focused on ensuring that we get the message from all sides of the House that pension reform indeed is supported, and that it's understood.

Over the 20 years since it's been reformed, these are several steps that are being proposed. The first phase was already implemented and the report that has been giving us some of the reasons why we're moving in this direction is playing into that, for us to take that analytical view. The member from Mississauga–Streetsville has been providing us with some of that background information, quite talentedly as well.

I think what we also have to recognize and support—I think it's already been said by everybody here, as well, with compliments to them—is that this isn't the end of pension reform and that there are some very difficult roads ahead that we have to get a handle on. People have referenced the senior citizen wave that's coming through that needs to be evaluated, and that, too, will be done. The government has already indicated that it plans to move forward in those kinds of areas. That will require even more work, more research, more study and more recommendations to come out on how that can improve.

I compliment all the members here up to the point where we've discussed an acknowledgment that pension reform is necessary. The member from Mississauga–Streetsville kind of captures that spirit in his regular way, because he does his homework on these issues and he does a good job of that.

In my last remaining seconds—I think I will probably be ruled out of order; if it happens, I will accept that—I want to say congratulations to all of those people during the municipal elections who have put their names forward in the riding of Brant, and I wish them all the best.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That was out of order.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: In which case, I'd like to also congratulate all the municipal politicians in Parry Sound–Muskoka, where there are some 26 municipalities and a lot of interesting races. I congratulate everyone for putting their names forward.

Back to the business of the day, I wanted to comment briefly on the speech on Bill 120, the pension bill, made by the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

This pension bill is about strengthening the solvency rules. That's one of the things it's intending to do, and I think it is a small step.

For those people who do have defined benefit pension plans, particularly, and are counting on those defined pension plans and are paying into them over a long time period, the government has a responsibility to set the rules so that the plans are solvent and so people can count on them in their retirement.

A recent report that just came out last week showed that, on average, Canadian pension plans at this point are funded to about 87 cents on the dollar, so if they wrapped up today, you'd actually only get 87 cents for each dollar

you should get. That's obviously not an appropriate situation.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville was talking about various other systems around the world. We do have some basic retirement income security in Canada that serves low-income earners well—that's the CPP, the GIS, and OAS, old-age security—but beyond that, you're relying on either your own RRSP or other plans. I note that in yesterday's *Globe*, in talking about the recent negotiations between the federal and provincial governments, there appeared to be broad agreement on the idea of regulating the private sector to create a new lower-cost pension option for workers who do not have a pension, to be used by small business as a way of offering pensions to employees. I think that's an idea that needs to be explored.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: I want to thank those who provided me comments.

To the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, I'd say that if we get this right, then the type of corporate pension failure like Nortel should be far, far less likely to happen in the future. The key thing to remember about these proposed reforms is that, if passed, the measures in this bill are going to allow the pensions to keep money in the fund and then watch it, because governance and proper plan administration is something that, over the years, we haven't provided the proper legislative framework for. That's one of the things that this bill is there to do: to ensure that the custodians of people's life savings and their retirement income have to manage them in a prudent, responsible and sensible manner.

To the member for Beaches–East York, I thank him for his comment on my “professorial” tone; I think he used those words. Perhaps he should have attended my lectures when I taught at Ryerson University. We need to strengthen the existing funding rules, and that's timely and that's essential.

I'm just going to go back to one of the things that I did mention in my 20 minutes, and I'm just going to take one particular point, which is to clarify pension surplus rules and to provide a dispute resolution to allow members, retirees and sponsors to agree on what should happen when a pension plan is wound up.

Another thing that we're going to have to deal with in this legislation is contribution holidays. I touched on that, and some of the other speakers have touched on that, but that's the real meat in the sandwich and that's the part that this particular piece of legislation will, in the end, be judged on.

To the member for Brant, I very much agree with his comment that people are watching us and they want us to work together as legislators, to speak and to act responsibly.

To my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, we tend to agree on a lot of things, and this particular measure sounds like another one of them.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: I know that we are probably zeroing in on the last few minutes of debate this evening, but I do want to participate in my more lengthy option when it comes to talking about Bill 120.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville put me on the right track; the member from Peterborough and the member from Thornhill, who had some comments about pension reform—I respect what he was saying regarding the way in which we have to continue the debate on what has happened, what is happening and what's going to happen.

One of the biggest things I want to start to focus on is, “Where to from here?” when we've introduced previous legislation and announced clearly that this would be phased. We're now on phase two, and I know there's a phase three that has already been announced that we're going to work towards. I personally will not be surprised to hear that there's going to be a phase four and maybe even a phase five, inasmuch as the debate has opened up our eyes to an issue that a lot of people over the decades have not been paying attention to, and that means successive governments. It doesn't mean one of the easy hits that I've talked to in the past about the partisan issue; this is about all of us wanting to make sure that the pension reform that we are engaged in—our discussion today and in the next little while—is based on trying to plot that path that we can get to, which is to have more people in a more secure situation in their senior years concerning pensions. That requires us to have an understanding of what the broad package is all about.

1800

Let's take a look at Bill 120, but before that, I'll go back a little bit into what the reforms before Bill 236 were, introduced in the province in 2009. The pension rules had hardly ever been touched in two decades. So, within a 20-year period, very little work, if not a little tinkering, was going on before 2009. I can almost guarantee—I don't have it factually—that there were individuals who were sounding an alarm bell because that's their job or that's their profession or that's where they gained their knowledge of financial security. Pensions is one of them.

What we are now dealing with is Bill 120, which is the next phase to Bill 236. The second stage of our reform would address almost 40 recommendations from the Expert Commission on Pensions. Our reforms will have responded to, with phase one and now phase two, two thirds of the 142 recommendations in that report. What we've done is, we've actually put an action to a report.

I do look over at the clock, Speaker, and I do recognize the power of the Chair, and because the power of the Chair is so strong and so great, I don't want to be ruled out of order for thanking my people in the municipal election, so how about if I sit down and allow you to do your next ruling?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That would be just fine, thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

POVERTY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches–East York has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question yesterday to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

The member for Beaches–East York, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Michael Prue: I stood in this House yesterday and I asked a question of the Acting Premier, and the Acting Premier saw fit to pass this question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

The question that was asked was a specific one. I asked questions related to the poor, who are worried that the government's poverty strategy has stalled. Specifically, I asked about a welfare review, an affordable housing strategy and a replacement of the special diet allowance.

Specifically, for the edification of all, the social assistance review was commenced—on 4 December 2008, the Ontario government released its poverty reduction strategy. The strategy made a commitment to “undertake a review of social assistance with a goal of removing barriers and increasing opportunities.” That was some two years ago.

On June 14, 2010, the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council released its report, in which it called for bold vision. The government, although they took that report, has not issued an official response to date.

My question was: What is the government doing on that issue?

The second one was related to the affordable housing strategy. Again, during the 2007 election, the Liberal Party promised, if re-elected, to create a long-term strategy for affordable housing. On June 3, 2009, the then Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Jim Watson, announced the launch of consultations on the strategy. Those consultations, in effect, must have taken place.

In February 2010, the new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Jim Bradley, promised to release the strategy by June 21, 2010. In June, the Ontario government delayed release of the strategy until sometime in the fall of 2010.

Again, my question to the minister is: What are they doing on this file?

The third question related to the special diet replacement. On March 25, 2010, during the budget, it was announced that the special diet allowance would be cancelled and that something else would be substituted in its place. On March 30, 2010, the Minister of Community

and Social Services said that they would design the replacement program “over the next few months,” to quote her exactly. The Toronto Star, that great organ of Liberal policy, indicated in August that the replacement program would be announced in September.

Again, my question on all three of these was the sane and sensible one: What is the government doing on these files and when is it going to decide what it is doing and tell the people of Ontario? If they can't give this House a commitment to proceed, they can at least give us the time frame for the actions that they are contemplating, which have been put off and off and off over a number of years.

Instead of getting an answer, I was treated to what I considered to be a diatribe of government inaction—a whole bunch of stuff, none of which was related to those three files. I was given comments on kindergarten for children. I was given comments on how much money the minimum wage had gone up. I was challenged about the times when I was in government—I have never been in government—and putting the minister's record against mine. I have no record of having been a minister.

I asked three sane and sensible questions, and all I got was a diatribe. The last time I asked this same minister similar questions, I got the same diatribe; no answers to sane and sensible questions.

So I ask them here again, and I'm awaiting another diatribe because I don't expect actual answers. These are three programs the government has announced. When is the social assistance review to be completed and reported to the House, as promised as far back as 2008? When is the affordable housing strategy that was promised in 2007, 2009 and 2010 to be released to this House? When is the special diet replacement going to be brought before this House that was talked about on March 25, promised again by the minister's colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services on March 30, and which has been indicated in the press to have been due to be released in early September? We are now closing on the end of October. None of these have been answered. My question still stands; I hope the minister will answer it tonight.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Minister of Children and Youth Services and the minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I stand proudly as the minister responsible for the poverty reduction strategy, because, after all, that is what the question was about. It was about the poverty reduction strategy.

I'll read the question that the member opposite posed: “Has poverty reduction fallen off the government's radar?”

Absolutely not. I'll take the opportunity here tonight to remind the member opposite with respect to the government's poverty reduction strategy and how we continue to make progress on that plan.

Ontario has the country's most ambitious and aggressive poverty reduction strategy, with a target of reducing child poverty by 25% within five years. It was our government that enshrined our targets in legislation and

made poverty reduction a commitment beyond those five years.

While the member opposite purports to speak on behalf of low-income Ontarians, I'm often left to wonder whether this is just political gamesmanship on his part. We have clearly continued on the poverty reduction strategy, and the initiatives that we have undertaken over the first two years of this five-year strategy have significantly impacted in a very positive way the lives of Ontarians. Despite a deep recession, we have made progress in the last two years and especially in the last six years.

Not only has it not fallen off the radar, my colleagues and I are breaking down silos and working together in ways never seen before to further the poverty reduction agenda. In fact, at least six of my ministerial colleagues have announced poverty reduction initiatives in the last six months.

This past September, 35,000 four- and five-year-olds started full-day kindergarten in nearly 600 schools across the province. I'll quote Dr. Charles Pascal, who says, "Establishing a strong foundation in the early years and building on it is the single most powerful factor in Ontario's social and economic future." If educating the workforce of tomorrow and making sure that every child has the education that they deserve to lift themselves and their families out of a life of poverty isn't poverty reduction, I'm not sure that the member opposite is speaking to his community and understands the work that we're doing to lift children and their families out of poverty. This is one of the most important things we can give to every child: an opportunity to succeed.

In September, another school year began with over 500,000 kids receiving healthy breakfasts and snacks so they're ready to learn. That's part of our student nutrition program and part of the poverty reduction strategy.

Just a few weeks ago, I visited the LAMP Community Centre in Etobicoke and launched the Healthy Smiles program. Were the member opposite on the side of Ontario families, he'd understand the incredible benefit

of such a program for children and families living in poverty. The Healthy Smiles program is going to help 130,000 kids in Ontario. That's 130,000 kids who previously did not have access to preventative dental care. They had to wait until their teeth were hurting before they could get help. Now we have 130,000 more reasons to smile.

In March of this year, we raised the minimum wage to \$10.25. Unfortunately, the party opposite voted against that initiative that will help lift families out of poverty.

Those are just some of the things that we've done in the last six months.

I don't want to forget the real Ontarians who are also benefiting today and those who will benefit tomorrow from our investments. Access to affordable quality child care is critical to helping families move out of poverty, and that's why we stepped in and filled the federal funding gap with a permanent investment of \$63.5 million. We saved 8,500 child care spaces and also 1,000 child care jobs.

We increased the Ontario child benefit to \$1,100 per child per year two years ahead of schedule. About 530,000 families are now receiving it, and the party opposite voted against that.

We've undertaken comprehensive tax reform to lift families off the tax rolls. This strategy belongs to the people in the province whose experience has shaped it and whose lives are improved by it.

We have a lot more work to do on the poverty reduction strategy, and we look forward to doing that work. We're helping real Ontario families in a meaningful way. On this side of the House, poverty reduction is all about results; it's all about having a plan and achieving those results. It's not about politics. The member is running out of time to be part of the solution.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, October 27, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1813.

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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
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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
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