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des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 22 February 2011

Mardi 22 février 2011

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 22 February 2011

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 22 février 2011

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG COMMUNITIES THROUGH
AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACT, 2011
LOI DE 2011 FAVORISANT
DES COLLECTIVITÉS FORTES
GRÂCE AU LOGEMENT ABORDABLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 9, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 140, An Act to enact the Housing Services Act, 2011, repeal the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000 and make complementary and other amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 140, Loi édictant la Loi de 2011 sur les services de logement, abrogeant la Loi de 2000 sur la réforme du logement social et apportant des modifications corrélatives et autres à d'autres lois.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour and a privilege to start off with an hour lead on housing in this new session. I want to welcome everyone back from the break, which I know for many members of provincial Parliament wasn't a break, so to speak, but was a chance to get back to our constituencies.

I also want to welcome back the clerks and the staff here at Queen's Park, and the new pages. I think they deserve a round of applause for all their hard work. Welcome back, everyone. I also want to compliment the Speaker on his new beard; it goes very well with the hat.

Certainly, I think all of Ontario hopes that this last session of this presently constituted government actually affords some change, a great deal of hard work and progress in the province of Ontario. I know that when speaking to my constituents over the break, one of the things that they find very frustrating is the level of rancour in the House. What they would love to see is in fact all sides of the House working together to actually, in this case, provide housing for Ontarians. We have a very dismal housing reality in this province, and certainly it's incumbent upon us all to work together to provide more housing to those in need in Ontario.

I know that often, the way that we conduct business in political parties in Ontario, one would think that we all want a one-party state, but I hope I speak for everyone in saying that's the furthest from our desires. Again, hopefully in the last few weeks remaining to us some significant changes are made.

I want to start off talking about housing by talking about an incident that really galvanized my thoughts about the necessity for housing in this province. When I was still in the ministry, actively in the pulpit and in a church, Emmanuel Howard Park, we woke up one day to a trailer in our parking lot. It had no right to be there, so we went over and knocked on the window, and discovered that inside was a young girl and her father who were living in the trailer. They asked if there was any possibility that they could park their trailer in the parking lot of the church because otherwise they would have to pay for parking somewhere else. Not only could they not afford to pay for parking, it was very clear that they couldn't afford to pay for housing.

This young girl was about nine years old at the time; she was attending school in our area. Of course, without a moment's hesitation, the board of the church said, "Let them stay," and proceeded to try to work with them to find them permanent housing, to no avail.

That was years ago, but that was very clearly an insight into what was going on. The little girl attended school every day and went back to live in the trailer every night. She looked like any other child in school. I'm sure her teachers had absolutely no idea of where she actually spent her nights. Her father was desperately looking for a job. Of course, it's almost impossible to find a job if you don't have a residence—and, in those days, if you didn't have a phone as well. We as a church provided him with a cellphone.

Then, many months later, after the school year was up, we all went to church one day to find that the trailer was gone. Who knows what happened to that little girl, and who knows if that family ever found housing? Such is the state of those who are in need in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world, and that continues to this day.

Before us on the table today is government Bill 140. This is a long-awaited bill; it was supposed to have been delivered in the spring. Finally, months and months later, it was delivered to this House last November. Certainly it was the result of much consultation with housing activists and providers across the province of Ontario. They greeted this with some excitement, only to open the bill and then witness what they didn't want to see, which was that there was very, very little done.

In fact, in this bill—and I'll repeat this many times, because this is a critical and central point—there is not one new unit of affordable housing provided. In this bill there is not one new dollar of rent supplements provided. In this bill there is not one new unit of affordable housing built, and in this bill there is no mention of inclusionary zoning whatsoever, which, if we remember, was passed in second reading by this House—my bill, the New Democrats' bill—and was supported by a vast majority of municipalities across the province, because inclusionary zoning doesn't cost one tax dollar. All that my bill allowed was that municipalities could step up to the plate and enact legislation, if they so desired, to have inclusionary zoning. That decision would not then be immediately appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board, which is what would happen right now.

So here we have a bill purportedly responding to the lack of affordable housing in this province and, in fact, delivering nothing: not one new unit, not one new dollar, not one new significant change that would allow for one new unit or one new dollar into affordable housing.

A few grim statistics—let's start with those, to show how bad the situation is in Ontario for affordable housing activists. First of all, 1.3 million Ontarians are precariously housed; that is, 1.3 million Ontarians pay more than 30% of their income on housing. One hundred and twenty thousand Ontario families live in overcrowded housing. Eighty thousand Ontarians live in substandard housing that requires major repairs. I wonder if that little girl who was living in our church parking lot would be included in that number. One hundred and forty thousand and counting—it's now up to around 142,000—households are on affordable housing waiting lists. This is a number, by the way, which increased by 10% in one year, from 2009 to 2010—10% in one year. And by the way, when you say “waiting,” we are talking about waits that now exceed 10 years on average, so many people literally die on affordable housing waiting lists.

Housing insecurity is rising, of course, because energy costs have gone up more than 50% in the last decade, and of course, as will be a major topic of this session in this House, we know that energy prices are probably going to go up another 50%. Again, that attacks most those who can afford it least.

The incomes of tenants—just generally, incomes have stagnated or decreased. A wonderful study by David Hulchanski at the University of Toronto looked at the city, the GTA, in terms of how the decline of the middle class has affected neighbourhoods. You virtually see it there, in not so black and white. I think it's brown and green. You see the areas of poverty increasing and moving to the suburbs. You see the areas of wealth increasing and moving to the interior of the city and you see the middle class emptying out. That's the tale of our city. That's the tale of Ontario, as well.

0910

Half of all renters in Ontario pay more than 50% of their income on rent, and more than half of all renters, as you can imagine—so say the experts—cannot then afford

to pay for other necessities. They're scrimping on food or they're scrimping on necessary school items because so much of their income is going to rent. We know this not only because we see these horrendous statistics, but because we go out into our ridings and we meet with folk who are in exactly that predicament. Of course, it's not an even predicament either. It doesn't affect all Ontarians the same. It affects women far more, children far more; it affects people of colour far more and new immigrants and refugees far more. We know, again, that like the chicken and the egg, lack of housing produces poverty and poverty produces lack of housing etc.

We in the New Democratic Party have responded to this. We've responded with several key bills and motions that are before this House. We've responded, for one, with something that is, one would think, a no-brainer: that housing is a human right. This is a United Nations statement. This is a United Nations resolution that simply says that housing is a human right. I proposed this in a motion before this House, certainly to no acceptance on the other side. One has to raise one's eyebrows: Is the government then saying that housing isn't a human right? I would love to hear from members opposite on this very issue. Is housing not a human right or is it? Is this House in accord with the United Nations recommendations or isn't it? If housing is a human right, and if we pass such a motion as a House, then presumably those who are ill-housed, underhoused or not housed at all could then have recourse to force this government into doing what this government should be doing, and that is providing housing as a human right.

We also put on the table a motion to build 10,000 new units of housing a year. This is what all housing activists are asking across the province of Ontario. This very government, in 2003, promised 20,000 new-build units of affordable housing in their first four years. You'll see, as I continue to speak, how of course that promise has not been upheld. In fact, what's affordable and what's not affordable is part of the problem in definitions, because if you are on Ontario disability, are earning around \$1,000 a month and should be paying \$250 to \$300 on rent, according to anti-poverty activists and in fact economists generally, you're not going to find housing in the province of Ontario. To make matters worse, imagine if you're an Ontario Works recipient and you're earning just over \$500 a month. As one Ontario Works recipient said just recently to an interfaith gathering on the topic of poverty and housing, “What does the government expect me to do—steal?” Imagine making \$500 a month and trying to live in the city of Toronto. I mean, we know what that life looks like. It looks like homelessness. It looks like food banks. It certainly doesn't look like anybody who can afford anything in the way of housing.

We also brought forward—and, as I mentioned, it passed second reading, so presumably there was support on all sides—inclusionary zoning. My bill was a very tepid one, quite frankly. It simply said, “Let's get out of the way of inclusionary zoning so that municipalities across the province of Ontario, if they so choose, could

bring in inclusionary zoning.” Because inclusionary zoning is in jurisdictions around the world—and even in Canada, in Vancouver—we know that inclusionary zoning—which is, for those who are new to the term, requiring that developers, for example, of over 50 units set aside as rent-to-own or affordable rental units at least 10% of those units. In some jurisdictions it goes up to 25% of those units. It doesn’t cost a tax dollar. In fact, it produces wealth in communities. In jurisdictions where it’s put into place, like Boston, you see at least 1,000 new units of housing a year being produced.

We, by very, very rough calculations, figured that if inclusionary zoning was brought in across Ontario at the conservative rate of 10%, we would produce—this is based on the number of new units that have been developed in the province of Ontario in any given year in the last 10 years—about 12,000 new units of housing a year. That’s not going to be the entire answer for the 140,000-plus families waiting for affordable housing, but it certainly will be a significant part of the answer, and again, a significant part of the answer without costing a tax dollar.

Even in conversations with developers—when times are tough, this would actually assist developers. Certainly municipalities have been very creative in other jurisdictions when they’ve brought in inclusionary zoning; for example, if they’ve done bylaw changes allowing an extra floor in a building that could be the affordable housing floor etc. There are lots of creative ways of using inclusionary zoning to produce affordable housing at no cost to taxpayers. Yet even though they said they supported this bill, when it came time to introduce their housing bill, government Bill 140, there is not a mention of inclusionary zoning in it, despite this uniformly being a call from all housing activists across Ontario.

We’ve also introduced a bill on tenants’ rights and landlord licensing. Quite frankly, I’ve spent some of my time during this break—and I will be spending some time this afternoon—going to visit my low-income tenants about the landlord licensing idea. I have yet to find one tenant who objects to it.

What is landlord licensing? Landlord licensing just simply says that where city work orders are held against a building—for example, in one of my buildings, an eight-storey building, there was one elevator out of order for three months, and there were seniors living on the eighth floor. Of course there were work orders against this building. Was the landlord in compliance? Absolutely not. Landlord licensing would force bad landlords into compliance for work orders simply by refusing to renew their licence to rent to new tenants if they didn’t comply. As I’ve argued in this House before, this is one of the only ways of forcing—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me. Sorry to interrupt you. I just want to remind members that we have one person speaking and the conversations should be taken outside.

Please continue.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I’ve argued in this House before that this is one of the only ways we have of really

assuring ourselves that landlords are going to deal with that tricky and pesky problem of bedbugs. When I go to see tenants in some of the low-income, privately held housing stock in my riding, they complain of bedbugs, and they complain that they’ve tried to clean up their units, but it’s impossible because it comes in from somewhere else. Even the good landlords who have taken good care of their properties complain about this, because they say that the building next door, where the landlord hasn’t complied with work orders—the bedbugs infect their properties from next door. So again, we have to have some way, as the province, of forcing people to do necessary work. Bedbugs is a classic instance of a problem that’s not going to stay within a building. If one bad landlord exists, that affects and infects everyone.

Again, landlord licensing is a simple idea, a self-funding idea, that would allow the province to insist on compliance with work orders, something that’s not happening now across Ontario. Of course it’s not happening in the wealthy areas or luxury apartments; it’s happening in the low-income tenanted areas, of which I have many in my riding.

Also, every housing activist—for years now, quite frankly, and certainly in consultation with the government—put forward five essentials for any adequate housing policy. I’m going to go over them in a bit of detail because they’re critical, and I’m going to compare what the housing activists have asked for and then contrast what they’ve asked for with what they’ve received in Bill 140.

Test number one—all the housing activists have asked for this:

“Bold targets and sustained funding

“A long-term affordable housing strategy must ensure an adequate supply of quality, affordable housing for Ontarians, supported by multi-year financial commitments.” The Ontario government should commit to funding a housing program—again, here are those 10,000 new units of universally accessible, affordable non-profit and co-op housing units for 10 years.

By the way, if we want to compare ourselves to somebody who’s doing it right, my husband and I, a few years back, were in Sweden. Sweden, a country much smaller than Ontario—there are nine million people in Sweden; we have about 13 million in Ontario—produced 100,000 new units of affordable housing a year. They called it their million-home program, and it was a 10-year program. Needless to say, they don’t have an affordable housing crisis in Sweden the way we do here. And Sweden isn’t alone in providing that. Many jurisdictions do better than we do; in fact, we have one of the worst records provincially and one of the worst records internationally. Also, provide funding so that at least 50% of these units can provide rent-g geared-to-income assistance.

0920

What’s in this announcement, with government Bill 140? As I said, not one new dollar; as they point out, “no new funding”—not one new unit—“no multi-year commitment, no innovative financing options, no strength-

ening of development/technical capacity of the sector” to provide housing. These are the housing activists themselves that supposedly this government consulted with.

“Test two: A solid measuring stick

“An effective housing strategy requires a solid foundation of accurate evidence about the scale of housing insecurity and homelessness in Ontario and a clear way to measure progress. Housing measures must track progress on whether actions taken under the long-term affordable housing strategy are systematically reducing the number of households”—but we know that’s not so. We know they’re not reducing the number of households on affordable housing lists. The empirical data is unequivocal on that point. In fact, it went up 10% in one year. It’s going up every year and the wait is getting longer—“and addressing the housing affordability problem through consistent annual reductions in the percentage of Ontario tenants spending 30% or more of income on housing.” We know it’s going directly in the opposite direction, that more and more tenants are spending more and more of their income on rental. By the way, coupled with that—because, remember, there was a time in Canada where the middle class dream was to own your own home—is the complete lack of affordability in our major centres for young couples and young families who try to ever even dream of owning a home.

I often tell the story, just by contrast, that I grew up in a Toronto and an Ontario where on one salary you could own a home and pay it off in your lifetime, a car in the driveway and, for a lucky few, a cottage as well. Now it takes two incomes, and even then in the city of Toronto you’re barely able to afford an apartment. Certainly you’re going to have to have two incomes to afford a car, and only the wealthy can afford another rural property or cottage. That is the change in one lifetime in the province of Ontario, and it’s getting worse. We’re on a downward descent. Our children will be worse off than us, and if we don’t stem the tide, our grandchildren even worse off than they are.

Another issue that this policy does not address is improving access to suitable and adequate affordable housing for members of marginalized groups, including aboriginal people, communities of colour, people with disabilities and mental health issues, lone mothers and people living in rural and northern communities.

Here is what is in the bill, according to housing activists: The “Ontario housing measure only covers families with children—the rest of Ontarians” are completely left out. That’s a very sad reality, because in my riding, and I’m sure this is replicated across the province, the greatest demand for housing, as I’ve mentioned before, is often for those on Ontario disability and those with mental health and addiction issues. Often those are the people hardest and most expensive to house in supportive housing, because there’s virtually no supportive housing, and most at risk. Most of our homeless population at any given time will fall into that category. They are homeless for a reason, and they die on our streets. I know that the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee should be commended

for being one of the few groups that actually acknowledges their deaths anymore, that actually remembers them into the community of the living on a regular basis. It used to be considered a disaster in the city of Toronto that we had some 5,000 sleeping on grates at night, and now, again, we’ve come so far—we’ve sunk so far—that we ignore them. We step over them and sometimes don’t even see them anymore. That’s how routine it has come to be in my city that we see somebody sleeping outside in the cold.

A solid measuring stick: Unfortunately, the measuring sticks that we have show that the numbers are trending in all the wrong directions.

Test three, they say, is accountability. “Ontario’s long-term affordable housing strategy needs to be kept on track, and the plan must remain accountable to the people it intends to serve.” Accountability measures should include: annual public reporting on progress; committing to ongoing public consultation; local control of program design and delivery; setting up a residents’ review committee; and appointing a full-time Minister of Housing to ensure that affordable housing is a government priority—we’ve had four Ministers of Housing since I’ve been here, and it never gets better; it only gets worse.

Here’s what housing activists say, again, about this bill. “Promise of annual reports”—yes, it’s there. The province says, however, that municipalities will have to engage the community; it’s not interested in doing that. And it’s saying that the current minister must share housing and municipal affairs responsibilities. So it’s a devaluing of that particular portfolio.

“Test four: Make housing truly affordable and accessible

“All Ontarians should be able to access housing they can afford....”

Again, the United Nations said it best. Why isn’t the reality here?

They suggest introducing a monthly universal housing benefit for low-income Ontarians, expanding the priority list for social housing, funding retrofits, and providing funding for at least 2,000 new supportive housing units.

In terms of supportive housing, I have a couple of stories from my riding, both from serving there as the member of provincial Parliament and as a United Church minister, about the necessity for supportive housing. One’s a sad tale about a young man who suffered from a mental health issue. He lived in Queen’s Park—I’m sorry, not Queen’s Park. We should have more homeless people living in Queen’s Park. Maybe then we’d take the issue seriously. He lived in High Park for many years and was finally found housing—he was on the wait-list for a long, long time—but because of his mental health issues, he was unable to keep his housing. I know that those who provide affordable housing often come up against this intractable problem. Those who have mental health issues—those who are hoarders, for example—who really are a danger to themselves and others, need more than just a box to live in. They need supports. They need social workers. They need someone to make sure that

they successfully live in affordable housing. Those supports aren't there, and those supportive housing units aren't there.

On the plus side, after many, many years of trying, we finally got the Edmond Yu centre built in my riding—and this is kudos to the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre—providing about 35 units of supportive housing where they had 10 before. In fact, it's going to be 45 in total. They're up and running, and I was delighted to finally be at the ribbon-cutting for that, but it took them a decade. As long as I can remember, they have been trying to get the Edmond Yu centre built. For those of you who don't know the story of Edmond Yu, it's a classic tale of the necessity of supportive housing. He was a young man who suffered from mental health issues, who ended up being killed. He was shot by a police officer because he was wielding a hammer on a downtown Toronto street corner. People were genuinely frightened. Here was a young man who had been homeless for so long, who needed supports, who needed a worker, who needed more than just a box to live in. Unfortunately for Edmond, but fortunately for others, the Edmond Yu centre has finally been built—but it took way too long. For 35 new units it took 10 years, with 140,000-plus people waiting. We simply can't go about it in that piecemeal, red-tape-buried way that we have in the past.

Again, where does this bill go short? There's no commitment to the Ontario housing benefit; just a vague promise to explore this and other options. There's no commitment to new funding for supportive housing. The Ontario emergency energy fund is to be rolled into consolidated initiatives, but there's no commitment to new funding; no affordable home ownership options. That's what's in the bill.

To reiterate my main theme, here is a government housing strategy with not one new dollar for affordable housing, not one new unit to be built of affordable housing, not one new dollar in rent-geared-to-income supplements, and no inclusionary zoning to allow the private sector to fill in the gaps—none of the above.

“Test five: Reform housing legislation to build stronger communities

“Key legislation that governs municipal planning, social housing and the private rental market must be reformed to promote growth in affordable housing, better protect the housing rights of tenants and provide flexibility for non-profit and co-operative housing providers.”

0930

I know that out of my office, we're trying to work on a new co-op. It may not even be built in my riding. We've had a bit of a seed grant to do that. We've got people interested. We're looking for the land right now. I fully expect that this will be a multi-year project, to provide, again, perhaps 80 to 100 new units. But with 140,000-plus people waiting on the affordable housing list, how is this piecemeal approach ever going to get us there?

Again, from the housing activists' point of view—and they are legion—here's what they say: Yes, there are some changes to the SHRA on rent rules; those are good.

But there's no promise to amend the Residential Tenancies Act. There's no inclusionary housing commitment, which I've said again, and the promise to expand use of secondary rental units in new and existing developments is all that we have. But again, not one new dollar, not one new unit, not one extra rental supplement—nothing concrete. As one housing activist said, it was like putting up the scaffolding and then walking away from the building site. There's no house there.

One aspect of this, of course—and I imagine that those who are listening and watching this first day of the session of the Ontario Parliament in action will wonder, “Well, perhaps the reason this government hasn't been more forthcoming in building rental units”—in fact, not at all; not one new rent-geared-to-income suite, no inclusionary zoning, nothing of concrete status in this new bill—“is that they don't have any money.” We have to admit, we in the opposition—and the government side, too—that that's partly true. This government doesn't have any money. This government's working deficit, \$18.5 billion or so, is more than all the other provinces' combined. They've actually doubled our structural debt in the seven years they've been in office. That's not a pretty picture.

But here's the reality of the economy of housing: It costs literally more dollars and cents to keep someone underhoused or homeless than it does to provide housing for them. Here I absolutely give kudos to those who have done these studies. There are now studies done in every major urban centre across North America. A recent one in Vancouver showed the highest cost yet, but let's take the one that is about seven years old from New York city that showed that it cost about \$55,000 a year to keep someone homeless.

That's kind of counterintuitive, until you start thinking about it. Because to keep someone homeless, you need extra money into the justice system, into emergency health care and, of course, rehab systems. You need shelters. You need more social workers. The actual cost of keeping someone homeless is more than it would cost to put someone into a hotel every night, just about. That's the stupidity of the current action plan of this government, which is non-action: it's costing more. Not just in the long run, where it could be argued it costs way more, because again, we're talking about poverty generation to generation and the cost of that, but it costs more in the short term.

I remember that one of my first committee moments here in this House was when Mr. Gerretsen was the housing minister. It was on government finances, and we got to ask questions about how money was spent and wasn't spent on housing. He admitted in Hansard, on record, that it would cost less to put someone in a motel or a hotel than to keep the current system going.

We have about 5,000 people on the streets of the city, many of whom will die this winter from complications due to homelessness and poverty. This is insanity. Isn't that the statement, that insanity is doing the same things you've always done and expecting different results?

Well, governments—this one included—have for a long time turned their backs on the housing file entirely; done very little, if anything at all; made gestures. And let's face it; this bill is a gesture in the direction of housing. It's a gesture. It has nothing concrete in it. It reduces red tape a little bit. It helps a little bit here and there, tweaks around the edges, but there's not one new unit, not one new dollar, not one new rent supplement in this bill.

As long as governments continue to tread water on the housing file, the cost mounts. The last study that was done on the cost of homelessness and underhousing in Vancouver showed it costs \$75,000 a year to keep somebody homeless—\$75,000 a year to keep someone homeless. This is insanity. This is also cruel. I mean, Scrooge comes to mind, eh? "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" Unfortunately, that is our housing strategy: There are prisons, and that's where a lot of those with mental health and addiction issues who haven't got supportive housing end up. And we all know the cost of keeping someone in prison. Last I heard, it was around the \$60,000 mark. So will we provide more prisons, or will we provide more housing? That's the choice before us, really. We've always opted for the prisons. Sad.

When you hear what housing activists who are in the field, who do nothing but housing, who look at housing issues all the time, have to say about this bill, it's pretty uniform. Here is something from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, and Harvey Cooper, who is the manager of government relations. I'm sure everybody in this House knows Harvey; he has visited us all often enough. "Cooper says that this approach," Bill 140, "fails to recognize that construction of affordable housing has a major stimulative impact and can play a key role in the economic recovery while reducing poverty and providing a valuable public asset for the long term." He goes on, to quote: "We agree with the province that the federal government has a responsibility to continue to support affordable housing as it has done in the past," Cooper says. "But"—a critical "but" here—"in presenting its vision for affordable housing, the Ontario government should look to lead, not follow. Its long-term plan should be grounded in a commitment to funding affordable housing as a core, continuing government program."

Again, those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. If we look at the New Deal, even from the Roosevelt era, how do you respond to economic bad times? Well, this government has responded to economic bad times by giving incredible corporate welfare hand-outs. This government has given \$4.5 billion to corporations, so that we have the lowest corporate tax rate in North America. That's how this government believes a bad economic time should be dealt with. It's the old trickle-down theory, and in fact what's happening is a more gushing-up theory. The poor are getting poorer; the wealthy are getting wealthier. The trickle-down theory we know doesn't work. What works, and we've seen it over and over again in response to bad times, is to build,

build, build. Infrastructure investment, new builds, new housing—that helps. This government isn't doing that.

Probably the best-known housing advocate and housing expert in Ontario is David Hulchanski. David Hulchanski is a professor at the University of Toronto; he turns out amazing work on housing and has done a phenomenal study on, essentially, Poverty By Postal Code—that was the United Way moniker—and he has provided some background to that. Here is what he says in conclusion: "The provincial and municipal governments could implement specific policies to help maintain and promote mixed neighbourhoods. These include"—guess what's first?—"inclusionary zoning, whereby any medium-to-large residential developments must include," he suggests, "15% or 20% rental and affordable units. Also, the province of Ontario could keep its promise to end vacancy decontrol—the right of landlords to charge whatever they wish for a rental unit when a tenant moves," and thereby discourage "the displacement of low-income residents in gentrifying areas." We certainly are seeing this in Parkdale. Certainly, we're seeing this. Certainly, we're noticing gentrification.

It almost sounds like a black joke that those who live in rental accommodation in Parkdale, which used to be one of the most affordable areas in the downtown core, can't afford to buy and can't afford to rent in Parkdale anymore. Down on Jameson, which is where most new immigrants and refugees end up living—because still there are about 10,000 so-called affordable housing units; that is to say, one-bedrooms renting at around the \$900 mark. So you find new immigrants and refugees housed together, many of them who let others in their communities know, and pretty soon you have a whole building, for example, almost full of Tibetans, which we have in south Parkdale. It used to be that's where they'd start, but unfortunately, that's where they're ending up now because they can't afford to move out.

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If they do move out or they can't afford even the \$900 a month, which often happens, and they get evicted eventually, guess what happens to that unit? New appliances go in, a coat of paint gets slapped on, the foyer gets jazzed up and the unit goes from \$900 a month to \$1,500 a month. And guess what? It's not occupied by new immigrants or people of colour or single-headed families anymore. It's now occupied by a whole other group. In fact, we're seeing that happening in those buildings: the gentrification bit by bit of buildings that were built in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and on.

This is a sad day, because it means again that David Hulchanski's study is even more right: that poverty is being moved out to the 905 areas. It's being moved out to the edge of Toronto, and the downtown core isn't for the poor anymore. That's the sad reality, a reality that certainly affects my riding. In our local high school, Parkdale high school, we have 65 mother tongues spoken. And that will change. It will change substantially not only the tenor of my neighbourhood but the tenor of all the downtown core, which we celebrate as being

multicultural. Well, that multiculturalism is based on some affordable housing prices still, and as that affordable housing goes, so goes the multiculturalism. And that's sad. That's sad, and that's happening. It's happening under our eyes.

If anybody doubts my word, I highly recommend *The Three Cities Within Toronto*, which is about income polarization among Toronto's neighbourhoods and is a real landmark study—again, David Hulchanski. That's what he says. He says, "What do we need?" He says we need, first and foremost, inclusionary zoning.

Here's what other groups have to say about Bill 140. The Housing Network of Ontario says: "The Ontario government has proposed some new legislation and administrative procedures that are useful and important, but the essential items for a long-term affordable housing plan—targets, timeline, and, most of all—money—'funding over a multi-year period—are missing.'" This is where I got that quote. "It's like they've put up the scaffolding but then forgot to give the workers the tools that they need to get the job done." That's from perhaps the largest of our housing activists.

We all know ACORN as being an incredible group of people across North America who have worked with low-income tenants as their primary group and primarily advocated for affordable housing. This is what they said about Bill 140: "There was much hope that after more than six months of consultations, over 1,000 written submissions, and a full year of writing, that Premier McGuinty and his administration would provide a bold vision for affordable housing in Ontario.

"They did not. Instead, they opted to package a handful of reforms as a comprehensive housing plan while failing to act on key areas that ACORN members, tenants, housing experts and others had been advocating for."

Again, they say: "There is no commitment to new provincial operating or capital dollars for housing;"—none whatsoever—"no mention of inclusionary zoning enabling legislation even after key members of the provincial government voted in support of an NDP private member's bill on the subject; no housing benefit to address the rising cost of housing among the working poor." A housing benefit is a direct subsidy to low-income tenants to help them pay their rent. That's what ACORN says.

Here's what the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, which comprises 755 member organizations, says about Bill 140: "While the strategy includes a focus on streamlining some administrative aspects of the rent-geared-to-income housing system and increased flexibility for both local communities and tenants, it does not address the critical need for increased investment in new development and the ongoing maintenance of existing properties—key public assets that must be protected for future generations...." However, "the potential of any strategy cannot be fully realized unless it is properly funded.... We would encourage the government to continue providing even limited funding in this current

economic climate and to adopt some of the innovative financing solutions that the community-based housing sector will be proposing."

I mean, sometimes when you hear these housing activists, you detect a hint of pleading now, pleading in their quotes and their write-ups of this bill, because after seven years of coming, weeping almost, to the doors of power here, this is what they get. This is what they get: a little rescinding of the red tape, but not one new housing dollar, not one new housing unit, not one new rent-geared-to-income supplement, and no inclusionary zoning. This is what isn't in this bill, and this is what is critical in any sort of housing policy.

Often what's sad in beginning a political life is that you realize that that great quote is so true: "Politics is the art of the possible." But really, what's possible and what's delivered by this current administration are now even chasms apart. What's possible for this current administration is to actually look at the numbers, to understand that investment in housing pays, that it doesn't cost; to understand that infrastructure investment—new builds, like they originally promised back in 2003—works to help the economy; that giving away money in terms of corporate tax cuts to the largest and most profitable corporations in the province of Ontario doesn't work in creating jobs, in providing housing and in alleviating poverty. That doesn't work, but infrastructure development does. That's what's lacking here.

It's really also not even about partisanship, because I remember—my goodness, I've said it before here: Bill Davis looks like a socialist in comparison to Dalton McGuinty. In Mel Lastman's day we had more housing going on in this province, new-build housing.

We had, in fact, David Crombie—a tiny, perfect Conservative mayor—come to speak to our Parkdale Visioning. We had him come to speak to us about how he ever got the St. Lawrence Market rebuild off the ground, kind of the gold standard for housing of its day. It still is, unfortunately, across North America and sometimes around the world. How do you take these old, often polluted, lands, turn them into a mix of co-ops and affordable market-driven places to live, and make it a wonderful place to live around a landmark like the St. Lawrence Market? This is the gold standard. We had him come to talk to us about how he did that. He gave us some sad news. He said that you have to have governments on your side.

Well, we don't have this government on our side. Otherwise, we would see exactly that kind of redevelopment, and we would see it frequently, because it's what is needed in all areas of Toronto. Otherwise, we will be doomed to David Hulchanski's vision of our future, because it's happening as we speak; that is, a polarized, divided Ontario, where the wealthy live in little gated enclaves, where the poor live in substandard housing—if they live in housing at all, or sleep on grates in our city streets—and where the middle class disappears, empties out, because nobody can afford being middle class anymore. They can't afford the house and

the car anymore. Is that the Ontario we want? I hope not. I really hope not.

It's interesting, I remember a Peter Ustinov quote about the city of Toronto that is sad now to repeat. I think he uttered it in the 1970s, when he was still alive, of course. He said that Toronto is New York designed by the Swiss. Boy, oh, boy. Look at our GTA and look at our province now. Is that what you'd say about where we live now? I don't think so, certainly not in my neighbourhood.

When I grew up in Toronto and my father spoke about food banks and the use of food banks and spoke about people riding the rails in the Depression, I thought, "Never again. How could that ever happen?" And now we see, and have seen under this current administration here, food banks proliferate. There are more food banks in the city of Toronto, than McDonald's now—more food banks than McDonald's. That's the reality of life in this province now. That's in one lifetime. And it's getting worse; it's not getting better.

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My friends from across the way like to, of course, take partisan shots at other parties—

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Truly, but this happened under the seven years of Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal watch. This happened under the Liberal watch in the last seven years. That's the reality. It's become worse: less housing, more families on the waiting lists, longer waiting times, more precarious housing, more renters who can't afford the basic necessities of life. That's happened here. At some point, when you have a majority government, you have to take ownership of what your jurisdiction looks like. This is what Ontario looks like, and this is a jurisdiction that gave us this Ontario—seven years.

I'm not going to let the federal government off the hook, either. We have long called for a national housing strategy. The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee has long asked for the 1% solution—1% of the budget to go to housing. We're still asking for that federally. We still need that federally to get out of the bind we're in. But there's so much more that could happen here and doesn't because of the short-sighted thinking. It's a kind of thinking that says, "It costs money, it doesn't make money, to invest in affordable housing. It costs money, it doesn't make money, to help people rise above the poverty line. It costs money, it doesn't make money, to put infrastructure front and centre and new-build affordable housing front and centre." That's the kind of short-sighted, conservative vision, quite frankly, that has caused this problem in the first place. "Let's leave housing up to the private sector." That has given us the Ontario that we live in right now. "Let's get governments out of the business of housing"—I mean, good grief, that's a libertarian notion, and that's essentially the philosophy of the McGuinty government. A Liberal Party with a libertarian notion: Get government out of the housing business. That's what we've got in Ontario.

It couldn't get more conservative. In fact, as I've shown, Conservatives did it better at times. They were less conservative and less libertarian than our current Liberal administration. It's sad but true from the New Democratic point of view, and sad but true from the point of view of those who live on those waiting lists. It's true for them as well.

I grew up in a Toronto that didn't have shelters. It also didn't have the corporate tax breaks that are now in place in Ontario. Is there a corollary here? I say that there are many corollaries between the rich getting richer and the lack of affordable housing on the other end of the income spectrum. There's a reason why Hulchanski's Toronto looks the way it does, and the reason always falls at the feet of government. That's what's happened. It's very sad.

So what we're talking about here, for those who've just tuned in, in the very first session back, just to set the tone for the new session, I've suggested to everyone here that we work together to change Ontario. People are tired of the bickering that goes back and forth. I'm suggesting that here we have a scaffolding in Bill 140; that this bill, hopefully, will go to committee; that this bill will hopefully be dealt with by a succession of housing activists, who will say pretty much what I've said here today—in fact, I've quoted from them and their statistics and their five-point plan to provide housing to Ontarians; and that we'll make significant amendments.

Significant amendments to this bill will include dollars, will include new bills, will include inclusionary zoning, will include more rent supplements, and will include, in fact, money in for more money out at the other end of the spectrum, because we know now—we can't pretend we don't know what we know studies have shown—that it costs more money to keep people underhoused and homeless than it does to house them; that, simply in dollars and cents, it costs more; and that, long term, it costs even more to keep the poor impoverished—we know that. There's no excuse not to prime the pump with funding now, so that the economy can improve later. This is a far better use of our tax dollars, scarce as they are, than putting money in at the top by giving some of the wealthiest corporations in Ontario huge tax breaks, making us the cheapest place to do business in North America for them and hoping that some of that money somehow trickles down so that somebody, one of the 142,000 on the housing waiting list, might actually someday find a place to live.

I started off also in talking about that little girl who lived in our church parking lot in a trailer with her father. It's been many years since that moment in our church history and our community's history. She was simply one of the ones we discovered. We knew her name; we knew what she looked like. We saw her father. We knew that if they walked along any street in any city in Ontario, they would pass as just your middle-class folk. We knew that the reality was anything but.

We know now that those who are lining up to use food banks are also the same as those who are lining up for

affordable housing, and we know that those lining up for affordable housing and those lining up for food banks are, by and large, now working people. This is a significant shift as well, which points to other measures that need to be implemented. But here's the problem: After months of consultations, thousands of pages of written submissions, a uniform cry from housing activists and housing organizations across Ontario for five basic steps, this government has delivered none of the above. Not one new dollar, not one new unit, not one new rent-geared-to-income supplement and not any, of course, inclusionary zoning. No requests there whatsoever.

So I suspect that that little girl, if the trajectory holds—and we know this from studies, again, that have been done by experts across North America; that if you start out homeless, it's very difficult to pull yourself up by the bootstraps from that existence. That in fact, contrary to Horatio Alger myths, the reality is that she'll probably go on to be poorer than her father, who's already poor indeed; that she'll probably have more health concerns than other little girls her age; that she probably won't get as much schooling as other children her age; that she'll probably be nutritionally deficient, unlike other children her age; that her father, trying to get a job without a home, will probably remain jobless; that their income will go down, not up, over time. That's their trajectory.

Ultimately, all of public policy comes down to a personal story. All public policy, all images of public policy come down to one picture. I want that those who are watching—and I hope my friends from across the aisle and around this place—will see the face of that little girl and that family, and her children and their children, who will be significantly worse off. I hope they see a direction we do not want to go. I hope they also understand that they have the power to change that direction.

I appeal that although this is the scaffolding, we need the building in this bill. Because it's not a bad thing—we'll probably vote for it—it's not a good thing either, because there's not one dollar, not one new unit, no new rent supplements and no inclusionary zoning, and those are four of the five requests from all of the housing activists. In fact, if you read it differently they're five of the five requests from all the housing providers and activists across Ontario.

There's still time to add that to this bill. There's still time to significantly amend this bill and put significant money behind new builds, infrastructure development and getting people off the streets in Ontario. There's still time. We've got, what, 12 weeks? You can do it. We can do it. We can do it together. We can provide those 2,000 new units of supportive housing a year. We can provide those 12,000 new units, inclusionary zoning units, a year without spending a tax dollar. We can build the 20,000 units every four years that this government initially promised; we can do that. We can provide rent geared to income; we can do that, too.

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We, finally, can actually begin to truly build the kind of Ontario that we would want our children and grand-

children to grow up in, the kind of Ontario that would never ever abandon that little girl and her father who had to sleep in an RV in our parking lot; that would never abandon an Edmund Yu, shot to death on a streetcar; that would never abandon the sole-income, single-parent families waiting for 12 years on affordable housing lists; that, finally, would never abandon our very own children and grandchildren, who will never be able to afford the middle-class dream of owning their own home.

This government has it within its power to do all of that. We all do. We all do if we work together. We all do if we significantly amend, if we put on the scaffolding of Bill 140 a structure that would actually provide—yes, new units; yes, new dollars; yes, new rent-geared-to-income supplements; and yes, inclusionary zoning.

I thank you very much. It was a pleasure and a privilege to start off the session. I hope it's one of cooperation, and I hope it's one of progress.

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

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Having listened to the member for Parkdale–High Park, with many of her comments I couldn't agree more. The McGuinty government understands just how important an address is, a home is, to the lives of hard-working Ontarians.

I have seen with my own eyes, having visited some of the affordable housing units in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville and those families, how it has transformed their lives. It has given them a sense of pride, a sense of hope and opportunity. It's that firm footing for that little girl or boy or husband or wife to know that they have an address, a home, that they open up at the end of a hard day when they come home. It gives them that grounding, that firm footing that all of us need.

The investments that the McGuinty government has made over the last seven and a half years—\$2.5 billion—with our partners, with the municipalities, with many not-for-profit agencies and organizations in our communities, have been remarkable.

I want to commend Minister Bartolucci and his predecessors for working together with the municipalities, with NGOs, so that we have a common vision—and we do have a common vision—for long-term affordable housing. This strategy speaks to what we heard from stakeholders: that we have to work together, that we have to make further progress.

It's unfortunate that the missing partner at the table is the federal government, which wishes not to participate when it comes to affordable housing. We have to speak all together with a strong voice and deliver the message that this is about Ontario's families, Canadian families, that need help, and in a time of need, we should all come together.

We are a compassionate government. The McGuinty government has a strong strategy that is delivering results for these families, and we are seeing that it improves the quality of life for all Ontarians in all our communities.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a couple of minutes of comments to the very eloquent speech from the member from Parkdale–High Park. She speaks with a lot of passion and conviction, and I admire her for her hour leadoff as we kick off this session of the Legislative Assembly.

I have to admit that I am a bit skeptical of this government's commitment. I had a couple of housing issues in my riding of Leeds–Grenville, which is predominantly a rural riding. We applied for some housing funds. There were two projects. One was in north Grenville, which is an extremely fast-growing part of my riding. It was a project that the local hospital, the Kemptville District Hospital, was promoting. And there was a project in Brockville that the folks from Wall Street Village had tried to put forward that would provide some much-needed seniors' housing in Brockville.

Obviously, I couldn't ask a very technical question during question period to the minister, so I decided to put it in the form of an order paper question. I put five order paper questions, because we were trying to establish our strategy for approaching the government for some money. They were very specific questions, asking about the round 1 funding through the Canada-Ontario affordable housing agreement: "What's the initial allocation? Who got funding? Were any units turned back?" They were all very technical questions.

To my surprise, I got back two paragraphs which basically said that the province and the federal government, since June 2009, were in agreement; they both contributed \$622 million—blah, blah, blah. I was really disheartened that that's how the Ministry of Housing—the minister—chose to answer the question. If we're going to take 12 weeks and if we're going to co-operate on housing, we need a little bit of a better answer than what I got to my local questions over the last session.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I sat and listened intently because I'm seatmates with the member from Parkdale–High Park. I listened intently to every word she had to say.

What this is, and what she had to say for the hour, is a call. It is a call for all of us to do the right thing. It is a call for us to go beyond a technical bill, which this one is. It is a call for us to make those decisions which will help people in this province.

She talked about the wait-lists. Go to almost any place in your own community and look at the wait-lists and how long it takes for a family to get decent affordable housing. In some cases, the wait-lists are more than 20 years. Certainly, if you have a large family and you want to get into decent public housing and you put your name on the list, there is virtually no chance you will ever get that housing until your children have all grown up and moved away, and then you're not eligible for it anymore.

She talked about inclusionary zoning. This is an idea whose time has come. This is an idea that this government should embrace. This is an idea that municipality after municipality in Ontario is saying we need to do: "We want to do it. Give us the authority." They're not

even asking for money. And as the member from Parkdale–High Park so eloquently put it, this can be done without costing one single dollar of provincial money.

She talked again about the lack of housing being a key component of poverty. We know that people in this province are starting to get poorer, and there's starting to be some backlash. We know the human costs that are involved.

I thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for putting her words so eloquently before this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I think it's always good when we struggle in this place to put a human face on issues that confront us, and I want to compliment all those members who tried to do that quite eloquently this morning.

The issue of housing, and social housing in particular, is not one that is new to us. I wrote my master's thesis many, many years ago on the issue of community participation in determining the kinds of social housing that might be built. That was at a time and a day and a place where the federal government, to their everlasting credit, through the Central Mortgage and Housing Corp. loan program, was providing low-interest and no-interest loans, in partnership with provincial governments and municipalities, to entice builders to come and build the kind of housing that would be made available to those on the margins, and it worked very, very well.

There were some significant changes that downloaded that—downloading seems to be a favourite exercise of governments, the senior one often inflicting on the next level of government obligations that they don't want to take onto themselves.

I was with Minister Bartolucci in Hamilton when this program was rolled out, and I just want to say for the record that I've never seen in my social service career the kind of enthusiasm amongst housing advocates for moving forward in hand-in-hand partnership to solve a problem which we all agree needs to be addressed than I did that day. Do you remember that, Minister? It was very—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments? The member from Parkdale has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to all the members for their comments.

A couple of items: I just want to set the record straight in response to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville about the McGuinty government record. Let's put it this way: Ontario has the worst record among all the provinces in affordable housing investments—the worst. This is based on Statistics Canada data. Ontario spends \$64 per capita on affordable housing—half the provincial average of \$115 per person. So Conservative, Liberal, NDP alike: We're the worst for investment in affordable housing. That's the simple and unadulterated truth. That's what this government has to own up to, and this technical bill does nothing to save that or change that in any way. So that's what we are asking for.

One of the members mentioned the delight with which this bill was received. I'm sure that among Liberal Party members it was received with delight, but certainly every single housing activist group we've spoken to, which is all of them, has said, "This is far from what we asked for." Why? Because there's not one new dollar, not one new unit, not one new rent-geared-to-income supplement and no inclusionary zoning. Those were the core of all of their asks; all of them ignored.

When you're dependent on government money, you might be nice at meetings, but the reality is, this is what they're saying in print in the media; this is their real reaction and with our—sorry—the worst provincial record for investing in social housing, I don't think there's anything to be proud about. What I'm suggesting is, since we've got the scaffolding of the bill, since it's going to committee, let's build on it. Let's add in the dollars, add in the units, add in the—

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

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.
The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.*

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm very excited that Nicolas Meilleur, a student at École Macdonald-Cartier, is going to be a legislative page. I know his parents are in the gallery, and they're very excited. So I would like to introduce Natalie and Jean-Roger and have them stand up. Welcome.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to take this opportunity to introduce two of the great employees of the MGS. I have the deputy minister and CEO of Service-Ontario, Bob Stark, and his new ADM of customer care, Helga Iliadis, who joined the Ontario public service on February 14, 2011. Welcome, and enjoy.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'd like to introduce a young constituent from York South-Weston, Asquith Allen, who is here in the House today in the gallery to watch the proceedings.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to introduce my brother-in-law Peter Weltman, in the members' gallery today. He's the father of a great young page starting today, Benjamin Hillier-Weltman. Welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to introduce a special constituent of mine. Richard Nancarrow is here with us today in the government gallery.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It truly is a proud occasion for me today to introduce my son Braden, who is a page for this term. He's not here yet, but he'll be coming back in.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you have made an expensive mess out of

Ontario's hydro system, and you don't respect the fact that Ontario families are being stuck with your bills.

Since our last question period some 75 days ago, we have seen up to a billion dollars in subsidies to Quebec and New York to take our hydro while Ontario families are paying more, we saw an extraordinary Liberal backtrack on offshore wind and microFIT, and we're seeing massive cost overruns at your Big Becky tunnel project in Niagara.

Ontario families are looking for relief, but they're not getting it from the McGuinty government. Premier, how much more will hydro bills go up as a result of your expensive experiments?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, it's good to be back. I'm not sure the break has improved my honourable colleague's disposition, but I'm always pleased to take his questions.

The question obviously is about energy, and I can tell you that families are concerned about, I think, three things in particular when it comes to our energy plan. They want to make sure that they have a reliable supply of electricity, and we are on track to do that. They want to make sure that, while we ensure that we have a reliable supply of electricity, we are also creating more jobs, capitalizing on a new opportunity in the global economy—and we're creating thousands of those. At the same time, they're also very pleased with the fact that we are cleaning up our air, that we're shutting down our coal-fired generation. Those are all initiatives opposed by the party opposite.

They want clean electricity, they want clean energy jobs and they want reliable electricity. That's exactly what we're delivering.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you used to claim that your expensive green energy experiments would only drive up bills by a meagre 1%, before you had to climb down and admit it was going to be 46%. We all know, Premier, that you're going to be lowballing that figure.

After seven years, Premier, you've become so out of touch that even when you retreat from your expensive energy experiments, Ontario families end up paying more. Take your recent backtracking on 1,000 microFIT projects that would pay 80 cents for five-cent power. Your ham-fisted bungling of this issue has now exposed Ontario families to expensive lawsuits.

Premier, why do you treat Ontario families like they're bottomless ATM machines? Why do they keep paying more and more for your bungling on the hydro file?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that Ontarians are becoming more and more interested in what it is that the party opposite has by way of specific proposals and plans, so I intend to take advantage during the coming session to help reveal some of those plans to assist Ontarians in their understanding of where it is that the party opposite, the official opposition, particularly plans to go.

To make it very clear, abundantly clear, we're against coal; they're for coal. We're for investing in solar, wind

and water power; they're against clean energy. We're for thousands of new clean energy jobs; they're against those new jobs. We're for attracting, so far, \$18 billion of new investment; they're against that new investment. So that sets up a pretty stark contrast of where they plan to go and where we plan to go. We're with families, clean energy, clean jobs, clean air.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem is, you just do not respect the fact that Ontario families get stuck with the bills for the expensive mess you've created in our hydro policy.

Let me give you one more example. The Big Becky tunnel project in Niagara is now five years late and \$600 million more expensive, and all the Premier has said about this latest Big Becky boondoggle is, "Well, these things happen." I guess that's no surprise from a Premier who gave us the billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle; no surprise from a Premier who is subsidizing exports of power to Quebec and New York to the tune of a billion dollars as well.

Premier, don't you respect the fact that Ontario families get stuck paying the bills? How out of touch are you to say that another boondoggle just happens?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're very proud of the work that is taking place as part of the Niagara tunnel project. It is a 10.2-kilometre tunnel that goes under the city of Niagara Falls. Working there is the biggest tunnel-boring machine in the world. It's going to supply clean power for the next 100 years. We're talking about a government with a bit of foresight, a bit of vision and a bit of courage to get that hard work done right now.

My honourable friends opposite think they can get all this work done and it won't add a single extra penny to our electricity bills. Ontarians don't believe that. That's magic. We have reality. We've got a sense of responsibility. We'll do the necessary to make sure we can turn the lights on, that the power's there, that it's clean power with clean jobs and that it delivers clean air to our families.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: What we expect is for projects to be on time and on budget, and if they're not, for you to actually care about it. For you to dismiss a project that is now five years behind schedule and \$600 million over budget shows how dramatically out of touch you've become with the reality faced by Ontario families struggling with higher and higher hydro bills.

Each and every day, the Ontario PC caucus is actually talking to ordinary families, small business leaders, students and seniors concerned about your expensive experiments. We brought forward a moratorium on your expensive energy projects that would say: Let's hear from people about the health and environmental impacts, and let's make sure that when it comes to industrial wind

farms, they're in communities where they're welcomed and at prices that Ontario families can actually afford. You voted against it. Now you've flip-flopped. Were you playing politics then, or are you playing politics now?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think both my honourable colleague and myself have had the opportunity during the break to meet with a number of Ontarians to hear about their concerns, their aspirations and their issues, and a very important concern that remains very prominent in the minds of many Ontario families is jobs. Our electricity plan is about jobs: 225 jobs in Fort Erie at DMI Industries; 158 jobs in Burlington at Satcon producing solar modules; 150 jobs in Cambridge at ATS to produce solar modules; 100 jobs in Newmarket with SunEdison and Flextronics manufacturing solar modules; 300 jobs in Don Mills at Celestica manufacturing solar components. I can go on and on. But a very important benefit of our clean electricity plan is thousands of new jobs, which is exactly what Ontario families are demanding.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Some 300,000 lost manufacturing jobs, Premier, because of your high taxes, runaway spending and skyrocketing energy bills. You are so out of touch after seven years in office.

Premier, you just show no respect for the Ontario families that are getting stuck with your higher and higher bills. At one point, you were so determined to force your expensive industrial wind farm projects on communities that if an Ontario family objected in any way, you insulted them by saying they were NIMBYs.

You voted against the PC moratorium until we could assure that projects were affordable and in communities where they're welcome, based on good science, until you said, "The energy minister's seat is at risk"—until Liberal seats were at risk—and then you did a spectacular flip-flop on your hydro policy.

Premier, when your position keeps changing like this on hydro, how can anybody believe you, and why are they getting stuck with the bills for the expensive mess you've created?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's interesting to hear this. I think I'm detecting some kind of a covert flirtation with clean energy on the part of the Leader of the Opposition.

But I want to tell you a bit more about the specifics of their plan. They are in favour of burning coal in Ontario; we're against that. We're in favour of investing in clean energy; that's solar, wind and water power. They're against that. We're in favour of thousands of new clean energy jobs; they're against that. We're in favour of attracting up to \$18 billion in new investment; they're against that. It's important to understand the difference. We, in fact, represent the future. We understand an opportunity for a brand new industry. The centrepiece in North America will be located here in Ontario.

They're for coal. They're for dirty air. They're for the past. We're for going forward: clean air, clean energy, thousands of new jobs.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the reality is that you've changed and twisted your energy policies so much that delegates at a yoga convention would be envious. You've flip-flopped on your green projects and on the Oakville energy plant, and your ideological approach means that you're buying expensive power at 80 cents for power that should be five cents in the marketplace. Now you're ready to toss out the main pillars in your so-called green energy plan that you put in the window only because seats, like your energy minister's, are at risk.

Premier, you know the idea to jam the power plant to an unwilling host in Oakville is wrong, and now you're going to do the same thing in Cambridge with another secret sweetheart deal.

How much are Ontario families going to pay for your bungling? How much are Ontario families going to pay for your expensive mistakes? Premier, when will you get a clue and understand that it's families that are paying the bill for the disaster you've created on the energy file?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, just to be—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, just so it's perfectly clear, they're in favour of coal; we're against that. We believe in clean air for our families. They're against clean energy; we're in favour of harnessing the power of the sun and the wind. They're against the thousands of new jobs that we're creating; obviously, we are for those. They're against the new investments that we're attracting.

Here's an interesting quote from a recent Reuters publication from February 14 of this year. It says: "The outcome of an election this autumn in Ontario could stunt a budding renewable energy industry in the Canadian province just as it is becoming one of the world's hot investment destinations."

I would ask my friend, who maintains he's in favour of a strong economy, why is he standing up against an initiative that has been recognized globally as being at the forefront in terms of landing new investment, new jobs and cleaning up our air?

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. For the past two months, the Premier's been travelling around the province with his PowerPoint slides, explaining to families why they have to pay more and expect less. The Premier says that he just can't afford to make life more affordable for folks. If that's so, how can he afford \$2 billion in corporate tax giveaways every year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I also say welcome back to my honourable colleague the leader of the NDP, and I welcome her questions.

What I would say to my honourable colleague is to understand that what, in fact, we've put in place is a comprehensive package of tax reforms. It results in tax

cuts for families of about \$12 billion over three years and of about \$4 billion or \$5 billion for businesses over the next three years. So I'd ask my honourable colleague to acknowledge what we are doing for families.

For example, the average Ontario family is receiving a \$355 income tax cut this year and every year going forward. There's also a new children's activity tax credit of \$50 per child, available this year and every year going forward. There also have been a number of transition benefits put in place, to assist with our transition as we adopt a modern taxation system that necessarily includes the HST. So I would ask my honourable colleague to acknowledge all those positive initiatives we've put in place to help our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The people I've been meeting with this winter might not be the same crowd that turns up for the Premier's PowerPoint presentation, but they do their jobs, they pay their taxes and they actually make our province work. They're telling me that they feel ignored. They're being told to pay more and more while their health care slips into crisis and their wages fall further and further behind.

Can the Premier explain how he's found the money for everything from CEO pay hikes to multi-billion dollar corporate tax giveaways while ignoring everyday people who are looking for a little bit of relief?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Obviously I take issue with my honourable colleague with respect to who it is that we are helping. I know my friend likes to describe Ontario as being divided up into different sections of people. We don't see Ontario that way. We see it as being in this together, and we've got a shared responsibility to move forward together.

Let me tell you about some of the things we've been doing. Full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds: That's a \$1.5-billion initiative. It's benefiting 35,000 kids this year. It'll be 50,000 as of this September. It's going to grow to 247,000 in all 4,000 Ontario elementary schools. That is a very expensive initiative, but we're doing it because it's the right thing to do. That's not to any particular—four- and five-year-old kids don't vote, but we're benefiting them nonetheless because it's an important initiative. It speaks to their future, and that in turn speaks to our future.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, while the Premier keeps talking at people, we have been listening, and here's what we're hearing: People's paycheques aren't stretching as far as they used to. They're being told they have to pay more for electricity—in fact, there was another announcement today about a rate hike by OPG—and more for home heating. The government's slapped them with a new unfair tax, but their health care is falling behind. In places like Windsor, it has actually become an official crisis.

The Premier has found billions and billions of dollars for corporate tax giveaways and CEO salary hikes, but

families want to know: When will they finally become the priority?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I say to my honourable colleague that we bring a balanced approach. We're taking a look at what we need to do to ensure that we grow this economy. That does call for, from time to time, providing additional supports to the business community; we understand that. But at the same time, we've not lost sight of the needs of our families.

I spoke a moment ago about full-day kindergarten and how that's saving the average family thousands of dollars in daycare costs every single year. We've also increased the minimum wage every year for six years. We've increased social assistance for our most vulnerable by 11% so far, raising the rates again last year. We have doubled student assistance. We've capped OSAP repayments at \$7,300. Our Second Career strategy, a very important investment, has helped 40,000 people so far. There's a new textbook and technology grant for our students of \$150 per student; I think it has helped some 220,000 students so far. Those are all initiatives to help our families.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Tomorrow, the Premier is going to be presenting his PowerPoint presentation to a very friendly audience that loves his corporate tax giveaways and secret private power deals, but if he actually left the conference hall to talk to the people in these communities, he'd hear stories like John's: "The HST is killing Ontario. I am laid off and find it almost impossible for me to drive to Windsor with the price of gas, just to hand out a few resumé's. Maybe Mr. McGuinty would like to trade places."

1050

Can the Premier explain to people like John why profitable corporations need a tax break, but they need to pay more?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me give you examples of some of the things we are doing. I know my honourable friend believes that we should never sit down and talk to the business community and, of course, I don't think that would be responsible. We worked with Dofasco; they're based in Hamilton. We announced a \$5.2-million loan to upgrade their steel production process and ensure the security of those jobs. We worked with AGS Automotive, and Tiercon, based in Stoney Creek; we provided them with \$6 million for the development of advanced bumper systems—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East will please come to order, and Minister of Consumer Services, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We also have been working with Max Aicher North America; they're based in Hamilton. We provided a \$9-million loan to help reopen a former steel mill. That's about new jobs.

What my friends have got to understand at some point—hopefully sooner, rather than later—is that when we work with the business sector we can actually ensure that there are more jobs, which is exactly what our families are looking for. We believe in that kind of a partnership and we'll keep strengthening it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier visited people as well as business groups, he would have heard stories like Laura's, a senior in London. She's been having a hard time paying her utility bills and writes this: "I have been living with Christmas lights instead of regular lights ... I wear heavy sweaters to keep warm."

Can the Premier explain to Laura how corporate tax cuts and CEO pay hikes will make her life better?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague is trapped in this old construct, sadly, which speaks to where the NDP is today in Ontario. They believe you've got to be anti-business, without understanding that when they're anti-business, when they're anti-economic growth, they're anti-jobs. All the people that my honourable colleague speaks on behalf of—I can assure you, if we were to bring them together and ask them if jobs were important to them and their families, they would say, "Of course jobs are important to us." That's why we're going to continue to find ways to bring a balanced approach to governing.

We'll find a way to work with the business sector. We'll find a way to work with the social sector. We're continuing to invest in health care; we've got the shortest wait times now in Canada. We're going to continue to find ways to invest in our schools. Now our kids are in the top 10 globally when it comes to our standardized tests. The fact of the matter is that we're bringing a balanced approach and we'll continue to do that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: After eight long years, it's clear that the Premier has lost touch with the people who elected him. Instead of putting them first and making life easier and more affordable, he slaps an unfair tax on their household budget while pumping billions of dollars into corporate tax giveaways. Instead of ensuring quality health care is there for them when they need it, seniors are being ordered to pay hundreds of dollars a day just to stay in the hospital and get care. Instead of doing his job in this Legislature, this Premier plans to spend the rest of the week hiding behind his PowerPoint presentation and hoping families forget his record of neglect. They won't. Why will families believe anything at all in the Premier's PowerPoint presentation when he has proven time and time again that he's just not on their side?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I don't share my honourable colleague's perspective, but I can say that I think we both equally prize health care for families in Ontario. We're both staunch believers in a public system. I'm proud of the progress that we have made. There's always more to be done.

When it comes to home care, for example, we've increased funding by 50%. There are now 182,000 more Ontarians who are being served. I think we all know that when our mum or dad can no longer make it on their own and need a bit of extra support so they can stay in their homes, we've got to be there as a society with those additional supports through home care services. We've got some in place—as I say, 182,000 more Ontarians are now accessing those additional services—but still there's more work to be done and we look forward to doing that.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Ontario families are paying the price for a Premier who has grown out of touch after seven years in office. In your PowerPoint road show, you have been going around testing the patience of business audiences with an hour-long lecture. But what is worse is, when you get to the section of your lecture that deals with your microFIT scheme, you've been making the disrespectful statement that you are "rendering farmers' existence as farmers more viable."

Do you think Ontario farmers owe you their existence now that 1,000 of them have lost their life savings investing in your microFIT Ponzi scheme?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members will please come to order. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The honourable member will withdraw the comment he just made, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw. I'm not sure what it was.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just an unequivocal withdrawal, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: It is a fine piece of irony that the PC Party would ask a question about efforts we're making to strengthen a clean energy program that's benefiting farmers, but it's a program that they want to kill. They don't support this program one bit. They want to do away with it. Their leader has said this much. Other members in their party have said this much.

We're standing up for Ontario farmers. We're making this program work. We're working with Hydro One. We're working with the OPA to ensure that farmers across this province can connect. The biggest threat to those farmers is those guys over there who want to kill their opportunity, who want to kill this microFIT program, who want to kill the thousands of clean energy jobs that were created. They should be standing up for Ontario farmers rather—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Agriculture. The member from Oxford. The Minister of Economic Development.

Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's bad enough Premier McGuinty thinks Ontario farmers owe him their existence. It is outright disrespectful that you're going around saying this in a lecture to CivicAction Toronto at the exact same time that you sent out a thousand Dear John letters to Ontario—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The Minister of Research and Innovation will withdraw the comment that he just made.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —letters to Ontario farmers who were lured into your get-rich pyramid scheme. Some of these farmers cashed in their RRSPs, others mortgaged their homes, and now they stand to lose it all.

You've taken away their livelihood, so why do you think they can afford to give you any more?

Hon. Brad Duguid: These challenges are the result of the need to rebuild our transmission system. It is one of the challenges that we face to this day, and it's because of the ugly legacy that they left behind when it comes to our energy system. We've made some exceptional progress. We've upgraded over 5,000 kilometres of transmission.

Here is the irony of the PCs asking this question: As we've made these investments, they've opposed these investments every step of the way. Here's the irony of this: As we're working with Ontario farmers to give them a chance to participate in our clean energy economy, they've opposed the microFIT program every step of the way. You can't have it both ways.

We're looking forward to seeing your energy plan. But the fact is their energy plan would kill the microFIT program. No wonder the Leader of the Opposition wants to hide his energy plan from rural Ontario—

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

1100

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is for the Premier. The McGuinty government's broken promise to redevelop Windsor's Grace Hospital site into a long-term-care home has forced the LHIN to declare a hospital bed shortage crisis in that community. Now seniors are threatened with \$600-a-day hospital bills if they refuse the first open bed in any nursing home. Why are seniors being punished for this government's health care failures?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I want to start by saying that it is completely unacceptable that anyone be charged more than the copay rate—that's \$53.23—if they are in a hospital waiting for long-term care. I want you to know that my ministry and my officials are working with the LHIN, with the hospitals, to ensure that they understand the proper application of this policy and that other hospitals, in fact, across the province do understand that it is completely unacceptable to charge anything more than \$53.23 per day.

I do want to talk about long-term care in the Windsor area. We know that long-term care is very important. We are making investments. There is a new long-term care that is opening as we speak. There are now over 100 residents and more coming every day. There is another long-term—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families want to be sure that their loved ones have the best possible care in the province. But not only are the services lacking; these families are being punished. In Windsor it's officially a crisis, but the story is playing out across the province of Ontario. An elderly patient in Toronto is being threatened with daily fees of \$1,800 to get out of the hospital.

Families are desperately trying to access the care they need, but they're finding a system in complete shambles. Instead of helping families, the government slaps them with exorbitant fees. Why are families being punished for this government's failures?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat that it is completely inappropriate and unacceptable for any individual in this province in a hospital waiting for long-term care to be charged more than \$53.23 per day. I think the member opposite owes it to the people of this province to actually speak the facts in this House.

Having said that, we do acknowledge that there are challenges in our health sector. But we are making tremendous progress. We are committed to reducing our ALC rates in our hospitals by building stronger, better community supports. We now have almost 200,000 more people receiving home care supports than when we took office. We are moving forward. We are making progress. Is it perfect? No. But, boy, is it a whole lot better? Absolutely, yes.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Over the past week, my office has received a number of calls from farmers and individuals who have applied to the government's microFIT program, and many of them have received conditional offers of a contract from the Ontario Power Authority. Recently, some of these applicants received a letter informing them that their project is in a transmission- or distribution-constrained area and is currently unable to connect to the electricity grid. I am concerned for those applicants who

may have invested in equipment and are now receiving notice that their equipment cannot be connected.

Minister, what are you doing to ensure that the microFIT program remains viable and these applicants are able to integrate their projects into the grid?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question.

Hydro One has undertaken the appropriate work to upgrade our transmission and distribution infrastructure to connect these microFIT projects as soon as possible.

The microFIT program has been a tremendous success. But one of the main challenges is that in 2003 we inherited a 1960s-era electricity grid, a grid that by all accounts was outdated, weak and unreliable. Continuing down the path of decay was simply unacceptable. Since then, we've invested over \$7 billion, strengthening our transmission system, and we've made significant progress. But there's still more work to do.

Getting these important projects online as soon as possible is a top priority for me and our government, and I've likewise made it a top priority for Hydro One. We're fully committed to supporting this program and growing our clean energy economy, creating thousands of jobs for Ontario families—

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister. Obviously, the future of the microFIT program is vital to Ontario's clean economy, and I know that interest in participating in clean energy generation continues to grow. It was reassuring to know that the full resources of Hydro One and your ministry are being brought to bear on strengthening the electricity grid so that renewable energy can be integrated in a safe and reliable way.

There has been some talk in the media about the future of this program given some of the challenges that have arisen. Can the minister commit that the microFIT program will continue to provide farmers with the opportunity to generate clean electricity and support Ontario's clean energy economy for years to come?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Absolutely. Yes, I can tell the member that we will continue to support this important program that allows farmers to actively participate in our clean energy economy.

But I think it's important for the member and his constituents to know that the single biggest threat to the thousands of Ontario farmers participating in microFIT is without a doubt the Leader of the Opposition and the PC Party, who have indicated their intention to kill this program altogether. I expect this is one of the reasons the Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to talk about his energy plan in rural Ontario. But the fact is, the PCs have indicated they want to kill this program, hanging thousands of farmers out to dry and killing thousands of clean energy jobs across Ontario. It's no wonder he is afraid to talk about his energy plan in rural Ontario. So we're committed to strengthening the microFIT program and making it work for Ontario farmers. The PC Party is committed to killing it—

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

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. The way that Premier McGuinty is running his government does not show respect for Ontario families. Take the day you pulled the plug out from under 1,000 farmers who invested in your microFIT scheme that would make Bernie Madoff proud. It was a massive backtrack on your flagship policy. You were giving your hour-long lecture to CivicAction Toronto and you spoke to media afterwards. Why didn't you mention during that scrum a single word about the Dear John letters you had sent out to 1,000 Ontario farmers? Not a word, Premier. Why didn't you mention it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think what the member should be doing is looking to his leader to say, "Why can't our party stand up for Ontario farmers like the government has been doing?"

We're very proud of this microFIT program and how thousands of farmers across this province are benefiting from it. What the member is not telling Ontario farmers is that he and his party don't support this program at all. His leader just last week said he would pull these advantages, these benefits from Ontario farmers.

It's very obvious why that party doesn't want to talk about their energy plan in rural Ontario. The reason they don't want to talk to farmers about their energy plan is that they're going to hang farmers out to dry when it comes to the microFIT program.

We're going to work with Hydro One. We're going to work with the OPA. We'll certainly deal with this transmission issue, and we're going to work with Ontario farmers to ensure they can be part of—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: You were no better the next morning, Premier, when you had a chance to say something to the media about your massive backtrack on Ontario farmers at your lecture road show in Oakville. Your team thought it was more important for the Minister of Finance to be out on a media conference taking a silly partisan shot at Ontario PCs than to say anything about your microFIT backtrack or, Premier, your massive backtrack on offshore wind. You waited until an international crisis in Egypt to issue an end-of-day press release on your offshore wind backtrack. How could you be so disrespectful as to use the crisis in Egypt to cover up your own backtracks?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment he just made.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Once again, it's totally ironic that the opposition who have opposed our efforts to get out of coal and build a cleaner, healthier future for Ontario are now the champion of offshore wind in the province of

Ontario. He opposes solar, he opposes bioenergy, he opposes onshore wind, and now he thinks we should be moving faster on offshore wind. Maybe he can explain to Ontario families why he would want to destroy our onshore wind projects, impacting farmers, killing jobs across this province, only to replace them with more costly offshore wind. This is yet another reason why the Leader of the Opposition is afraid to share his energy plan with Ontario families.

1110

Our clean energy economy is booming: 13,000 jobs created by the end of last year. We're on target to meet our 50,000-job target. We're moving full speed ahead and making Ontario a global clean-energy powerhouse. They have opposed—

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

NUCLEAR WASTE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Why is the government of Ontario allowing Bruce Power to transport used nuclear steam generators which are former Ontario property, which are 50 to 60 times more radioactive than international standards, across the Great Lakes without any kind of environmental assessment?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has indeed granted permission for Bruce to ship 16 decommissioned steam generators to Sweden for recycling. The member will know that this is a federal agency, and this is the responsibility that they've been charged with.

But I guess what I want to ask the member—I wrote to that commission to ensure that they're taking the needs of Ontario into full consideration. Did he write to them? He may have, but I'll ask him if he wrote to them to make sure the voice of Ontarians was heard. Or did his leader stand up and write to them? She may have. I don't know. She may well have, and if she did, that's good.

But we wanted to ensure that all safety and environmental concerns were being taken into consideration. I've been assured that they have. They've made their decision. They took deputations. They're the experts on these matters, and I would suggest that the member might want to respect that a little bit.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This is this an astounding dereliction of duty. This is a minister who had the power to keep those radioactive steam generators in the hands of OPG. He didn't do that. In the end, it's on his hands, on his shoulders, on his head that this was allowed to go forward, and even now, not using the power of the Minister of Transportation to refuse transportation permits. The Minister of the Environment could demand an environmental assessment, not just the CNSC doing their little side show for this province.

The Quebec Minister of the Environment has publicly opposed the shipment. When will this government take

on its responsibility, stop passing the buck to the feds and act?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Unlike those guys, we're not all talk. I did write to the federal minister, and I did write to the CNSC to ensure that they're taking all the needs of Ontario into consideration.

But, again, this is another anti-nuclear rant from the NDP. That party opposes nuclear, they oppose natural gas, they oppose renewables now, they oppose hydro, and they oppose our efforts in investing in conservation.

If they ever come out with an energy plan, I can tell you it's going to have something very important that's going to be lacking in it, and that will be power. In fact, I would suggest that the slogan for the NDP energy plan should be "NDP: no darn power."

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. Madam Minister, as you know, I've been speaking many times about the diesel trains that are cutting straight through my riding and especially the proposed shuttle trains that will now go to the airport.

GO Transit is presently working on the largest infrastructure expansion project in this corridor, and you can imagine the complaints I've received from constituents who are living near the tracks about the dust and noise, and now they're concerned about the increased number of trains that will be running on the corridor.

For the past year, constituents have been waiting for the results of the Metrolinx electrification study, and I'm excited and delighted with their findings. Metrolinx now recommends that we move forward with electrifying both the Georgetown and the Lakeshore corridors.

Minister, since Metrolinx recommends electrification of both the Lakeshore and the Georgetown GO Transit rail corridors, why is the province—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member for Davenport and the member for York South–Weston for their advocacy on this issue from the beginning.

Electrification is a very important issue, and it's a multi-billion-dollar decision. We needed to make sure that we had all the information necessary to get it right, and that's why Metrolinx commissioned a study to look at the possibility of electrifying our entire GO network. The main findings of the study did, in fact, indicate that the highest transportation solution would be realized by electrifying the Lakeshore and the Georgetown South corridors, where the ridership is the highest.

Beginning the process with the air-rail link is the best first step, and we've given Metrolinx the go-ahead to begin the environmental assessment for the air-rail link. This is the first step towards that electrification of the entire system.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary. The member for York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Constituents in Davenport and my own constituents in York South–Weston are glad to know that the EA is moving forward.

I understand, however, that Metrolinx had a board meeting this past Friday where they approved the purchase of the vehicles for the air-rail link. Constituents in my riding of York South–Weston are very concerned that we are moving forward with the purchase of these vehicles when perhaps we don't really need to. They view that as a waste of taxpayers' dollars, especially considering that the province is funding the environmental assessment for the electrification of the air-rail link.

Can the minister explain why the government is moving forward with the purchase of these vehicles?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are committed to having the air-rail link in place in time for the Pan Am Games in 2015. It's a very important part of our commitment on the Pan Am Games. And EAs take time; they're not something that we can rush. You have to go through the process.

As I've said many times in this House, the vehicles that are being purchased are convertible. They will use the highest and cleanest level of diesel, tier 4 diesel, and they will be able to be converted to electric trains when that corridor is completed.

The air-rail link will connect Pearson airport to Union Station. There's a need for this rail link if we're going to be an international city. We need to have this air-rail link in place. The cars are convertible, and I'm very happy to say that we're going to begin the EA on the air-rail link.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you showed just how out of touch you have become when you said that crime is not a priority for Ontario families. You said, "When I talk to Ontarians, their first concern is not keeping people in jail longer...." Tell that to Gravenhurst families who spent the weekend terrified about the escape of Ashley Crawford from Beaver Creek prison. Crawford murdered a woman by setting fire to her. Ontario families are breathing a sigh of relief that he was caught in Toronto today and will be back behind bars. Premier, why are you so disrespectful of Ontario families whose priority is to get tough on crime?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's exactly the opposite, of course, because if you look at the record of this government in terms of its investments to combat crime in the province of Ontario, you will find those investments are very extensive.

The member would know, for instance, that this government has put more than 2,000 additional police officers on Ontario streets; it has established—the first of its kind—a \$51-million guns and gangs strategy and it has invested over \$10 million annually in the highly

successful Toronto anti-violence intervention strategy and provincial anti-violence intervention.

Since 2003, we've been consistent. We have seen some declines as a result of the combination of working together. We're committed to getting tough on crime and have proven it with pieces of legislation that have come into this House and by the resources that we have provided to the policing community out there and the—

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: The Premier says, "Crime is actually going down," but tell that to the Scarborough families who saw one of their neighbours die in a home invasion where police later said the criminals had the wrong home. In Ontario, robberies and home invasions have gone up since Premier McGuinty took office. Cocaine production, trafficking and distribution are up. Trafficking in narcotics like crystal meth is up.

It used to be that Ontario families locked their doors when they left the house; now they lock the doors when they're inside the house. Is the only way Ontario families will see a change in their government's priorities to see a change in government in this province?

1120

Hon. James J. Bradley: Were that to happen, I think the concern of the people of this province would be with the cut, cut, cut, slash-and-burn policies that are being advocated by the party opposite. Those who are concerned about crime in this province would be very apprehensive to have a party assume office that wants to reduce substantially the investments that are being made in the province of Ontario.

We have national forums, for instance, where we get together with other ministers. We have rallied those ministers to urge the federal government to live up to its commitment—and I know that my friend will want to join in this—on additional police to be provided for this province and others.

We have done a lot of things in this province to enhance the opportunity for people to fight crime—

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

STEEL INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. For more than three months, over 900 workers have been locked out at their jobs at US Steel in Hamilton. Ontario workers are tired of seeing their livelihoods threatened by multinational companies that simply don't care. When will this government finally show a little bit of backbone and stand up for Ontario's workers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Applause.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me, I would like to take the opportunity to extend my gratitude to the Premier for allowing me, with this opportunity, to represent the province, and all my colleagues on both sides of the House for their good wishes.

In regard to the member's question, it's incredibly difficult for the workers and their families during this time of extended lockout. I appreciate the concerns that are brought forward. It's never easy.

Our province has been proud of the fact that, over the last seven years, we have been able to enable—over 97% of the time, collective agreements have come to fruition and have settled. I do encourage both sides of the House to participate in the collective agreement. We will have mediators available from the ministry to facilitate, as we always have, and it's—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The lockout at US Steel in Hamilton and the attack on workers' pensions by US Steel is just the latest in a series of strong-arm tactics being used by US Steel to intimidate its workforce. And all of this from a company that accepted \$150 million from the Ontario government in 2006 and made employment commitments, in fact, to the federal government as well, that it admits it hasn't honoured.

Why won't this government say no to the bullying tactics of arrogant multinationals like US Steel and finally stand up for Ontario's workers?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We respect the collective bargaining process. We recognize the difficulties that have been undergone. We reject the approach of labour unrest, and we do our best to try to facilitate workers' rights, as well as that for collective agreements. It's with that in mind that we will continue to make our mediators available.

We recognize that in the years prior, there was tremendous unrest, and that has not been the case here; 97% to almost 99% of the time now, settlements have been resolved, and we will continue to try to facilitate that whenever possible.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Minister, Bill 21, the Retirement Homes Act, passed in June. The government says this is an important piece of legislation that, for the first time in Ontario, provides strong protections for seniors. But, Minister, it's February and the province is still not regulating retirement homes in the province. In Willowdale, my constituents tell me they've heard that retirement homes will be regulated at some point, but they don't know when.

Minister, when will the act come into force? When are we getting on with it? Seniors and their families in Willowdale and in Ontario want to know.

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you to the member from Willowdale for this very important question. It gives me an opportunity to share with the House where we are in the process. For the first time in the province of Ontario, we will be providing strong protections for our seniors who live in retirement homes. In fact, we have about 700 retirement homes in the province of Ontario,

and there are about 40,000 seniors who live in these retirement homes.

Today is an important day in the process. Today the first set of proposed regulations for the Retirement Homes Act will be posted on our website for public comment, and that means for the next 45 days the public is asked to go on our website and comment on the proposed regulations. These proposed regulations were developed with extensive consultation with seniors' groups, the experts and industry partners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: We all know that regulations are a key part of this act. People are going to carefully review them to make sure that they provide strong protections for retirement home seniors. The fundamental principle of the act goes to the heart of values that we in this Legislature all share. Seniors have a right to live in safety, security and autonomy. They have a right to make informed decisions about their own care.

Minister, can you give my constituents in Willowdale and the people of Ontario some details about how the regulations are going to work? How are they going to protect seniors in retirement homes? How will they implement the core principles of this act?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Again, I would like to reiterate that these regulations are a key milestone to the Retirement Homes Act. They are an important part of our plan to provide strong protections for seniors who are living in retirement homes. The proposed regulations cover a range of very important areas, including care and safety standards, licensing and inspections, as well as enforcement, of retirement homes. There are also requirements for every regulated care service—that means from assistance with bathing to feeding to food preparation and storage of medication. There are also regulations that support the safety of residents, which include written policies promoting zero tolerance of abuse and neglect and requirements around trust accounts based on behalf of the residents.

Regulating retirement homes in the province of Ontario is the right thing to do, and we are on track.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Attorney General. Minister, industry reports show that auto insurance fraud in Ontario costs \$1.3 billion a year. Media reports expose a growing problem with “target and bullet” schemes, where innocent drivers are targeted by insurance fraudsters. But the province has a catch-and-release policy when it comes to prosecutions of insurance fraud. In many cases, despite charges being laid, the fraudsters don't get to trial because of unreasonable delays. Minister, why is crime not a priority with your government?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Nothing could be further from the facts, as the comments and as the programs that my colleague the Minister of Community Safety outlined earlier clearly illustrate.

Fraud is a very big challenge, particularly in the auto industry—and I'm not sure why the party opposite didn't do anything about it while they were there for eight years.

We've taken a number of additional steps. We're working with the insurance agencies, working with crown prosecutors and the police to see what additional steps we can take to go after fraud within the industry. We have programs in place to make sure our prosecutions proceed as quickly as possible, unlike the party opposite. We are putting additional resources available to prosecute these and other crimes, unlike the—

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

Mr. Norm Miller: Premier McGuinty has admitted that crime is not a priority for him or your government. Last week in Brampton, he said that being tough on crime was no longer a priority for Ontario families.

Documented cases from the industry's own investigative branch show that charges are being laid. But that's only half of the equation. When these matters get to trial, they are not treated seriously. Cases are withdrawn, trials are stayed, and when a sentence is handed down, quite frankly, sentencing is a bit of a joke.

1130

Minister, why is your government's incompetence forcing Ontario families to pay more for auto insurance premiums?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Let's look at a few of the facts. The party opposite talks about crime and does nothing about it. They launch a program to invest in police officers that's time-limited; we have to pick it up, make it permanent and add 1,000 to it. They're all talk, no action.

They talk about delays in the courts. For every single year they were in power, the time it takes the average case went up. It's now going down. They had no plan, no say, no nothing.

They talk about being tough on crime. This Premier, this government, asked the federal government to end the two-for-one, three-for-one credit. They didn't do it. We asked the federal government; we got those changes. We asked for more mandatory minimums; we got those changes.

They're all talk, no action. If they've got a plan, let's see it, because we're still waiting.

DISCLOSURE OF TOXINS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, we learned last week through the Toronto Star that a number of people, and I would say in the thousands of people, were affected by Agent Orange that was dispersed by companies under direction from the Ministry of Natural Resources. How could it be in a modern democracy like ours that the public was not informed when it was found out that this Agent Orange led to cancer?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm very glad to have the opportunity to address this issue, and I'm pleased that the member from Timmins–James Bay has asked the question.

I'm very concerned about this issue, and I can assure members that I'm committed to obtaining all the facts and sharing the information in an open and transparent fashion, and protecting public health.

Our government is taking steps to address the situation, and my office has taken a number of actions already. I brought the issue to the attention of the chief medical officer of health last week, who informed my office that there is no immediate public health risk.

I've asked the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to establish a dedicated phone line for anyone who may have questions. This line was operational as of last Friday. I've also instructed staff from all ministry districts to post information on MNR's website regarding herbicide use during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, as well as steps for former employees or employees of private forestry companies should they have any concerns and where they can take them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, the issue is this: In our democracy, in the 1970s, when the Ministry of Natural Resources learned that the toxic chemical they were using, Agent Orange, led to cancer, how could it be that the public was not informed? There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of people that were affected and never got treatment because they had no way of knowing that their exposure to Agent Orange led to the cancer they got. I've already started to receive the emails, as you have, because we're c.c.'d on them, in regard to families that have been affected.

My question to you is, how could it be that the Ministry of Natural Resources didn't make this information public as soon as they found out in the 1970s?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: As I stated earlier, I am very concerned about this issue, and I realize that it is certainly a worrying subject for many families in northern Ontario.

We can't change what happened 30 to 50 years ago, but I can assure you that our government is taking steps to ensure that the issue is addressed. Last week, I instructed my ministry to take immediate steps to gather as much information as possible on this herbicide. Unfortunately, much of this information predates our electronic records, so it may take a little time to assemble and evaluate paper records.

I can tell you that MNR stopped using this particular herbicide in 1979, six years before it was banned in 1985. I can assure you that this herbicide is no longer in current use in Ontario. While exposure to 2,4,5-T happened more than 30 years ago, people's health concerns need to be addressed right now.

I take this matter very seriously, and we're going to continue to collect information and make sure it's available to the public.

PREMIER'S ATTENDANCE

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Standing order 1(b)(iii) states that the purpose of the standing orders is to ensure that proceedings are conducted in a manner that respects the democratic rights of members "to hold the government accountable for its policies."

I call your attention to subsection 7(1) of the Executive Council Act, which states: "Every minister of the crown is required to attend in the chamber during the period set aside for oral questions on at least two thirds of the days on which the House holds routine proceedings."

This morning, media reported Premier McGuinty no longer feels the need to show up for work. He will be in contravention of a lawful order of this House and will prevent the opposition from holding the government accountable for its policies. This contravention is especially grievous as this is the last session of the House and the last question periods before the dissolution of Parliament and the next general election.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to point out to the House that we passed the law—we passed the law—requiring ministers to be in question period at least two thirds of the time. We did this because the Conservative government didn't show up. We would like to point out that in the spring of 2003, Premier Ernie Eves only showed up for 33% of question period, and in the last session of the Legislature, Premier Mike Harris only showed up for 34% of that time. We now publish attendance records, and every minister in this government has attended at least two thirds of question periods to date.

I believe that this is not a point of order, and I believe that we shouldn't even be discussing this at this time.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. The New Democrats find it regrettable that a legitimate concern raised by the official opposition House leader is reduced to partisan bickering by the government in their response.

The next few months are going to be precious months here in the chamber. It's going to be scarce time before a provincial election. With respect, it's my submission on behalf of New Democrats to you that the Speaker should call upon the government to abide not only with the letter of the law but with the clear spirit of the law and that scofflaw ministers, including a Premier who would rather do election campaigning across the province than attend question period, should be reined in.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the government House leader and the member from Welland for their comments relating to the point of order that was raised.

Particularly, the member referenced section 1(b) of the standing orders and 7(1) of the Executive Council Act. It is for me to inform the House, as Speaker, that the Speaker does not have the authority to enforce the Executive Council Act. That authority is not vested within the

Speaker. I would also remind the honourable member that there is nothing contained within our standing orders that compels a member to attend this House.

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

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Good afternoon to everyone. As part of Black History Month, I would like to introduce the following guests—they're not in here, but they're in the Legislature today for an event being held by the Canadian Black Caucus. They are students from Westview collegiate, Cedarbrae Collegiate, Pierre Laporte Middle School, Kane Middle School, Glen Ames middle school, Silver Springs Public School, Georges Vanier Secondary School, Fairbank Middle School, Rockcliffe Middle School and Clinton public school.

I would also like to introduce the president of the Canadian Black Caucus, Ms. Gwyn Chapman, along with the sponsors and presenters who are here with us today.

Also, I take this opportunity to introduce and acknowledge some other guests who are joining us in the Legislature this afternoon, including Ms. Ida Fogo and her son Mr. Brian Fogo, and members of the Black Creek communities of Jane and Finch, represented by my colleague Mario Sergio.

I'm really pleased to acknowledge all who are here today, and I look forward to seeing them in the Legislature again.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: This morning, Ontario's grain and oilseed farmers held a breakfast here at Queen's Park to deliver a message: They need a permanent business risk management program.

This program was introduced as a pilot for three years, and it worked. Farmers demonstrated their support for the program by participating even when prices were good to ensure that the program would be there when they needed it.

Now the McGuinty government claims they can't continue the program without federal assistance. They said the same thing last year, then extended the program halfway through the summer.

Today we are in the same position as we were a year ago. Once again, our grain and oilseed farmers are being asked to plant without knowing whether there's a program to count on.

They asked for a program that was predictable and bankable; if they are forced to beg the government each

year for an extension, it isn't either. Bankers won't approve an operating line of credit based on the hope that the government will be forced to do the right thing.

We believe that the grain and oilseed business risk management program should be made permanent so our farmers can depend on it. Tim Hudak has committed that, if elected, a PC government would work with Ontario farm leaders to develop a risk management program based on the cost of production for all sectors.

Farmers have consistently told the government that a made-in-Ontario business risk management program can succeed. The Ontario government needs to show leadership and do what is right for Ontario farmers.

KINDNESS WEEK

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome everybody back to the Legislature for the 2011 edition of Queen's Park.

I again rise to recognize Kindness Week in Ontario. As you may recall, this Legislature unanimously passed a motion recognizing Family Day week as Kindness Week in Ontario, an initiative that was started in Ottawa through the leadership of Ottawa's very own Rabbi Reuven Bulka, a great friend who started this campaign to just remind people that we should be kind to each other. We are often taught that we have to be kind to our family and friends, but I think it's our civic duty that we be kind to strangers as well, and this week just makes it easier to do those random acts of kindness.

Today I was pleased to join MPP Elizabeth Witmer from Kitchener-Waterloo and MPP France Gélinas from Nickel Belt to give out Kindness Week kits to all the members, the media, staff and the friends who are visiting Queen's Park. Those kindness kits included the cookies which a lot of you enjoyed. I want to thank Tim Hortons for sponsoring and providing those cookies, as well. It's just another simple way of reminding you to offer kindness to others.

Also, thanks to your support, Speaker, we're doing a book drive at Queen's Park during this week. Books collected in your office will be donated to the Ontario Literacy Coalition. I encourage all members and staff: If you have any extra books, please bring them to the Speaker's office and donate for families who need books.

COYOTES

Mr. Bill Murdoch: They resemble small wolves but are stronger than the average-sized dog. They are cunning and stealthy, and they roam and hunt mainly at night. To some people they are cute and playful animals, but in rural Ontario they are nothing but trouble.

I have hundreds of signed petitions, some from farmers who have first-hand experience with coyote attacks and others who have lost pets and feel under threat by this brazen animal. Sheep farmers, cattle farmers: All of them are losing animals and hundreds, if not thousands, of income dollars due to the kills. As

many as 6,000 lambs and sheep alone are killed by coyotes on Ontario farms every year, according to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Obviously, we in rural Ontario are in a crisis.

I'm proposing a province-wide coyote bounty. Furthermore, I'm also proposing that the province allow counties to implement their own proof-of-kill collection system. County offices should be coordinating verification and will have to properly dispose of the evidence.

This is right now the only solution for the predator crisis because whatever else has been done up until now has failed. The coyote problem has only gotten uglier. Farmers themselves have tried numerous other methods of getting rid of the coyotes. The bureaucrats have tried their own eradication policies with trapping and hunting but to no avail.

My biggest concern now is that a coyote will start targeting small children because its food supply—namely rodents, rabbits and groundhogs—is running dry.

My bounty proposal has the support of farmers and farmer groups such as Middlesex southwestern sheep producers and municipalities such as Kincardine and Chatsworth.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Today I rise to commemorate Black History Month. Every year during the month of February we celebrate the achievements of Canadians of African descent and the contributions they have made towards building a stronger, more united Canada.

Black History Month began in the United States in 1926 as Negro History Week. Its initial purpose was to raise awareness of the African experience and to educate people about the rich culture and diversity of the African diaspora.

The advent of black emancipation in the United States helped Canadian Afrocentric organizations to champion the importance of the history of the black community.

Through the efforts of organizations such as the Ontario Black History Society and the Canadian Negro Women's Association, Toronto became the first municipality in our country to celebrate Black History Month in February 1979.

In 1995, the member of Parliament for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Dr. Jean Augustine, introduced a motion in the House of Commons to declare February Black History Month. It was passed unanimously by the House on December 5, 1995, and the first Canadian declaration of Black History Month began in February 1996.

Please join me in welcoming our distinguished guests from the African-Canadian community who are here today. Some are in the Legislature; some are in some of the other rooms. We're all here together to celebrate the political, social and economic contributions that all Canadians of African descent have made towards the betterment of our province and of our country.

PEYTON AND TAYLOR HORNING

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to rise today to recognize two incredible girls from the village of Merrickville in my riding of Leeds–Grenville. Twelve-year-old Taylor Horning and her 10-year-old sister Peyton are proof that you can make a difference in this world at any age.

The girls were devastated last year when they saw images of the environmental damage caused by the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. What happened to the wildlife on the US gulf coast stirred something inside of them. Although it happened far from home, they felt compelled to do what they could to help.

So while many other kids relaxed during the summer, Taylor and Peyton worked tirelessly on their mission. They collected hair and fur from 26 hair salons and pet groomers in three cities. I'm proud to say that the girls collected an amazing 1,000 pounds of hair and fur that were made into hair booms used to soak up the oil.

Taylor and Peyton have set a fine example to others their age that if children have a commitment and dedication, they can get things done. But I'm not the only politician who's taking notice of these outstanding young agents of environmental change. Just prior to Christmas, the girls were delighted to receive a presidential environmental youth award from US President Obama.

I'm sure everyone in this House will join me today in applauding Taylor and Peyton Horning. Girls, I can't wait to see what you do next.

1510

THREE KINGS DAY

Mr. Mario Sergio: It is with pride that I congratulate hard-working and dedicated constituents like Henry Samuel from my riding of York West. For the past six years, the United Dominican Canadian Cultural Club and its president, Mr. Henry Samuel, have been reaching out to the youth in our community by organizing the Three Kings event held at our own York Woods Theatre every January 6.

According to tradition, the three wise men brought gifts to baby Jesus on January 6. Many Latin American countries continue to celebrate this offering by leaving gifts under their children's beds on the night of January 5 for them to discover on the following morning.

The United Dominican Canadian Cultural Club has been fundamental in keeping this tradition alive in our community with the annual Three Kings event, spending months preparing and collecting donations from all over the city for this one very special celebration.

Some 500 kids attended the Three Kings event, where each child receives a toy and is delighted by clowns and a guest appearance from the three wise men, as well as from their favourite cartoon characters.

I would like to thank Henry Samuel and the United Dominican Canadian Cultural Club for their relentless dedication and generosity to children, their good citizen-

ship and their leadership throughout our York West community.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Recently, Cliffs Natural Resources, the mining company interested in developing the chromite deposits in the Ring of Fire region 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, released their study dealing with some of the mining issues, the transportation issues and the smelter refinery issues. What got people's attention was Cliffs's opinion that a smelter refinery located in Ontario would be unlikely because Ontario's hydro electricity rates are too high. Since then, the McGuinty Liberals have issued press release after press release in an attempt to discredit Cliffs Natural Resources' comments.

Here is the history: Last year, Xstrata closed their copper refinery in Timmins. They're going to continue to take the ore out of the ground in Timmins, but now they're going to ship it to Quebec to have it smelted there, and about 2,000 good jobs are going to follow. Why did they do that? Because they're paying \$70 million a year for electricity in Ontario and they can pay only \$35 million in Quebec.

Four and a half years ago, what was then Inco closed their copper refinery in Sudbury. Today, they still take the ore out of the ground in Sudbury, but they ship it to Quebec to smelt it there at half the cost. That's exactly what is happening with Cliffs Natural Resources. If they move to Manitoba or Quebec, they'll pay half the cost of refining the metal.

There's a real problem, a real issue, with hydro rates in Ontario.

JANE STREET HUB

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to rise in the House today and share that the Jane Street Hub in York-South Weston officially opened its doors last January 20. Located at Jane and Trethewey, the Jane Street Hub is a one-stop centre for health and social services, with six different agencies operating and partnering under one roof. The community was especially pleased to have Minister Matthews there for the celebration, participating in opening day events, including joining a drumming class for a little performance.

The hub is home to Unison Health and Community Services, COSTI, Macaulay Child Development Centre, Midaynta Community Services, North York Community House and Yorktown family centre.

Funded by the provincial government and the United Way, the hub is one of eight similar centres serving Toronto's high-priority neighbourhoods. A tremendous necessity in York South-Weston, the Jane Street Hub will play a vital role in increasing access to much-needed services, and joins recent health care investments in the riding of York South-Weston by the provincial government, including a new MRI at the Humber River Regional Hospital, two new family health teams and a new

nurse practitioner-led clinic set to open at Keele and Eglinton. These new services are all widely welcomed by our community.

CAROLYN BROWN AND DAVID NEWPORT

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm honoured to rise today to speak about two distinguished members of the medical community in Peterborough. Dr. Carolyn Brown and Dr. David Newport were honoured on December 1, 2010, at an event hosted by the Patients Association of Canada and the Ontario Medical Association as winners of the Patients' Choice Awards.

Dr. Brown and Dr. Newport are members of the Peterborough Clinic family health team and were nominated for this award by their patients. The patients of these two doctors wanted to acknowledge in a public way how much they appreciate the good care they received when under their care.

The Patients' Choice Award is a patient-led celebration that recognizes a positive impact that a doctor has in the lives of their patients.

The president of the OMA, Dr. Mark MacLeod, said: "On behalf of Ontario's doctors, I want to congratulate Drs. Brown and Newport on being chosen to receive this award.... We hope more patients will come forward and share the positive impact their doctors have had on their experience in the health care system."

It's a pleasure to recognize Dr. Carolyn Brown and Dr. David Newport for winning the Patients' Choice Award. They are to be commended for their commitment to their patients and the health care profession.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Timmins-James Bay has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer given to his question by the Minister of Natural Resources concerning Agent Orange. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Murdoch assumes ballot item number 68 and Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item number 77.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the following reports were tabled: on December 23, 2010, the 2009 annual report entitled Public Health: Everyone's Business, from the chief medical officer of health; and on December 21,

2010, from the Ombudsman, a special report entitled Investigation into the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Monitoring of Long-Term-Care Homes.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION LABOUR DISPUTES RESOLUTION ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 SUR LE RÈGLEMENT DES CONFLITS DE TRAVAIL À LA COMMISSION DE TRANSPORT DE TORONTO

Mr. Sousa moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 150, An Act to provide for the resolution of labour disputes involving the Toronto Transit Commission / Projet de loi 150, Loi prévoyant le règlement des conflits de travail à la Commission de transport de Toronto.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: On division.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Carried on division.

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 64 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee membership.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following

committees: on the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Fonseca replaces Mr. Brownell; on the Standing Committee on General Government, Mr. Brownell replaces Ms. Jaczek; and on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Ms. Jaczek replaces Mr. Sousa.

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Hon. Charles Sousa: I rise in the House to propose legislation that is being introduced to address the unique and specific transit needs of the city of Toronto. As members of this House know, on December 16, 2010, Toronto city council made a request during a motion, asking that the province designate public transit in Toronto an essential service.

Our government respects the right of the city council of Toronto to speak for the people of that city. Our response to the city of Toronto's request takes into consideration the city's concern regarding the unique circumstances of Toronto and its transit system. These circumstances include the critical role the TTC plays in the life of the city of Toronto and, indeed, in ensuring the health and safety of its people.

1520

This bill, the Toronto Transit Commission Labour Disputes Resolution Act, 2011, would prohibit strikes and lockouts at the TTC. As a general matter, Ontario's Labour Relations Act would continue to apply to labour relations between these parties. However, in cases where the parties reach an impasse in collective bargaining, outstanding issues would be resolved through a fair and neutral third-party process: binding-interest arbitration.

This proposed legislation addresses a truly unique circumstance. Toronto is Ontario's and Canada's largest city. The TTC is also this country's largest transit system.

Every business day, approximately 1.5 million people ride on and rely on the TTC. There's the health care worker who rides the system to get to their job at a hospital or nursing home. There are the students and teachers who take it to school. There are the parents who rely on the TTC to get to work and provide for their kids. There are those, including many elderly Torontonians, who don't have cars and take the TTC to medical appointments. There are the young people who use the TTC for a safe ride home. Tourists who visit our attractions depend on public transit. There are thousands of riders who can't afford the time and money to drive and park downtown, if that parking is even available during a TTC work stoppage.

We know that the fewer the number of cars on our roads, the better it is for our environment and our air quality. The TTC helps keep cars off the road and reduces air pollution that our children and elderly breathe. We've seen the packed roads and the major disruptions caused in Toronto when it has been brought to a near standstill by TTC work stoppages.

The city of Toronto has the largest concentration of hospitals, nursing homes and health care facilities in the province. There are 40 hospitals, 84 long-term-care homes and 21 community care centres in the greater Toronto area, as well as many retirement homes. Many of those who staff these facilities get to work every day by public transit.

It is clear that, for the city of Toronto, any loss of public transit, relied upon by 1.5 million on a normal business day, is much more than just an inconvenience. To get an idea of the scale of TTC's operations, on the average business day, it moves the same number of people that live in Hamilton, Kitchener, London, Sudbury and Windsor combined. When we think of the number of people affected by TTC work stoppages, we can also understand the city of Toronto's concern about the economic impact work stoppages have.

We know from past experience that work disruptions on the TTC severely affect the city's economy, and we know the importance Toronto has in the province's economy. Work stoppages at the TTC, according to a city of Toronto staff report issued in 2008, have an estimated economic impact of \$50 million every workday. The impact of TTC service disruptions would send economic and environmental shockwaves across this province.

Five times since 1974, the provincial government has enacted legislation to end or prevent a TTC work stoppage, most recently in April 2008. That legislation testifies to the vital, unique and critical role the TTC plays in the lives of Torontonians.

Our government firmly believes in the right of collective bargaining and that the best collective agreements are those reached at the bargaining table. This proposed legislation would not take away or limit the right to bargain, and even when bargaining reaches difficult stages, our professional mediators are available to assist the parties to reach an agreement. This bill would only prohibit strikes and lockouts. This bill would provide a fair and neutral means to resolve bargaining impasses—binding arbitration—the same basic means of resolving impasses used by our police, firefighters and hospital workers.

The people of the city of Toronto are in the best position to determine how vital the TTC is to their lives. Their elected representatives have made this request to the province. We have carefully considered the request and consulted with the city, the TTC and its bargaining agents, and after carefully reviewing the request, the reasons for it and the reality of the circumstances, we are responding in a way that is fair and measured.

This is not about taking sides. It is about acting in response to the city of Toronto's request. It is about

looking out for the people of Toronto, and that includes looking out for their health and safety. It's about listening to the people of Toronto and their concern about the ability of their city to function effectively if they are left without their transit system.

It's only fair and reasonable that the TTC and its unions know the rules that will apply in setting these agreements if they reach an impasse in bargaining. With our proposed legislation, the parties would have a stable means of settling unresolved collective bargaining issues and the public would benefit from uninterrupted access to vital TTC services.

With this bill, this Legislature would no longer have to resort to ad hoc back-to-work legislation in order to resolve TTC labour disputes while the people of Ontario's largest city are left stranded without their transit system. Fostering stable labour relations and uninterrupted provisions of services by the TTC reinforces our government's key priorities of public health, the environment and green economic growth.

A report prepared by the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 113, in 2008, estimated that without TTC services, there would be over 178,000 additional cars on the road in Toronto and about 350,000 new car trips on any business day. That's a lot of added pollution. That is an impact the people of Toronto can understandably ask to be protected from.

The city of Toronto motion requesting this legislation asked as well that a mandatory review of the legislation take place after five years. They've requested it, so our bill calls for such a review to take place within one year of the fifth anniversary of its coming into force.

Again, this legislation comes in response to the city council of Toronto motion to prohibit strikes and lockouts at the TTC. We have carefully considered their request. We have consulted with the city, the TTC and its unions, and we have listened to the people of Ontario's largest city say that they need the largest transit system in Ontario to function without interruption. We have listened and we have acted responsibly in introducing this bill.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Today I am pleased to rise in the Ontario Legislature as a proud Canadian and as a person of African descent on this first day of the spring session in the month of February, Black History Month.

I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guests, friends and the young people who have joined us in the Legislature today. Indeed, it is a great honour for me to address the Ontario Legislature in this regard for the third consecutive year.

I am particularly pleased to speak on Black History Month in this year 2011, the year which has been designated by the United Nations as the International Year for People of African Descent. This designation aims to strengthen the economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights of people of African heritage; to increase

our participation and integration in all aspects of the social fabric of our society; and to promote a greater knowledge of and respect for our diverse heritage and culture.

This year is an important milestone for this annual recognition of black history and culture; 2011 also marks the 15th anniversary of the national declaration of Black History Month in Canada. It is certainly apropos at this time to recognize the Honourable Jean Augustine, the first black woman elected to the Parliament of Canada, who built on the legacy of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, also known as the father of black history. Dr. Augustine introduced a motion in the House of Commons officially recognizing February as Black History Month in Canada.

1530

I congratulate the many organizations, including the Ontario Black History Society and its president, Mrs. Rosemary Sadlier, for their work in keeping alive the history, the struggle, the successes and the culture of a people: people of African descent.

The month of February is not only Black History Month; it is also Heart Month. Accordingly, I take this opportunity to call attention to the fact that people of African descent are at high risk for heart disease. Risk factors include unhealthy weight, obesity, physical inactivity and smoking. In this Black History Month, I call upon persons of African descent to make important lifestyle changes to reduce their risk of heart disease by engaging in physical activities, eating healthy foods and living a smoke-free life.

Each and every one of us has a role to play in how we are remembered on the pages of history, and of course, African Canadians have a proud history. We contributed to building a stronger, healthier and more prosperous province for all Ontarians. While history most often recognizes the great successes among us, African-Canadian builders are everyday people: the volunteers, the teachers, the parents, the young people, elders and men and women who are the fabric of Canadian society; individuals who are the very cornerstone of our society; individuals whose contributions to our society are numerous; individuals whose names are not written on the pages of history, but indeed, these individuals are certainly building blocks in the foundation of our great province. These are the individuals on whose shoulders we stand, people like me and others: the role models who have moved us, moulded us, sacrificed for us and indeed, the individuals who shaped our history and changed our world.

In celebrating our past, let us not forget the battles we have fought seeking peace and harmony for ourselves and our children. Of course, we know our children are indeed our future, and today I had the opportunity to address students visiting the Ontario Legislature. Again, I take this opportunity to welcome them here. This is a very diverse group of students, I might add, standing together today in this Legislature in recognition of Black History Month.

I certainly look forward to a future that embodies a society where opportunity and equality for all exists for

everyone. In the words of one of the greatest black leaders of all time, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice."

I am indeed pleased to stand in this Ontario Legislature as a member of the African-Canadian community, but also as an Ontarian, a Canadian and a member of one race, the human race, as I ask all members of the Ontario Legislature to join me in recognizing February as Black History Month and 2011 as the Year for People of African Descent. Together we can work towards the day when African Canadians will stand side by side as elected members of this Legislature and elsewhere in every sector of our society.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to thank the new Minister of Labour for bringing forward this legislation. However, as we have seen time and time again, this Liberal government has shown a disregard for the parliamentary process. Once again, opposition parties were not given a copy of this bill until just a few short minutes ago.

If the media is to be believed, the government would like to pass this bill quickly. If that is indeed the case, I think it would behoove them to abide by our long-standing parliamentary traditions and inform the opposition parties of forthcoming legislation. However, this new minister appears to be following in his predecessor's footsteps.

It is important that the Legislature respect the request from the mayor of Toronto that the TTC be designated as an essential service. The people of Toronto depend on the TTC to get to and from work every single day, to make a living for themselves and their families. This was a platform issue for the mayor in the recent election, and clearly, it resonated with the people of Toronto. Thus, it is our responsibility to respect the mandate that he was given.

When the member for Don Valley East brought forward his private member's bill on this same issue last year, the PC caucus supported it on second reading because we believed that it was a debate worth having. This is further underscored by Mayor Rob Ford's request that this Legislature examine the issue.

For seven years, this government has demonstrated that it will take the side of organized labour and union influence over and above the desires of regular hard-working families in the province of Ontario. However, once again, they are backtracking and proving their lack of conviction, this time showing that not even their friends in organized labour can trust them.

The Minister of Finance pledged to freeze the wages of unionized government workers, but that promise was broken. The previous Minister of Labour ignored this issue, despite a disruptive and expensive strike in 2008. It is appalling that this Legislature has ignored such an

important issue for the last seven years. Rather than examining this issue, the Premier has focused priorities on issues such as banning plastic bags and chocolate milk.

I'm looking forward, and the PC caucus is looking forward, to examining this bill and participating in a full debate in this House on the merits of this legislation.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Ted Arnott: Why do we recognize February as Black History Month? I want to quote Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, president of the Ontario Black History Society, who has an eloquent reply. "African-Canadian students need to feel affirmed; need to be aware of the contributions made by other Blacks in Canada; need to have role models; need to understand the social forces which have shaped and influenced their community and their identities as a means of feeling connected to the educational experience and their life experience in various regions in Canada."

I absolutely agree that role models and mentoring generally contribute to healthy and cohesive communities. Role models help students feel connected to their communities, and in the case of African-Canadian students, they will find role models throughout our history and in places throughout Ontario and Canada.

In Glen Allan, in Wellington county, the Queen's Bush settlement was once home to 2,000 black settlers in the 1800s. That's where, along with the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, I attended an Ontario Heritage Trust ceremony in the summer of 2008. A man approached me that day: August 1, he told me, should be recognized as Emancipation Day in Ontario, an idea long championed by Rosemary Sadlier and the Ontario Black History Society. I agree.

I then approached the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, and we agreed to co-sponsor a bill to proclaim Emancipation Day. I then went to work lobbying the Premier and other members of cabinet. This was the first bill ever presented in the House by two MPPs from different political parties sponsored jointly. Thanks to the Legislature, one of the most significant milestones of black history in the British Empire is now enshrined in law.

So we find good reason to celebrate February as Black History Month. It's a chance for all of us to join African Canadians in celebrating their valued contributions throughout our nation's history. Some of those contributions were highlighted in a recent editorial in the Georgetown Independent and Free Press, and I urge all members to read it. On CBC Radio, Diana Braithwaite has done a fabulous job this month of highlighting many more stories of Ontario black history. And of course, Rosemary Sadlier and the Ontario Black History Society continue to do their outstanding work.

On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the entire Ontario PC caucus, please accept our warmest congratulations for another successful Black History Month.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure as leader of Ontario's New Democrats to speak to the minister's statement on Black History Month. New Democrats, of course, join in the celebration of Black History Month. This is a month in which we acknowledge the rich history and traditions of the African-Canadian community. We recognize the many varied contributions that the African-Canadian community has made and continues to make to enrich the social, the cultural and the political life of Ontario.

1540

This is a celebration that has a long history in our province. It grew out of Negro History Week, established in 1926 in the United States by Carter G. Woodson, a black educator and publisher from Virginia. The month of February was initially chosen because it contains the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Black History Month allows African Canadians, particularly African-Canadian youth, to have an opportunity to affirm and celebrate their roots and history in North America, but to do that specifically with pride: to celebrate heroes, certainly, and role models and understand the social and political forces that have shaped their community. I too want to celebrate the fact that young people came to this Legislature today for Black History Month. I unfortunately didn't get a chance to pop in, but I know that they were up in room 228 doing some very positive work today, and I think that's a very important piece of today's celebration.

It's also an opportunity, though, for the larger community to learn of the history and contributions made by blacks to Canada and to Canadian history and to how our community itself, as a result, has evolved. It's a rich history that stretches back to long before Confederation, to the earliest days of colonists on this continent, and it deserves, definitely, celebration, but also commemoration.

But while we do that, while we celebrate, we must also use this month to take stock of where we actually are today. No person of good faith would argue that we don't still see ongoing issues of racism and injustice in education and employment; in terms of the justice system already and the unfair treatment of black men in particular in that system. It's a real, serious problem that we still have to grapple with here in this province. Although Black History Month is an opportunity to celebrate the victories and the distance that we've come, I think it's a lost opportunity if we don't acknowledge the racism that continues to exist in our society.

So we still, unfortunately, have some distance to travel on the road to true freedom and true equality in Ontario. It's incumbent upon us, therefore, at this point in time, during Black History Month, to rededicate ourselves to moving Ontario to that destination where there is equality, where there is freedom, where there is opportunity and justice for African Canadians. We don't have that right now, and we need to get there. In our cele-

bration, let's also remember that we need to reach that destination.

I just want to end by saying that we certainly do value the sacrifices made by all kinds of untold women and men over the years, over the decades, who gave us so much and who gave so much for their families, for their communities and ultimately to all of us. Thank you.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Mr. Peter Kormos: The most fundamental right in any free and democratic society is the right of a working woman or man to withdraw their labour. If they don't have that right, they are no longer free and they no longer live in a democracy. That's why New Democrats will not be party to this apparent joint action between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party to prohibit TTC workers their right to withdraw their labour in the course of a dispute, in the course of contract negotiations.

Since the 1940s and 1950s and Justice Rand and his report, there's been a remarkable maturation of labour relations and labour relations structure here in the province of Ontario and throughout most of the civilized world. We, as a Legislature, should be nurturing that sophisticated process. We should be supporting it, encouraging parties to labour disputes to negotiate in good-faith bargaining, because a negotiated settlement, a negotiated resolution, a negotiated solution is far more likely to be complied with voluntarily, without coercion, without threats by both parties to an agreement, and serves the public better. The experience with arbitrated settlements has inevitably been that they are higher and the taxpayer pays. They produce settlements that aren't the result of collaboration and negotiation, which this bill is the negation of.

PETITIONS

RURAL AND NORTHERN SCHOOLS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to save rural and northern schools in Ontario, and it's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas rural and northern schools are an important part of Ontario; and

"Whereas rural and northern schools are widely recognized for their high educational standards and intimate learning experience; and

"Whereas the frameworks of rural and northern schools are different from large urban schools and therefore deserve to be governed by a separate rural and northern school policy; and

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

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty found \$12 million to keep swimming pools open in Toronto schools but hasn't found any money to keep rural and northern schools open in Ontario;

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

"That Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Minister of Education support the citizens of rural and northern Ontario and suspend all accommodation reviews until the province develops a rural and northern school policy that recognizes the values of these schools in their communities."

I've signed this.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Paul Miller: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

"Be it resolved that Dalton McGuinty immediately exempt electricity from the harmonized sales tax (HST)."

I agree with the petition and will sign my name to it.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition that contains over 2,200 signatures of concerned citizens from the township of Russell, delivered to me at my constituency office on last December 14 by the former mayor of Russell township, Roger Pharand. I understand their concern and why they are worried.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned residents of the united counties of Prescott and Russell in the province of Ontario, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

"Whereas the petitioners have serious grievances with the proposed development by Taggart Miller Environmental Services, proponents of the Capital Region Resource Recovery Centre (CRRRC) planned for the old Russell shale pit and surrounding properties between Eadie Road and North Russell Road, between routes 100 and 200 in the township of Russell;

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

"To take action to cause an absolute cease and desist order for this proposed CRRRC development by Taggart Miller Environmental Services on this site of the old Russell shale pit and surrounding properties in the township of Russell in the province of Ontario."

I give that to Nicolas to take over to the Clerk.

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to save Duntroon Central Public School and all other rural schools in Clearview township:

“Whereas Duntroon Central Public School is an important part of Clearview township and the surrounding area; and

“Whereas Duntroon Central Public School is widely recognized for its high educational standards and intimate learning experience; and

“Whereas the frameworks of rural schools are different from urban schools and therefore deserve to be governed by a separate rural school policy; and

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

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty found \$12 million to keep swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn’t found any money to keep rural schools open in Simcoe–Grey;

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

“That Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Minister of Education support the citizens of Clearview township and suspend the Simcoe County District School Board ARC 2010:01 until the province develops a rural school policy that recognizes the value of schools in the rural communities of Ontario.”

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition containing 4,500 names that were gathered by Mr. Bill Scott from Friends of the Memorial as well as John from Friendly to Seniors, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the continued and projected need for long-term-care facilities in our community is having serious adverse effects on Sudbury Regional Hospital emergency departments and acute care services due to the ALC (alternate level of care) patients at this facility; and

1550

“Whereas the North East Local Health Integration Network alternate/appropriate level of care steering group recommended the Memorial site transitional care unit remain open until 2013; and

“Whereas the mayor and council’s seniors’ advisory panel passed a motion that the Memorial site transitional care unit remain open and accept all alternate-level-of-care patients currently at the Sudbury Regional Hospital site;

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

“To instruct the provincial authorities involved, including the North East Local Health Integration Network, the North East Community Care Access Centre and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, to reverse the decision to close on March 31, 2011, and maintain the operation of the Memorial site transitional care unit until such time as suitable and sustainable alternate-level-of-care accommodations are made available.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it, and ask page Nicolas to bring it to the clerks’ table.

PARAMEDICS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I present this on behalf of the constituents of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex who have signed this, as well as the family of Paul Patterson.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas paramedics play a vital role in protecting the health and safety of Ontarians; and

“Whereas paramedics often put their own health and safety at risk, going above and beyond their duty in serving Ontarians; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario annually recognizes police officers and firefighters with awards for bravery; and

“Whereas currently no award for paramedic bravery is awarded by the government of Ontario; and

“Whereas Ontario paramedics deserve recognition for acts of exceptional bravery while protecting Ontarians;

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

“Enact Bill 115, a private member’s bill introduced by MPP Maria Van Bommel on October 6, 2010, An Act to provide for the Ontario Award for Paramedic Bravery.”

I, of course, will sign my name to this one.

OAK RIDGES MORAINÉ

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition from my riding of Durham which reads as follows:

“Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the Oak Ridges moraine; and

“Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the Oak Ridges moraine; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier government to plan, protect and enforce clear, effective policies governing the application and permit process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries; and

“Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Minister of the Environment initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the Oak Ridges moraine until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to prevent contamination of the Oak Ridges moraine”—specifically, on Lakeridge Road.

I am pleased to sign and present this petition to one of the new pages, Benjamin.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: “We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Be it resolved that Dalton McGuinty immediately exempt electricity from the harmonized sales tax (HST).”

I sign this petition.

PARAMEDICS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas paramedics play a vital role in protecting the health and safety of Ontarians; and

“Whereas paramedics often put their own health and safety at risk, going above and beyond their duty in serving Ontarians; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario annually recognizes police officers and firefighters with awards for bravery; and

“Whereas currently no award for paramedic bravery is awarded by the government of Ontario; and

“Whereas Ontario paramedics deserve recognition for acts of exceptional bravery while protecting Ontarians;

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

“Enact Bill 115, a private member’s bill introduced by MPP Maria Van Bommel on October 6, 2010, An Act to provide for the Ontario Award for Paramedic Bravery.”

I am pleased to affix my signature to this.

COYOTES

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

“Whereas coyote predation is a growing problem in rural Ontario, especially on farms; and

“Whereas there are documented reports that coyotes are attacking people and pets and that the attacks are getting more aggressive; and

“Whereas as many as 6,000 lambs and sheep alone are killed by coyotes on Ontario farms every year; and

“Whereas these losses are seriously impacting farmers’ incomes; and

“Whereas the current control measures authorized by the Ministry of Natural Resources under the municipal financial incentives for control of coyote predation program are cumbersome and impossible to adhere to;

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

“That the Ontario government minimize predator losses by implementing a province-wide coyote control program that includes a \$200 bounty for each coyote carcass and allow counties to implement their own proof-of-kill collection system.”

I have signed this.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury:

“Whereas the Ontario government” has made “PET scanning a publicly insured health service...;” and

“Whereas,” since “October 2009, insured PET scans” have been “performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask our new page Emily to bring it to the Clerk.

COYOTES

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank Steve Kirkwood from my riding for providing me with this petition. It’s signed by residents in the North Augusta and Addison area. I want to commend the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his initiative in writing it and providing it to my office.

It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas coyote predation is a growing problem in rural Ontario, especially on farms; and

“Whereas there are documented reports that coyotes are attacking people and pets and that the attacks are getting more aggressive; and

“Whereas as many as 6,000 lambs and sheep alone are killed by coyotes on Ontario farms every year; and

“Whereas these losses are seriously impacting farmers’ incomes; and

“Whereas the current control measures authorized by the Ministry of Natural Resources under the municipal financial incentives for control of coyote predation program are cumbersome and impossible to adhere to;

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

“That the Ontario government minimize predator losses by implementing a province-wide coyote control program that includes a \$200 bounty for each coyote carcass and allow counties to implement their own proof-of-kill collection system.”

It has been certified by the table. I’ll affix my signature and send it with Hailey.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury and Nickel Belt:

“Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints in the areas of

hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies and retirement homes; and

"Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate any of these areas;

"Whereas people wronged by those institutions are left feeling helpless and most have nowhere else to turn to help correct systemic issues;

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

"Grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies and retirement homes."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Nicolas to deliver it to the table. Nicolas is from Sudbury, by the way.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas the McGuinty government is conducting a review of the province's under-serviced area program ... that will result in numerous communities across rural and small-town Ontario losing financial incentives to recruit and retain much-needed physicians; and

"Whereas financial incentives to attract and keep physicians are essential to providing quality front-line health care services, particularly in communities in rural ridings such as Simcoe-Grey; and

"Whereas people across Ontario have been forced to pay Dalton McGuinty's now-forgotten health tax since 2004, expecting health care services to be improved rather than cut; and

"Whereas taxpayers deserve good value for their hard-earned money that goes into health care, unlike the wasteful and abusive spending under the McGuinty Liberals' watch at eHealth Ontario;

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

"That the McGuinty government immediately stop its ill-advised attack on rural health care and on rural communities who need financial incentives to successfully recruit and retain doctors."

I agree with the petition, and I've signed it.

1600

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTH PROTECTION AND PROMOTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2011 LOI DE 2011 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION ET LA PROMOTION DE LA SANTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 8, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 141, An Act to

amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act / Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We're talking here about Bill 141, and I'm very pleased to be able to continue my remarks, as it turns out, in support of Bill 141.

Just to remind people what we were talking about: In the fall of 2009, as you all know, we had an H1N1 pandemic, and Ontario's public health system performed very well. Huge numbers of people were vaccinated and our hospitals managed to deal with the load of sick people that they were presented with and to take very good care of them. Our schools were closely monitored but were able to stay open.

However, I wouldn't like to suggest that everything ran smoothly. There are always some things that don't go quite as well as they might. A pandemic like this always offers us the opportunity to look at what worked, what didn't work and prepare for the next time so we can do a better job the next time around. What happened in this case, of course, was that Dr. Arlene King, the chief medical officer of health of the province of Ontario, undertook such a review, made recommendations about what we can do better in the future, and Bill 141 is based on Dr. King's recommendations—those recommendations that require legislation. Obviously, there are many other recommendations that we're acting on but which don't require legislation.

Basically, Bill 141 does three things: It gives the chief medical officer of health the authority to issue directives to local medical officers of health and boards of health in order to provide a coordinated response to a health emergency. Secondly, it expands the minister's authority to take over public premises during a public health emergency. Finally, it provides that a board of health may not appoint an acting medical officer of health for more than six months without the approval of the chief medical officer of health and the Minister of Health.

Back on December 8, when we were first debating this bill, I did have the opportunity to actually talk about the first two of those amendments. I know you were all listening very carefully and you remember every word I said, but just in case some of you weren't actually here, I thought maybe I should go over some of the highlights of those first two amendments before we look at the third amendment.

As I said, we had the experience of the H1N1 pandemic in 2009. It's an example of an emerging public health threat affecting Ontarians. It certainly will not be the last public health event that Ontario will have to deal with. But the experience does provide us the opportunity to reflect upon potential vulnerabilities in potential future, more serious pandemics; provincial, national or international public health events; and emergencies with health impacts.

Under Ontario legislation, Ontario has a highly decentralized public health system, with a great deal of local flexibility given to local medical officers of health

and local boards of health. Under that situation, local public health units led the response to H1N1 in their respective jurisdictions. This approach allowed communities to respond to local needs, such as demographic and geographic variations across communities. However, that decentralized approach also gives rise to variability across the province and sometimes the perception of inequitable access to pandemic response services. Media coverage clearly focused on long lineups, and sometimes there was the sense that people were not being given access to vaccines in the priority sequence and that queue-jumping was happening.

If we had had the ability to have explicit provincial direction, that would have helped clarify which group should get the vaccine first in different areas of the province. That's one area where there seemed to be some confusion. There might also have been an opportunity to look at some provincial direction, for example, on crowd management protocols and on how best to make sure that you could manage a lot of people wanting access to a vaccination in a very short time.

The first amendment deals with that variability and the inability to have a provincially coordinated response. The legislation, if passed, would create a new authority for the chief medical officer of health to direct boards of health and medical officers of health to adopt policies or measures in cases of a pandemic, public health event or an emergency with health impacts. These directives would be made in situations where the chief medical officer of health believes that such measures would protect the people of Ontario and are necessary to support a coordinated response to the event.

Directives would only be issued on matters related to infectious diseases, environmental health, public health emergency preparedness or other matters listed in a regulation. Any directive would be in force for up to six months, but the chief medical officer of health—who I'm going to start referring to as the CMOH because it takes less time—could terminate the directive earlier or reissue the directive after the six-month time period was up, as they deem necessary.

If the reissuance of a directive would result in the directive being in force for more than six months, the CMOH would be required to consult with affected local medical officers of health and boards of health before reissuing the directive.

If we want to facilitate coordinated, consistent responses to significant public health events, it is important to specify provincial requirements regarding critical parameters of the response, whether that be with respect to immunization response in a pandemic; product recall response to a food-borne disease outbreak; or a containment response to a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident, to give some examples. We need to have the authority for these directives to be issued by the chief medical officer of health. However, as I've said, there are a lot of details around when these can actually be offered. That's the first amendment.

The second amendment has to do with the taking over of public spaces for public health use. Post-SARS, we

had a very narrow ability to do that, which is, the legislation was altered to say that the chief medical officer of health can issue an order to take over a space specifically for the purpose of setting up an isolation ward.

We found with this health emergency that sometimes you need things for other purposes. So this would give broader power to take over public space in the case of a public health emergency. For example, it might be to set up a mass immunization centre, as we saw with H1N1, but it might also be to set up a space where you could assess people and treat them without moving people who have the disease and mixing them in with hospital space. If you had a biological or a chemical disaster, you might want to set up a containment place where people could be treated without contaminating others. There are a number of ways in which you might want to do this, but again there are quite strict regulations around this second amendment.

Finally, the act proposes changes to the way acting medical officers of health are appointed. Currently, acting MOHs do not require the approval of the CMOH or the minister. While acting MOHs are required to be physicians, they are not required to hold any other public health qualifications, and in some cases, acting MOHs, medical officers of health, have served for literally years because they have been appointed and reappointed and reappointed without ever gaining the appropriate qualifications.

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On the other hand, the appointment of a permanent MOH or an associate MOH does require approval by the minister, and that allows the minister to ensure that the medical officers of health are appropriately qualified.

The proposed amendment would require the approval of the minister and the CMOH to appoint an acting MOH for longer than six months. In other words, if the person is truly temporary, the local board can do it. If it's going to be a prolonged situation, then the minister and the CMOH have to look at it, and they may also have the power to apply conditions. Typically, that condition would be that this person will continue to act as the MOH, but while they are doing that, they will study and obtain the correct medical qualifications to act as a permanent MOH. That would be a typical sort of condition that would be put in place.

The approval of an acting MOH will then be aligned with the process for the approval of permanent MOHs and associate MOHs, and will allow the minister to ensure that people are fully qualified and that the health of Ontario's citizens is better protected.

We live in an increasingly globalized world. The movement of people, pathogens or micro-organisms, food products, consumer goods, what have you, can lead to security concerns. Because Ontario has so many people coming here for trade purposes, for visitor purposes—we have people from all over the world coming here, potentially introducing pathogens into our environment. Bill 141 will further protect the health of Ontarians against such threats.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Guelph.

Bill 141 is kind of an apology for the way the previous pandemic unfolded under the government—H1N1 at the time—and this is recognizing the good and fine work done by the medical officer of health for Ontario, Dr. King. She summarized that in a report that ended up in this Bill 141.

I'm also reviewing the comments made when it was first introduced on December 8, 2010, just before the House adjourned for the winter break. It is quite interesting because our critic Christine Elliott, I think, did a very commendable job in being fair, in being reasonable, and also trying to bring forward that this is something that is very important to all Ontarians regardless of where they live. We can't have different programs, not in this area or in any other area, different programs for different areas of Ontario, so let it be a lesson that there were so many people involved and the decision-making process was rather fragmented. We had the role of the Canadian medical group that were commenting on it, as well as the authorities.

So I think it's very important that what this bill does is sort of sort out who does what in the case of something that is identified as a pandemic.

If you look at the history here, all four of the original cases emanated from Durham, which is my riding. It's very important to put that on the record here. I don't think there was much infrastructure in place. We all say in this place that everyone would agree that we should have a strong, well-funded response to these kinds of things that challenge people's lives, but when you examine it, Dr. King said in fact we did not.

This bill attempts to respond to Dr. King's remarks, and I would—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Clearly, Bill 141 attempts to increase or increases the powers of the chief medical officer of health and ensures coordination among local health units in the event of a pandemic or health emergency. It seems like a no-brainer to support it—it seems, and yet there are a couple of things.

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies has raised serious concerns about Dr. King's recommendations, presumably on which Bill 141 is based, for additional powers for the chief medical officer of health. They argue that the lack of standardization across the province was not the cause of the disarray that occurred during H1N1. In fact, ALPHA argues that it was this one-size-fits-all approach that was part of the problem. It's an interesting comment, and I'd be interested to hear what more they have to say on that matter.

Another little problemo: Some 10 days after Bill 141 passed first reading, the Ministry of Health released their findings on Ontario's response to H1N1. It's a curious thing to me: Why did it come 10 days after as opposed to

10 days before the bill was passed? You then would assume that the two were working hand in hand and that the bill was passed with, presumably, the recommendations made by the findings on Ontario's response to H1N1. It didn't happen.

There are a number of concerns that our member from Nickel Belt has raised. We want to make sure we get full hearings so that we can hear everyone and make sure we achieve the balance that we're looking for.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I think the member from Guelph now, on two occasions—she had started her speech earlier, when we recessed on December 9, and continued her remarks today.

I've had the pleasure of working with two MOHs in the riding of Peterborough: Dr. Garry Humphreys and then, when Garry retired, Dr. Rosana Pellizzari. We've had numerous discussions about planning for a pandemic and future pandemics. I remember Dr. Humphreys would always provide a case study about the Spanish influenza in 1917, 1918 and 1919 in terms of the probabilities of a pandemic moving forward and, in fact, a pandemic covering the world.

We're lucky: There was good planning in place for H1N1. Dr. King took the opportunity to look at that. It's very important, when a dramatic situation does occur, that we do take the time to review it and then, of course, find ways that improvements can be made for the future.

I think we're safe to say that the laws of probability of another pandemic being here to challenge us sometime in the future are quite real. As we approve Bill 141, that will strengthen Ontario's position.

Dr. King really is an outstanding person. She has provided great advice. The member from Guelph, I think, has done a good job in highlighting the key points of the bill. Ontarians will certainly be better protected as we plan for the future.

I know all of us in our own right, of course, are looking at ways, in terms of hygiene and other things, to make sure that we prevent the spreading of various diseases, and this bill will be an important piece of that future.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to ask the members of the Liberal government one thing about this bill; it comes in under section 97. It says, "Section 97 of the act is amended by adding the following clauses" and it goes on to say, "defining or further specifying the meaning of any or all" of the following phrases: "infectious disease," "environmental health," "pandemic," "provincial, national or international public health," and on and on.

They have a bill in front of the House, but they don't have the definitions of what the words mean in the bill. Certainly, the cart is in front of the horse in this respect. It's very odd to be asking this House to pass a bill when we haven't even defined what the terminology in the bill is.

This is the first that I've ever seen where a government has brought forward a piece of legislation and hasn't even identified or defined what the terminology is. This is absolutely crazy, and I would like to see somebody from the government side, this afternoon during debate, explain how it is that we can pass a piece of legislation without understanding what the words are in the legislation, without having any definition for those phrases. Once that is answered, then we can begin to have a far more intelligent discussion on the merits of the bill itself.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the members for Durham, Trinity–Spadina, Peterborough, and Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for their questions and comments, and appreciation to the member from Durham, who noted that not only were Dr. King, our chief medical officer of health, and the local medical officers of health involved in this, but in fact the federal government was very much involved in procuring and distributing the vaccination, and of course, the World Health Organization was involved. Trying to get all these levels coordinated was quite a challenge, and we certainly need to have a better ability to coordinate what we're doing within Ontario.

With respect to language in bills, this bill, like any other bill, uses plain, ordinary English language, so you can refer to the Oxford dictionary. But we have reserved that if it's necessary, there can be, by way of regulation, further definition of some of those words, and we have specifically talked to the medical officers of health around the province and committed to them that any regulations that are written will be done with their consultation, so if there is a need to further clarify, we will work with the local medical officers of health to provide that clarification.

But I do hope that we will have the support of all the members of the House for this piece of legislation, because as we plan for future pandemics, it is very important that we have the authority to have a coordinated response. That doesn't mean exactly the same in every place in Ontario. There might well be different directives for northern Ontario and for southern Ontario, but we do need to have a coordinated approach.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's good to be back in the assembly this afternoon, and I say a belated happy new year to you and to all of my colleagues.

I've been listening with interest, and I'm glad to add a few words of my own on the subject of Bill 141, entitled the Health Protection and Promotion Amendment Act, 2010. The first thing I would observe is that this is about as simple a title as you can get from this Liberal government in terms of titling bills. I'm surprised they didn't call it the "we really did a great job but think we could probably do a better one next time around, in case

there's a pandemic that doesn't materialize act, 2010." But that's what it seems to be.

The first thing that I want to recall is what happened a year and a half ago for all of us in our ridings, for all of us in our homes. There is probably not a member in this Legislature who didn't hear from constituents during the course of the fall of 2009 because of one problem or another that materialized in that time period pertaining to H1N1. A lot of people, with a lot of trepidation, mothers and fathers of children, older people, people in affected groups or more affected groups, were very concerned with what would happen if they didn't get the vaccine in time, because this was certainly a sky-is-falling scenario. And just so that we make this clear, I'm not making light of this in using that kind of terminology. This was a legitimate fear, and I think one in which we all shared.

But if you search your memory and you think about what was happening, the complaints took the form of examples like this: "There's not enough vaccine at this particular spot, and there are lineups around the block," or "We have too much vaccine and there's not enough of a lineup, and the vaccine has to be destroyed after a certain period of time." So it seemed to be a mismatch in a lot of areas, in terms of quantities of vaccine, quality of vaccine, the ability to administer the vaccine, conditions in the venues that were selected to administer the vaccine, and who was going to get it when. That's before you get into the issue of people who were jumping queues, and we've all heard reports of that on radio and television and in the newspaper. That's what was going on a year and a half ago. That suggests to me that all of the things that could have been done weren't done, and that's in a situation where there never really was a pandemic that materialized.

I found it interesting that the choice of words as signified by my friend from Lanark and as used by my friend from Guelph don't match the situation in every sense. I think that's what my friend from Lanark wanted to signify. For example, the member from Guelph kept referring to this as a pandemic. I'm not sure that this was a pandemic. It was an apprehended pandemic. We feared that there might be a pandemic or an epidemic, but there wasn't—again, not making light of it. Thank God, it wasn't a pandemic.

What we're looking at in this bill is planning for something that could one day eventuate and that we all hope won't.

The Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus identified a number of problems with the rollout of the H1N1 response back in the fall of 2009, and I have touched on a few of those in the past couple of minutes.

The management of the H1N1 outbreak was well coordinated internationally by the World Health Organization. We watched those nightly reports on television of people talking to us from Geneva about what was going on in the world on the question of H1N1. The federal government also was acknowledged to have done a good job.

The biggest problem was in the distribution of the vaccine at the provincial level here in Ontario, where it

was clear that there wasn't really any central oversight over the 36 public health units in Ontario, and that seems to be what this bill, in large part, wants to address.

The problems were identified by the chief medical officer of health in her June 2010 report, entitled *The H1N1 Pandemic—there's that word again—How Ontario Fared*. Again, this bill is largely a response to Dr. King's report.

The Health Protection and Promotion Act, or HPPA, is to be amended by this bill to require that the Minister of Health and chief medical officer of health approve any appointments of acting medical officers of health for a term of six months or more. This would be under pandemic or apprehended pandemic circumstances.

Secondly, the proposed act would amend the HPPA to allow the minister to make an order for the possession of publicly owned premises or part of a publicly owned premise for public health purposes. That's defined as an inoculation facility. What's being said there is that under certain circumstances that we could loosely describe as an emergency, the chief medical officer of health gets more extraordinary powers than ordinarily would be granted, and this kind of power is taken if the chief medical officer of health is of the opinion that there is an immediate risk of an outbreak of a communicable disease or to the health of persons in Ontario.

Finally, this proposed act would amend the HPPA to allow that the chief medical officer of health could issue a directive to any board of health or medical officer of health requiring the adoption or implementation of certain policies or measures in the event of, or "an immediate risk of, a provincial, national or international public health event, a pandemic or an emergency with health impacts anywhere in Ontario; and ... that the policies or measures are necessary to support a co-ordinated response...." That's a lot of fairly legal jargon. What it says is, if something like H1N1 is believed to be in the process of materializing in our area, then the chief medical officer of health has powers to do what needs to be done to address the public health in those circumstances.

The first thing that I should say is that our caucus will be supporting this bill. There's nothing here that is of such detail or attention that we find any need to go against it. There are a number of challenges and concerns with the bill, however, and the first thing that I would like to cite was mentioned today in the presentation of another bill by one of our critics—and this happened to our critic the member from Whitby when this bill was presented. I'm quoting from Ms. Elliott in Hansard, upon presentation of the bill, where she said, "Unfortunately, as has become the norm here, I am responding to a piece of legislation that has just now been delivered to me, so I'm a little bit short on details." We heard that again today, so I might, without deviating too much from the substance of the bill, say to the Liberal government: If you want to present bills, particularly ones like this where you have a legitimate reason to believe that we won't argue too much with you and we'll actually

support them, could you please give us the details of that bill before the fact so we can give you an adequate response? That was housekeeping.

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But mainly in response to Dr. King's report, *The H1N1 Pandemic—How Ontario Fared*, there were a number of key problems with the rollout of the H1N1 response to last fall's outbreak. I mentioned already that international and national handling of that outbreak was generally acknowledged to be well managed. Ontario was lucky that emergency rooms did not see a larger surge of patients. I think that, if you take a look at what is in this bill and, more particularly, if you take a look at what is not in this bill, the issue would be that in the event of something happening of the magnitude and scope that was envisioned for H1N1 at the time and that we are trying to address in this new bill as we go forward—what would have happened in emergency rooms, and still today, even upon passage of this bill, what would happen in emergency rooms remains a concern because I don't think, and I don't think most of the experts that I have spoken to believe, that we would have necessarily been adequately equipped to handle what could have been an unbelievable volume of very sick people in a minimum number of facilities.

While we were trying to address the issue of inoculation, and while this bill still looks at the ability to inoculate, because it looks at venues, delivery and administration, it doesn't talk to what would happen in the event that we have a lot of very ill people trying to seek access to emergency rooms that are ill-equipped to handle them. Dr. King, the chief medical officer of health, noted that if ERs experienced a larger surge, we would be dealing with a very different reality right now. Since this bill—and let's deal with it on its terms—seeks redress for deficiencies that were discovered by way of Dr. King's report in how we handled the incipient pandemic back in the fall of 2009, may I go on the record and say that we should be looking at expansion beyond the scope of this bill to say, "Here's what would happen if that pandemic eventuality had come to pass and we had to deal with emergency rooms that were incapable of handling this load"?

We understand that the bill addresses the disparities between the chief medical officer of health and local medical officers of health in communicating during an outbreak. There are advantages in this kind of situation to having centralized control. The chief medical officer and the minister would be better able to direct resources where necessary; we understand that. But I still say that the resources we're talking about are resources that are largely involved in prevention and that don't, at this point, address treatment—dare I say "cure"? Careful management of resources can be monitored and distributed appropriately at a centralized location. One of the reasons we're supporting this bill is, we agree with that. But we would like to see some of the cracks in this bill filled in so that we look at not just the eventuality but the reality of a pandemic situation.

Let's talk for a moment about Panorama. Panorama would inherently ease the distribution and rollout of vaccines during such crises. Government has dragged its feet on the implementation of this very important and vital program. "Ontario will continue to take steps toward implementing Panorama, a pan-Canadian initiative which will improve public health surveillance and enhance the province's capacity to deliver immunization programs." Improving Ontario's Ability to Respond to Public Health Emergencies, a document from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care described as a backgrounder, said this on 29 November 2010. So Ontario will continue to take steps toward implementing Panorama.

Panorama has been in development for six years; six years and still not functional. So we have to ask ourselves the question: Why? Is this rot in the system? I'm just asking this rhetorically because six years is a very long time to address something that is urgent enough to have elicited a bill barely a year after something didn't materialize that could have materialized, and Panorama seeks to address that on a far wider basis than just the province of Ontario. So I have to ask myself if there's some rot in the system—maybe eHealth-style rot. I'm just saying.

Dr. Pellizzari, local medical officer of health in Peterborough, noted, "We're not collecting local data right now." She continued to explain that there are currently gaps in the health unit's surveillance. I'm continuing to quote: "Health Unit Looking at Doing More with Less", and that's from the Kawartha region, by Lauren Gilchrist, February 10 edition. So the health unit is looking at doing more with less. If we're going to deal with resources, let's not look at resources being insufficient to do what it is you have to do; that is a local medical officer of health in Peterborough who was saying that, not me. Panorama would help cast that health surveillance net that many health units such as this one are seeking. Government backtracking and ignoring the advice of experts is something that we see all too often in the province of Ontario. I raise the question, because it has to be raised, as to whether or not this is happening here.

So we're left with having to deal with a patchwork in order to create a fully integrated health protection and promotion system. What we're seeing in this bill is something worth supporting on our side. I've said we would support it because, on a stand-alone basis, it works. But on an integrated basis as part of our system used to address an eventuality like H1N1 or some other hideous, I could go as far as to use the word "plague," coming our way, we're not there. That's what the experts are saying: We're not there.

We quote again from Dr. King, who says in her report that it is essential that we "extend our chain of command to the local level." So there's this mismatch, this disconnect. You've got a local medical officer of health in Peterborough saying we don't have enough resources and you've a report from the chief medical officer saying we have to connect by a chain of command that addresses the local level.

Let me turn to southern York region, which is of maximum concern to me. In York region, where we are gravely underserved in our health unit requirements, the centralization of pandemic and outbreak surveillance and management would greatly have alleviated the pressures faced by the central LHIN and York Central Hospital. We don't have sufficient health coverage in York region at this point. The government knows this. We're sitting in abeyance on a new hospital for the southern part of York region to the west, which would be co-operated by York Central Hospital, that hospital known as the Vaughan hospital, but it awaits approval by that government.

We're talking about resources like that, and we're also talking about the fact that the Central LHIN is constrained from spending in York region because allocation of resources to York region has not matched the growth of York region, as is the case outside of the 416 in a lot of areas. The average spending on health care outside of York region—and, let's be specific, in the 416—is somewhere above \$900 per year per capita, whereas as soon as you cross Steeles Avenue you're into about a \$200 chop; \$700 and change in York region. That funding formula has to be revisited. That also addresses the issue of resources in York region.

"Health care is a top issue affecting York region in terms of access to both practitioners and health services locally. Recent studies have found that health care services in the 905 area are currently lacking as compared to the greater Toronto area, and many residents—particularly in rural areas—may be greatly underserved with respect to physical and mental health services." That was taken from "York in York Region: York University's Strategic Advantage," commenting on health delivery services in York region in an article that's quite old now, so you'd think it would have been addressed—November 2007.

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York region clinics saw over 1,290 patients receive the vaccine every single day. However, because of the lack of coordination, these clinics were overcapacitated and forced to turn away potentially infected patients. I'm quoting: "York Region H1N1 Flu Immunization Clinics at Full Capacity," and that's from york.ca/H1N1 in the fall of 2009. That's York region commenting on itself. It could only do what it could do.

Centralized chain of command—great idea. That's what this bill is about. Adequate resources—also a great idea, but that's not what this bill is about. That's what's lacking—sadly lacking.

In terms of overall support on the part of this side of the House, I'm pleased to stand today in support of Bill 141, but I want to point out that while it deserves the support of all, it is only a piece of a puzzle that has to be established, and it is a barn-door piece of legislation. We're closing the barn door after the horse has bolted. I think we all, on all sides of this House, know that.

I think what's also important is that, if we know that, we don't want to be caught flat-footed somewhere down

the road where we actually have a pandemic materialize and we have to ask questions later, God help us, with some large number of people very ill or even dying. This could happen, and this is what we're trying to avert.

The government has not kept its promise in several areas that affect the health care system. This side of the House understands what our health care professionals need. The Liberal government continues to waste hard-earned tax dollars that could be going to the front lines of our health care system. Rather than pointing fingers at us—we're not in power at this point; we certainly expect to be by the end of the year. You people are in power. Take a look at yourself. Don't point your finger unless your hands are clean.

The bottom line is, you have to put as much into front-line health care as you can. Tim Hudak and a Progressive Conservative government will see to it that every single dollar of health care money goes to front-line health care. That's what we have to do; that's what you have to do.

I hope that we can move quickly, pass this legislation, get on with it and expand it to the point where it addresses what has to be addressed for the good of all Ontarians.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'd like to address some of the comments from—I'm going to say "the member for Thornhill." That's even right. So I will address the member from Thornhill.

First of all, the member made some comments early in his remarks about what seemed to be sometimes a mismatch between the vaccine that was available and what people were doing with it. Quite frankly, that's one of the reasons why we need coordination of service, because what was happening was that on Friday afternoon, often quite late on Friday afternoon, our Minister of Health and chief medical officer of health would learn from the federal Minister of Health how much vaccine would be available in Ontario on Monday. So they literally had the weekend to figure out how to distribute it around the province. Although they gave advice, saying to the medical officers of health, "This is how you should be using the vaccine that becomes available this week," what often happened was that the medical officers of health didn't necessarily follow that advice. Under this act, there would be much more coordination; the ability to deal in that sort of frantic rollout, which was the experience that we had; and the ability to give coordinated advice about how the vaccine should be used, who it should be targeted at and who it should be delivered to in each jurisdiction.

There were some questions raised as to what you would do if the hospitals were overwhelmed. Well, that's the second amendment I mentioned, which was the ability to take over other public places in an emergency situation to set up assessment, treatment and referral centres. In fact, that already did happen; there were stand-alone centres.

With respect to the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Thornhill—I listened outside. I've spoken on this bill before so I can't speak again, but I can do a two-minute response. I think he covered it when he said this bill is kind of acknowledging that they're shutting the barn door after the horse is gone, and it's clear that we support the implementation.

If you look at the history here, there is the Panorama strategy, which is the federal strategy, which was adopted right after the SARS epidemic, catastrophe, whatever definition you want to put on it. But there's a case where we've been warned once. You can be excused for that, but now that you look at the evidence of the last one—and Dr. King is right. They had 19 people telling you every night on the news about the adjuvanted and the certain groups that could take it and certain groups—people were just completely bewildered. To me, in a lot of ways that represents the way Premier McGuinty is implementing the new Green Energy Act. Everything they do is so haphazard. Even the HST—in fairness, it's the same thing. It's just "tax everything," and then two months later they're rolling back part of it. They're fixing this and fixing that.

This is not a simple political manoeuvre, I hope. Let's try to get it right. Listen to our critic and our leader, Tim Hudak. I think we'll be working with you to make this stronger—along with having a plan that's going to address the large nature.

If you look at the comments made by Dr. King, she said the world is a smaller place today. We are connected. What she says here is, this stuff travels to Toronto—named as one of the places that's the most susceptible because of the very cosmopolitan, welcoming—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm looking to the member from Thornhill to help me with this question, because I asked the member from Guelph and she didn't quite answer it, but in response to you she makes reference to lack of coordination as being a problem here—and I raised an issue. The Association of Local Public Health Agencies, otherwise known as ALPHA, has raised serious concerns with Dr. King's recommendations. They argue that the lack of standardization across the province was not the cause of the disarray that occurred during the H1N1. In fact, ALPHA argues that it was this one-size-fits-all approach that was part of the problem.

I'm not sure whether you have an opinion on this, because I didn't get an opinion from the member from Guelph, but I wonder whether you have one, and I wonder about whether or not you're calling for public hearings, because we want full consultations in order to be able to get people to come and talk to us about this so that we can get the right balanced approach to this problem.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'd love to provide a quick comment for the member for Thornhill because I think he made some excellent points. He used the words, "This is just one piece of the puzzle."

I want to pick up on this issue of Panorama that the government has been working on for a number of years.

The quote from Dr. King, the chief medical officer of health, that I think is pertinent to the debate today is:

"This was the largest and most rapidly executed immunization program in Ontario's history. We underestimated the logistics of organizing and delivering a mass campaign in extraordinarily tight time frames, across a vast province, in the glare of intense media coverage and in the face of rising demand. We underestimated lineups and demand surges. We had different plans unfolding in different communities, with the result being a different level of service depending on where you were in the province. We didn't fully leverage the primary care physicians who traditionally deliver the seasonal shot. And in too many critical ways, we didn't have the details we needed about how the immunization program was unfolding.

"That last point is critical. In an era where there is much talk about electronic health systems and patient records, we do not have in this province the capacity to electronically manage and track our immunization programs."

This is the government that wears the billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle. Again, if this is the piece of the puzzle, why isn't Panorama mentioned in this piece of legislation? Clearly, the chief medical officer of health indicates this point is critical. If this is the critical point, if having the electronic system to track immunization is so important, why hasn't this government added it to the bill? It's silent. That—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Thornhill has two minutes to respond.

1650

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to my colleagues from Guelph, Durham, Trinity–Spadina and Leeds–Grenville for their comments.

I think what this bill says to me is that we have an opportunity to do better. That's, effectively, what the message was from Dr. King. The report that was provided by Dr. King was a good report. I think what the government is trying to do here is act on that report, but there are some points being raised around this chamber that make an awful lot of sense.

My friend from Durham, for example, talks about the fact that people were confused. Yes, people were confused because there was a communications piece—Dr. King doesn't talk that much about communications, and this bill doesn't address communications—that has to somehow or other be addressed along the way so that we know what we're saying to all of the people in Ontario at any given time so they understand, in turn, what they are supposed to do. If you had communicated properly about where the vaccine was, how to get it, the levels of

intensity with which you were able to get it; i.e., if you were an older person and more feeble or a younger person, more junior, you had a particular place in line.

What it comes down to is the old saw, "If you want to start a small business, start a large one and give it to the Ontario government to run." Effectively, that's how we run health care. The problem with health care in this province or, for that matter, any other province, is we've got one supplier, folks. That's it.

My friend from Trinity–Spadina asks the question about lack of coordination and whether it was indeed a one-size-fits-all issue that caused some of the problems that Dr. King has addressed. I don't necessarily think so. I think that if you create coordination, one size fits all in terms of distribution of the vaccine, for example, works. How it's distributed in York region is going to be widely variant from how things go down in Timmins just because of geography.

This bill needs work, but we support it.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 141. It's a pleasure to be back again at the assembly on behalf of my constituents in Ottawa Centre.

I'm heartened by the discussion I'm hearing. I think that's why we are all elected: to look at bills and understand them better and the implications to our communities across the province and to provide our input as to how to shape the bill better. I think that's what the nature of the debate has been so far.

It is an important issue. I think the context is extremely important, in this particular case, when we're dealing with Bill 141, An Act to amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

I had the opportunity to look into the Health Protection and Promotion Act when I was drafting another private member's bill, Bill 194. That was to create a public health agency in the city of Ottawa. Essentially, what I was doing through my private member's bill was amending the City of Ottawa Act to ensure the public health agency in the city of Ottawa is not just run by the city but has its own independent board. As opposed to politicians like you and I making decisions on important public health issues, the experts are the ones making those decisions. Now, my private member's bill never got debated on this floor because, thankfully, the government adopted my bill in 2009. It was then enacted and is now being enforced in the city of Ottawa, but the principle was an important one.

I think that important principle applies here in Bill 141 as well, that principle being that when we are looking at issues that are important to public health, that impact all of us individually and as a community, those decisions should be made by medical experts, those who have expertise in public health. Those decisions, of course, should not be made by individuals like you and I because we do not have expertise—again, we're dealing with people's lives here—but they should be made by public

health agencies and medical officers of health. Of course, in Ontario, we have a chief medical officer of health for Ontario as well.

Why has this debate now come up again? I was hearing about this from various members: the response to how the H1N1 crisis was dealt with. It was speculated that it was going to be a major pandemic. It was significant around the world, and steps needed to be taken to ensure that the public in Ontario—Ontarians—were safe and that they'd get the proper vaccination across the province. I stress "across the province"—regardless of where they live. I think that's a very important point. It does not matter if you're an Ontarian and you live in Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, Windsor—that's just to mention the larger cities in the province—or in smaller towns, be it in Lindsay or be it in Kenora or other towns across the province. That is, I think, the crux of this bill: that when we are dealing with issues like pandemics, which could be deadly—we have, God forbid, a potentiality of losing many lives—when we're dealing with issues around pandemics and an approach to dealing with that particular pandemic, that there be a coordinated approach.

What this bill is essentially doing is giving the chief medical officer of health of Ontario more enhanced oversight authority to help ensure that Ontario's public health effort and response to a pandemic are better coordinated. I think that's an important task to undertake.

Yes, we've got, under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, individual health agencies that exist in municipalities or under regional municipalities, and they would—could—and they do address their community's public health issues from community to community. But in the case of something large, like a pandemic like H1N1 or SARS—many of us remember when that took place—or where there is some sort of a national or international public health event that is going on or there is a larger emergency that could affect the health of Ontarians, there should be a mechanism to ensure a coordinated response, a coordinated reaction to that particular emergency or pandemic. The bill is trying to pull all that together, essentially.

In this particular case, I think what's happened is what should always happen: After dealing with the H1N1 situation, we made sure that we looked at how well we did in the H1N1 crisis. It was not a test run; it was not a dry run. It was a real, live situation that allowed us to evaluate. We were lucky that we dealt with it well and that Ontarians were able to get the proper vaccination across the province. But it was not smooth; I think we debated that in this legislation. It could have been better. Having a post-mortem, no pun intended, is important in that type of situation.

I can just speak from my example in Ottawa during the H1N1 crisis and how the situation was dealt with in Toronto. As I recall, when we were reacting to the pandemic, there was quite a different response. I may be biased, but the response in Ottawa was far better coordinated; it was far better targeted in making sure that

the citizens of Ottawa got access to the H1N1 vaccination.

As you may recall, Madam Speaker, there was a priority list as to who could go first. Children were, I think, at the front end and then it depended on age categories etc., whereas the situation in Toronto was slightly different. I think there were broader concerns as to how the whole program was rolled out in Toronto, bigger queues and a little bit of panic that was associated with getting the vaccination.

I think what our chief medical officer of health did through her post-analysis was to see how did it work and how could it be improved, and produced a set of recommendations that are reflected in Bill 141. I think that's exactly how the system should work. That's exactly what we should do: When we deal with a situation, we should always strive to do better and evaluate how things work and how it could be improved.

1700

Reading through the material and reading through the bill, my understanding is that what Dr. King, Ontario's chief medical officer of health, is trying to do is that the kind of discrepancy in approach that was taken in Ottawa and in Toronto, two large cities—Toronto being the largest, Ottawa being the second largest—does not take place in the future, where a different level of service was provided when dealing with the situation in Ottawa versus the quality or level of service that was provided here in Toronto. How can we rectify that difference and make sure that we have a more sophisticated, a more coordinated effort next time around, God forbid, if there is a pandemic or an emergency which is large in nature and could affect the health of Ontarians, so that you've got quality response or reaction in both cities, and not only two cities like Toronto and Ottawa but every single community, town, village and hamlet across the province?

That is the main crux of this legislation: to ensure that we've got a very limited new authority that is being given to the medical officer of health of Ontario to deal in very limited and specific circumstances, to impose or implement a more coordinated response to any major future pandemic or other emergency that could affect the health of Ontarians. Of course, I think our role as a Legislature is to ensure that we debate the policy and that we ensure that the policy is right, that it meets its objectives as recommended by the medical officer of health. But I think we should give a lot of deference to the medical officer of health on this issue because she is, after all, the expert. She has far better and superior understanding of how responses to pandemics work, how things were rolled out and dealt with with H1N1—and for us to pay respect perhaps to those recommendations or pay heed to those recommendations because at the end of the day, we have to rely on experts when it comes to issues of health.

I go back to my original point I was making earlier: When it came to my city, we had a public health agency in Ottawa but it was not governed by an independent

board. It was governed, in our city of Ottawa, by the city council. Essentially what you had is politicians like you and I—duly elected, no doubt—who are making very important public health decisions, probably not the best approach to deal with that type of thing. We had some situations in Ottawa that did not work well. I remember when I used to sit on the board of the Centretown Community Health Centre, which is a very active community health centre in the city of Ottawa, working with other community health centres. We had some circumstances where city council decisions really did not meet what the science was telling or what the experts on the ground were telling. That's what propelled me to introduce Bill 194: to ensure the city of Ottawa has an independent board of public health, which the city is now in the process of putting forward. There are lots of citizens, actually—over 100 applications were received—who are putting forward their names to sit on this board, who have competence in public health issues, are able to make decisions on very important public health matters through experts. Of course, our role, or the role of city council in the case of Ottawa, is to defer to that independent board on various decisions. I think we should take the same approach. This debate is important, but I think we should look very carefully to the recommendation that is being made by Dr. King in light of the response to H1N1.

As a last point, I also take this opportunity to thank Dr. King and her staff and all public health agencies across the province for the remarkable job they did in dealing with a very stressful situation like that of H1N1. I think it was a great example of three levels of government working well together, federal, provincial and municipal governments, not only in Ontario but perhaps across Canada, and dealing with a very important and urgent health issue—which could have had a very devastating impact on our population—in a very effective manner.

Let's move forward. Let's look at the recommendations presented by the medical officer of health. Let's make this system even better, what is being suggested through Bill 141, so that the next time we're dealing with a big health emergency or with a future pandemic, we've got a more solid, coordinated approach to dealing with those situations.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. I look forward to hearing the points of view of my colleagues on this important matter.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Just to comment on the lawyer—the member from Ottawa Centre and his speech. I'll bring this up again: I asked a question earlier of the Liberal government about having legislation that incorporates phrases and terminology that aren't defined. So once again, I'm going to ask somebody in the Liberal government, maybe the member from Ottawa Centre—he's a lawyer. Maybe he can explain this process of putting the cart before the horse to us. Later on, they're going to

define and specify the meaning of any and all of the following phrases: “infectious disease,” “environmental health,” “pandemic,” “provincial, national or international public health event”—I don't know if that's a conference or whatever that public health event is—and “public health emergency preparedness.” Now, I really would like to know what—and for the member, that's on page 4 of the bill: “Section 97 of the act is amended by adding the following clauses.”

What do those phrases mean? What are we getting ourselves into? What is a national or international public health event in this act? What is environmental health? Is that the health of the trees or the health of the river? What is environmental health? Explain that to me, and explain how this affects this legislation, not knowing what these terms actually mean and what their definition is.

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

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am pleased to comment on my colleague's speech from Ottawa Centre.

I think it's been an important piece of legislation. I think my friend has outlined that significantly in his remarks and brought the local situation in Ottawa into some clarity. I understand that this piece of legislation is proposed—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Well, in one way its implications are fairly narrow. They are to allow the chief medical officer of health more authority during times of pandemic, during times when there's a health emergency in Ontario. We all know from some very recent past experiences—H1N1 and some others—that we need to have a central authority to coordinate the work of all health units.

I would say that during this period of H1N1, Dr. Allan Northan, the chief medical officer of health of the Algoma region—that Algoma and Sault Ste. Marie were ahead of the curve. They did an absolutely magnificent job of providing vaccine to the people they needed to provide it to, in an appropriate time frame and without any kinds of real problems in the distribution.

That was not the case across all of the province, unfortunately. Some strong central leadership would have made sure that that happened. This is what this piece of legislation is about. I think that it behooves all members of the House to vote in favour of it. I've had some indication from the other side that that's actually to be the case.

I commend my colleague for his intervention and look forward to moving this bill along.

1710

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Ottawa Centre, who is a lawyer and also the president of the Liberal Party, spoke very well, and that would give him the qualifications to do that.

I want to first of all commend the medical officer of health for the region of Durham, Dr. Robert Kyle, and the staff who work in that area for their excellent report issued in October 2010. It's the pandemic H1N1 review, a very thorough and comprehensive review, and I'm reading part of the report—and our critic Christine Elliott did put some of this in the record.

Ontario received laboratory confirmation of its first four confirmed cases of the pH1N1 on April 28, 2009. All four of these cases were residents of Durham region, and two of them were actually in my riding of Durham. These were the earlier cases linked to Mexico. From then on, because I'm duly elected and was trying to stay up on it, I watched the news dutifully. Every night there would be a different person from a different level of government talking about what the plan was; and then the World Health Organization was ramping up the tension; and then we had the communications strategy, which would basically be the provincial level, talking about the adjuvanted and the non-adjuvanted, the scarcity, whether young children should have it or not have it, the pregnant women—they actually created a panic, not a pandemic.

We have listened to Dr. King, and we understand completely that she wants to take full control, because if you read the act itself—and the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has said here that in the definitions it's quite startling. You should read subsections 77.9(1) and (2) of that part—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I just want to respond in this way. The Ministry of Health's report, Pandemic (H1N1) 2009, says, "At the local level, public health units reported that they worked closely with their local pandemic response partners. Many" local "public health units utilized and/or developed relationships with primary care providers, hospitals, local health integration networks (LHINs), First Nation organizations, school boards and community-based agencies. Public health units identified that these collaborations enabled the effective implementation of public health measures, and assisted in developing strategies to distribute vaccine and in some cases, implement alternate assessment, treatment and referral centres, or flu assessment centres. According to survey results from external health stakeholders, many respondents placed a high value on the relationships they formed over the course of the pH1N1 response and intend to leverage these relationships to enhance service delivery in their communities."

In other words, some of the most effective work was done at the local level. Some of the most effective work was done through decentralized networks. What the government is proposing is very centralized control.

This comment clearly outlines the benefit of local control. So what I'm left to ask is this: What will happen to this ability under the reforms suggested by this government in Bill 141?

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, the member from Durham and the member from Kenora–Rainy River for their points of view on the comments that I made earlier.

In response to the member from Lanark about definitions of certain terms that were used, and I think you asked me, sir, to speak as a lawyer, so I'll give you a very legal answer. It's difficult for me to answer those questions when I have not seen section 97 of the act which it refers to. Unless I see the full act, I can't give you the answer as to what those terms mean.

But I think, again, the bigger, broader issue here—and that may speak to the member from Kenora–Rainy River—is that one is not taking away the various municipalities' power to implement responses to pandemics. A couple of points: One, this legislation applies in very specific circumstances. That is an important one, so the decentralized nature that is our system remains. Secondly, in situations when this legislation would apply, what is being asked for is that there be a coordinated effort. Coordination implies that all parts of the system—be they municipal, obviously, boards of health and the provincial board of health—work together to ensure that they are providing a more systematic way of dealing with that particular emergency or pandemic. I don't see, personally, as I read this legislation or I read the report, taking away from the decentralized nature.

I think that system works, and we have seen it during H1N1, but making sure that there is a more coordinated or standardized delivery when it comes to those limited circumstances where this provision may apply—

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I got quite an answer from the member from Ottawa Centre in response to an earlier question I asked about the definition of phrases. The member from Ottawa Centre said, well, he wouldn't know what they meant until he read the complete bill, until he read section 97. This is, of course, fundamental with the Liberal government, illustrated clearly by the member from Ottawa Centre. He is going to promote and advocate a bill that he hasn't read and doesn't understand—doesn't understand what the meanings of the phrases are, hasn't read the bill, but he stands up as a representative of those people and advocates for the passage of a bill that he has not read and does not understand. I can assure you, the good member is a lawyer, but I wouldn't want to be going to that—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I just remind the member to keep his comments relevant to the bill.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Sure.

Anyway, we know that this bill, Bill 141, is nothing less and nothing more than an apology for the horrendous rollout and actions that we saw during H1N1.

I'm going to refer back once again to the member from Ottawa Centre as he praised and glowed that H1N1 was a great example of three levels of government

working together. Well, if that was the case, why are they looking to make wholesale changes on how they would deal with a pandemic or perceived pandemic?

Really, I think by any reasonable and objective measure, it would be very hard to describe H1N1 as a pandemic. The good member from Durham has referred to it. We all recall those days, the days of panic- and fear-stricken people shown on television on every nightly news channel, how the fear about H1N1 was propagated and promoted, but there really was—and I think the public health unit in Hastings—I forget the gentleman's name right at the present time but I remember he said very clearly that this really wasn't a pandemic and there was no evidence of a pandemic. Again, not to make light of it, but we keep things in perspective here. Every year, of course, there are a hundredfold more people who suffer fatal illness from the common flu and from other things, but that's not called a pandemic, as H1N1 was referred to. Again, we still don't know just what a pandemic is because it hasn't been defined. We don't know what—

Interjection.

1720

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, you're saying you don't know because you're saying you're going to define it afterwards. Those are your words. Read the bill and you'll understand what you're promoting. You won't understand it until you actually read it.

What is environmental health? How do we explain that?

This is a legal document. It's going to be interpreted by lawyers. It's going to be interpreted by courts, by the bureaucracy, and this government is saying, "We don't have to understand what the terminology is in the legislation."

I do want to say something else. There's another little section in here—it's all under section 77 of the health promotion act—that shows up on page 2 of Bill 141: "The minister, in the circumstances mentioned in subsection (3), and subject to subsection (1.1) ... may require the occupier of any premises to deliver possession of all or any specified part of the premises to the minister to be used for public health purposes." That's key: any premises. The minister may require and take possession of any premises. There's only one little caveat to that, and thank God it's there. The next section, section (1.1), says, "The minister may only make an order ... with respect to premises that are publicly owned premises, unless the premises are to be used as a temporary isolation facility."

Again, we're not quite sure what all this terminology means, but we do know that the authority to take possession of private property is included in this act.

I'm sure that once again, the Liberals will have the opportunity to get up and speak. I've raised a number of these questions earlier. None of them have been able to answer those questions—other than the fact that they haven't read it and they don't understand it and they can't tell us what it means, but they're going to promote

it and approve of this bill regardless of their lack of knowledge about this bill.

I think members from the third party have also raised some interesting and very significant concerns about this bill: about the centralized planning that is flourishing in our health system under Bill 141, and how the local health units have indicated that planning was not the problem with the H1N1, and if there was any problem, it was the centralized nature of that planning—the inability for local people to act quickly, timely, decisively because of centralized decision-making.

I want to go back once more to a key phrase, on page 1 of Bill 141: "No person shall perform any duties or exercise any powers under this section unless ... approved in writing by ... the chief medical officer of health." That's an awful lot of authority to rest in one individual—that you need to have written permission for the exercise of any duties. I understand why the local health units are concerned with Bill 141. Increasingly, more and more power and authority is being put into fewer and fewer hands.

We know—well, we've seen it. This Liberal government has shown time and time again what happens when you concentrate authority into fewer and fewer hands. We just have to look at the Premier and the boondoggle at eHealth. We can look at the Premier and the Ministry of Energy and the boondoggles happening in microFIT and all of our electrical generation programs. More and more authority is being divested into fewer hands.

I guess I could say this: No legislation can compensate for incompetence. No legislation can remedy incompetence, ineptness. But this is what this government always thirsts for: more legislation to try to not remedy their incompetence but to hide their incompetence, to try to demonstrate that they have some interest in fixing things. But really, the only thing they have an interest in is putting more and more authority into fewer and fewer hands, concentrating and centralizing that decision-making and being able to hide from their due diligence of actually reading and understanding the legislation that they're voting on.

I think every person in this province expects a government member to actually not just hear what they're to do, not just be told what to do by that centralized power within their party, but there's an expectation by the people of this province that an elected representative actually understands what they're doing.

I look forward, I really do look forward, to the member from Ottawa Centre, the member from Guelph or any member—or the minister—explaining some of those key questions that I've asked today. What do these phrases mean and why are these phrases not defined prior to voting for this bill? Explain to us how environmental health, a national or international public health event, infectious disease or pandemic—any of these—are going to be defined. What is going to be the consequence for people?

I also want this government to explain to me under what specific circumstances the minister will be able to

take possession of private property, because there is no mention of compensation in this for the taking of private property. What checks and balances is this government going to propose to limit that minister's authority, and what compensation is this government going to offer up if that case is ever exercised?

The taking and possessing of private property by the minister is not to be thought of lightly. It's not to be discounted. This government has an obligation to itself and, more importantly, to the people of this province, to ensure that the proper checks and balances are indeed included.

I want this government to explain to me why nobody will be able to perform any duty unless they have the written permission of the chief medical officer of health.

Those are a few of the questions that I have. I wait patiently for an answer from this Liberal government to those questions on Bill 141.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Just a few brief responses to what the member said: First of all, the authority to take possession of private property for the purpose of creating an isolation ward is actually already in the act. We aren't changing that. That was put in the act post-SARS. It's there.

1730

What we are saying is, we need access to premises under emergency situations for more than just isolation wards, but we're restricting it to public places. There's absolutely no mystery about what "public place" means. It's actually defined in the act as places that are part of the broader public sector according to the Financial Administration Act. That seems pretty clear to me. In fact, it includes—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Private property, Liz.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: You weren't listening: That's already in the act. The amendment is for public places.

It includes things like schools, colleges, universities, other health service providers and municipalities—the things that you would think common English would tell you are public places that belong to the broader public sector.

The reason we need those is, suppose you have something that is highly contagious, and the local hospital is already full. We might want to set up a temporary place where people can go for assessment and treatment where they aren't infecting the other people who are in the hospital with, maybe, a heart problem or a baby that's just been born; you don't want to expose them. We are setting up having the facility to set up something temporary where we can actually have people—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark–Frontenac.

Mr. John O'Toole: Lanark–Frontenac. That was the other member. Lanark–Frontenac and Addington, right?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Close enough.

Mr. John O'Toole: Anyway, he makes a couple of very good points. I think he uncovered some things that are, if you look at it, suspicious. I think that's our duty in opposition here, to point out things that don't exactly line up with what the intent is that we're being told.

Here's what Dr. King said in her remarks: "We live in a truly interconnected world, and with that interconnectedness comes vulnerability to literally any disease that emerges anywhere in the world. Because of air travel, a disease can take less than a day to travel around the globe under the right, or wrong, circumstances. A recent study, for example, found Toronto to be one of the most vulnerable cities in the world in that regard because of our high volume of air travel to and from a great number of different locations.

"Simply put, we know beyond a shadow of doubt that at some point, there will either be another pandemic, or another emerging infectious disease event like SARS, that will require a provincial response."

Dr. King gets it. I understand the importance of having a plan, but let's go to first principles. It's an admission that you had no plan. That's scary, when you think of it. Yet when I turned on the television, there were several different people, Dr. So-and-so, Ph.D., eminent immunologist, etc.

I can only say this: There are doctors in this Legislature that aren't being appropriately assigned tasks which they're capable of performing. I say that quite genuinely. We put people in charge of things who haven't got the foggiest idea, specifically in health care. I can say that there's a former medical—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I've had the opportunity now to listen to some government spokespersons, and I just listened to my colleague from the Conservatives. While I don't agree on most health care issues with members of the Conservative caucus, I do think my colleague has hit upon something here.

We find that this bill is really one of overwhelming centralization, that it really does take away some of the capacity of local health units to respond to what they see on the ground. It is another one of those "Let's run it all from Queen's Park" things. We've seen lots from this government of "Let's run it all from the Premier's office." We've seen lots of fiascos that that leads to.

New Democrats continue to have a real concern that this will actually do more harm than good. They're trying to centralize control in dealing with a possible pandemic which has all kinds of possible permutations in a province the size of Ontario, which has some very large cities, some very small towns, some very large rural areas, some very isolated First Nations. Trying to put all of your eggs in one centralized basket is, we think, a very big mistake. I would hope that someone from the government side would stand up and explain why they're so all-fired interested in centralizing everything once again.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Once again I want to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the member from Durham and the member from Guelph on their comments. Of course once again, the member from Guelph was very adept at answering a question that wasn't asked and not answering the question that was asked. But what is clear with Bill 141 is that this government responds to headlines, and their policies are nothing more than slogans. Those three questions—three questions were asked: Why are those terms used in this act without having definitions included with them? Why is the minister able to take possession of private property with no mention of compensation, no checks and balances included on that authority? And why this thirst and desire for centralized control to the nth degree with the chief medical officer of health?

All these questions are nice, simple, easy questions but I understand it's very difficult for the Liberals to answer them when they have not actually read the bill. Maybe this evening when they go home, they'll actually take some time to print the bill off, sit down, put their feet up and read—read what it is that they're proposing instead of just responding to headlines and in a fear-panicked headlong rush bringing in legislation to try to remedy their incompetence throughout this land.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to join the debate. The Health Protection and Promotion Amendment Act, 2011: This bill is extremely important to strengthen and better coordinate the province's response for future public health emergencies or events such as pandemics.

I wasn't involved in any great way in the SARS epidemic in 2003 except to follow it in the newspapers, but the H1N1 in 2009 certainly brought a lot of problems to our area of Orléans and Ottawa. There were a lot of uncertainties. I recall a big line of people, mothers and fathers with their young children out in the cold weather, maybe waiting for an hour. It took a few days to get organized, to get them inside our new Shenkman centre and have that whole system where the people were at least covered from the elements—who should be tested first and how was it all to go forward? This bill will strengthen and better coordinate the province's response for future public health emergencies or events such as pandemics. Overall, the proposed amendments would strengthen the province's ability to plan, manage and respond. That has to be extremely important. We came off easily with the H1N1 because it wasn't as bad as we thought it was, but we certainly have to prepare for the worst. I think that this bill goes a long way in strengthening that preparation for future pandemics; provincial, national or international public health events; and/or other emergencies that affect the health of Ontarians.

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I think what we see in this new world that we have is that the unexpected occurs more often, and so being

prepared—isn't that the Boy Scouts' way of thinking?—being prepared is important, and bringing forward this bill helps that preparation, helps us be more confident.

We'll get away from the issues that did come out in the H1N1 in the Ottawa area, and I'm sure across the province, where councillors were writing me to get to the Minister of Health to get the changes made in the procedures. We had hockey players, I think, getting in the line early, if I recall right. Anyway, there were a lot of things that just didn't go as well as they should have.

So knowing what we do, having a central command—it goes back to the ice storm, and Bob Chiarelli was in command centre in Ottawa when that was on. They learned a lot from that very serious natural event about how to run major catastrophes, we could call them, because it certainly was a catastrophe for many people in the ice storm. But they had central control down at the city of Ottawa, and I really have to say, that regional government showed us a lot of leadership. Bob Chiarelli was the chair of the region at the time. Brian Coburn was involved; he was a member here. But that central command is extremely important. I think that's where we're going, and we'll know how to handle all of these future events a lot better under this new legislation.

The new authority could be used only under limited and specific circumstances. Directives could only be used in instances of an infectious disease outbreak, such as H1N1; environmental health hazards; or public health emergencies. These directives would be in force for up to six months, but they could be terminated earlier if necessary.

There are often times when local public health units would benefit from more clarity and a standardized approach in place when a major health event like the H1N1 pandemic occurs.

We know it's not a question of whether there will be another pandemic; the only question is, "When will it occur?" Diseases know no borders, and Ontario must be in a position to protect its citizens and its health care system.

The H1N1 pandemic was not as severe as it could have been, but the next one could be worse, and that's what we have to prepare for. The minister said in November 2010, "I'm proud of the way Ontario handled the H1N1 pandemic; we learned a lot of lessons. What we are doing today is making sure that Ontario is better prepared for the next pandemic."

Part of making sure we are better prepared is implementing a panorama, a pan-Canadian initiative to improve public health surveillance and enhance the province's capacity to deliver immunization programs and ensure adequate vaccine inventories. The implementation of all these things will allow health care providers to more accurately detect outbreaks of communicable diseases and move to control them sooner.

Having the ability to have an increased level of planning for immunizations allows for a more rapid response in times of pandemic outbreak. Overall, the proposed amendments would strengthen the province's

ability to plan, manage and respond to future pandemics; to provincial, national or international public health events; and/or to other emergencies that affect the health of Ontarians.

You might say, “Why now?” I think this is the proper time to plan. We have had the experience with H1N1 very recently. A lot of consultation has gone into this new legislation. This is the time to make sure that we use all those best practices that we developed through all our communities across the province and to put those into one piece of legislation that’s going to direct the proper handling of the next time.

Having the ability to have an increased level of planning for immunization allows for a more rapid response in times of pandemic outbreak. This proposed legislation would add to the many important tools already in place and enhance our response to public health threats.

If the legislation is passed, the CMOH would have the authority to direct boards of health and local medical officers of health to adopt measures during any future public health emergency.

I just heard the discussions regarding the ability of the medical officer of health to be able to take over public buildings. This is important. We have those situations now with the daycares, having a place where they can go if there’s a major breakdown. The Legion in Orléans talks about planning so that their facility would be available for community groups and would have backup power and backup water so that they can be part of a civil emergency that we might see.

The proposed legislation is part of this government’s larger plan to enhance the way we respond to future public health events or emergencies, which ensures the health of Ontarians and the health of our health care infrastructure.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m pleased to provide a couple of minutes of comments to the member for Ottawa–Orléans. I appreciate that he mentioned the ice storm because we in eastern Ontario, back in January 1998, had to deal with some pretty interesting weather, and it caused a lot of issues.

At the time, I was working at the newspaper, and unlike my wife, a reporter who was out working all day, I was involved with the Internet division of the newspaper at the time when the ice storm hit. There wasn’t much business in the Internet business when the power was out, so I ended up at home with our kids. At the time, the baby, Caitlin, who’s now almost 21, was just about seven; she wasn’t eight yet. The other kids were 10 and 11. I remember during the ice storm how many days I could get those kids to have barbecued steak and eggs in a row because I was using whatever I could out of the—

Interjection: Eggs?

Mr. Steve Clark: Yeah, I barbecued the eggs, the toast, the steak—to see how many days I could get the

kids to have steak and eggs before everything was lost in the freezer.

But what happened was some of the things that the member for Ottawa–Orléans talked about: opening up schools, Legions—some municipalities ran out of Legions during that ice storm—health care centres, schools. Everything opened up. We put cots out. We helped each other. We brought generators around. It was a time when everyone banded together to make sure things got done. The things that are being proposed under this bill—some of our folks think they’re happening already, that in times of need, things like a pandemic, we can rally the people around.

I can appreciate the intent. Again, my concern is what’s not in there. The electronic immunization records aren’t there. That’s what I’m concerned about.

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

Mr. John O’Toole: The member from Ottawa–Orléans, I think, brought this to a very practical level. I think it’s a good time to remind ourselves that, if you look back in the 1970s, we’ve seen emergencies in more than 30 previously unknown diseases associated with bacteria and viruses that have wreaked havoc on the health care system. These include Ebola from 1977; legionnaires’ disease, I think, was 1977; hepatitis C in 1989; variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease was in 1996; and the H5N1 influenza A virus or avian flu in 1997, as well as others—as well as SARS.

You’re right: This is not a surprise. In fact, SARS was a wake-up call sort of nationally in terms of a response. That’s when they came up with the federal Panorama plan. I think that’s one thing that should be in here. On a serious note, this should be in the bill. Although the government has made every indication—and the minister’s remarks did mention it—that they were sort of working towards that, it should be in here as a requirement because of the way these things move around. As Dr. King said, with today’s mobility around the world, it should be command central. It should be a national plan, and that’s what I think is important.

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Some of the provisions under the bill, as has been mentioned by the member, are important to be able to, at the will, under the right circumstances—this is what’s required: who defines what an emergency is or what an environmental health outbreak is?—but they should have the authority to take and use facilities that are required in parts of Ontario where there aren’t often a lot of facilities around. They may have to use private or public to make sure the public are maintained safely. So I think he makes some very good points, and we still have a lot to learn on this particular bill.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: It’s always a pleasure to listen to the member from Ottawa–Orléans. He’s got a great background. He served with great distinction as a city councillor in the Ottawa area. Of course, he’s a professional

engineer by trade and he understands the profession. He understands what the essential elements of this bill, Bill 141, the Health Protection and Promotion Amendment Act, are: to provide some new powers to the chief medical officer of the province of Ontario, Dr. King. He spent a good deal of his speech this afternoon talking about that.

I'm personally pleased that he announced just recently that he's planning to seek re-election. I know that constituents in every corner of Ottawa–Orléans are going to Mr. McNeely every day and saying, "Phil, we want you to stay. We know the great job you've been doing for the last eight years and we want your leadership to continue." This speech is emblematic, I think, of his kind of leadership in his community talking about Bill 141.

I know he has worked very closely with the MOH in the greater Ottawa area and he knows that it's important to plan for things like a pandemic. He was used for that in his professional career as an engineer: to plan for future activities that may happen. That's exactly what this bill is all about.

The proposed legislation would give the chief medical officer of health enhanced oversight authority to help ensure that Ontario is better coordinated. This new authority would also be used only in limited and specific circumstances, and I think that's very important. There has been some discussion this afternoon that this is a Kremlin-like centralization that's going to happen. That's certainly not going to happen, because we're asking for enhanced powers in a very specific area.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to thank the member for Durham, the member for Peterborough, the member for Leeds–Grenville and the member from Timmins–James Bay for the great amount of insight that he gave us.

I think that what I hear this afternoon is that every member has a lot of confidence in our great communities throughout this province. Certainly, having been raised in Cumberland, near Navan—Navan almost made that Hockeyville thing very recently—Rockland, where the arena is called the Lalonde arena, and Orléans and Carlsbad—those are just some small communities in my part of Ontario. When times are tough, and I guess it's the rural background; you certainly have that—and some of the members have mentioned that, have alluded to that—great strength we have in our communities. So this is not in any way critical of these communities for any of the deficiencies that happened during the H1N1 that I'm aware of.

We look back on the heroics that occurred during the ice storm.

The strength is in our communities. The leadership will come from the top and we'll have the best practices across the provinces, but we certainly can depend on our people, on our communities, on our churches, on our

farmers. They'll be there to make sure that they provide all the hard work that's necessary should another pandemic occur.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a few comments in our remaining time today on Bill 141, An Act to amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act. I think it was the member for Thornhill who, in the start of his speech, talked about all of the flowery names that the government has given their bills, things like the Good Government Act, and the fact that this is just so plain. I'm not sure; maybe your writer of the fancy titles is probably doing the PowerPoint presentations now, something like that, that the Premier has been out spouting. So you've moved them from giving bills catchy names to putting them out on the road with the Premier.

When I commented on the member for Ottawa–Orléans, I talked about the ice storm and my prowess for making steak and eggs for my kids at the time. When the issue of H1N1 and the pandemic was discussed this time around, I was a CAO of a municipality, the township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands. During the time that these issues took place, I was on the front lines in the municipal sector. I can remember like it was yesterday when we did a tabletop exercise. Our municipal staff got together, and we did an actual tabletop exercise that if the pandemic hit our municipality, how would we handle it? I found it fascinating because I'm always very interested in emergency preparedness.

When I was a local mayor, 25 years ago, I remember going to the emergency preparedness college in Arnprior. I remember going a couple of times and dealing with emergency preparedness. I remember our council refining its emergency preparedness manual.

So when I was the CAO and we did this tabletop exercise, it was fascinating. Our deputy fire chief took us through the exercise, and I can remember that I was sick with H1N1 for a couple of days as part of the exercise, some of our staff went down, and we really had to decide how we were delivering our municipal services.

This reminded me of the ice storm, and how people banded together; how we opened up schools, municipal offices, local Legions to the public; how restaurants that could still make food provided it for a massive amount of people. But this tabletop exercise really made me think about, if it did hit to the degree that they thought, how we would be able to cope and decide which services we would provide and which we didn't.

As we all know, it wasn't as bad as what we had thought. Our municipality, I remember, maybe had one person that had taken a couple of days off work because they weren't sure. Obviously, they couldn't get to a hospital to find out whether they had H1N1, so we sent them home.

I remember buying masks. We bought masks for every municipal staffer; I think they cost \$10 or \$20. We all had to get fitted with these masks. I remember that the knowledge was quite high. I remember that fall, as well,

we had to get a lot of hand sanitizer, and that every council meeting we were there. So it really changed the way people thought.

In our community, the CAOs had regular conference calls with the health unit, and I found that at least our health unit, the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville health unit, had to adapt quite quickly. I know that some of the statistics we had were great in terms of being able to adapt. I know that during the first couple of days they had some issues with long lineups for children, and they were able to do a numbering system which greatly relieved the problem.

The one thing they did do right was that they kept referring people back to their website. We didn't seem to have the problems they had in the GTA with region-jumping. Those just weren't there. We didn't have the confusion that was in the area, but we were well aware from the media of the problems that were establishing throughout the province.

I know that my time is rapidly leaving, but again, the point I want to make too is what's not in here. When you look at the medical officer of health, Dr. King—she talked about Panorama, and the reasons why, the critical need. She used the words, "That last point is critical"—that you need those electronic health systems, that you need—

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

1800

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

DISCLOSURE OF TOXINS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Timmins–James Bay has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Natural Resources. The member for Timmins–James Bay has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know that everybody is going to be riveted to their seats as they walk out of the assembly to get to their offices to watch this on television.

All kidding aside, I don't plan on using the full five minutes. I don't expect the parliamentary assistant is going to use the full five minutes, either. There are just a couple of basic issues that we've got to get to.

What we learned last week from the Toronto Star report is that Agent Orange was used by the Ministry of Natural Resources through the 1950s and the 1960s and early 1970s in what they said was Kapuskasing and Hearst. First of all, for the record, if it was used in

Kapuskasing and the Gordon Cosens Forest, I've got to believe it was used across northern Ontario and anywhere else, quite frankly, that the ministry was carrying on spraying programs.

I believe that at the beginning, when all of this started in the 1950s, that the ministry probably didn't know that this was a toxic chemical. I can't believe that the ministry in the 1950s, when they set out to use these chemicals, would have said, "We're going to use this," if they would have known in fact that it was poisonous and it was something that would cause cancer and eventually death in human beings. I want to put that categorically up front. This is not about a witch hunt in regard to trying to besmirch the MNR when it comes to what they thought they were doing was safe and that turned out not to be.

But the big issue here is a simple one: when the ministry did find out in the early 1970s, I would believe, or maybe the late 1960s, that the use of Agent Orange was something that, quite frankly, caused sickness in human beings and caused cancer, as we have found out through the experiences of Vietnam where they used Agent Orange in order to defoliate the jungles of Vietnam so that the Americans and South Vietnamese troops were able better to find the North Vietnamese troops. It was found at that time that Agent Orange caused cancer. The first point that I want the parliamentary assistant to respond to is: When the ministry found out, why didn't they come clean? Why didn't they say to the public of Ontario, as a crown agency or ministry, "Listen, we have just now found out that"—circa 1968, 1970, or whatever year it was—"Agent Orange causes cancer, and anybody who thinks that they may have come in contact with Agent Orange needs to come forward in order to be tested and monitored, and we have to take a look at making sure we do what is right for those who have come into contact."

Instead, from what I can see, the ministry said nothing publicly, and that's what troubles me because we live in a modern democracy, and that modern democracy says that the public has a right to know. In this case the ministry, for whatever reason, did not advise the public when it came to the dangers of being exposed to Agent Orange through the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, when they found out that these chemicals were dangerous. That's the first thing I want to ask the parliamentary assistant and why I'm doing the late show: Why is it that the Ministry of Natural Resources did not make public that these were dangerous chemicals and people who came into contact with this as a result of exposure in the forests of northern Ontario were not advised that that was the case? If the minister can respond to that, I'm sure I will come up with multiple supplementary answers in other question periods to come.

Mr. David Oraziotti: Thank you—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry; you have up to five minutes to respond. Go ahead.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I appreciate that, and I want to thank the member from Timmins–James Bay for his

question and for the opportunity to provide some further information on a very, very important issue.

I can assure the member that I'm very concerned about this issue. The minister is and our government is, as I am sure all MPPs in this Legislature are, concerned and committed to obtaining all of the facts and all of the information with respect to what transpired during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s around the herbicide spraying program in the province of Ontario, doing that in a way that is open and transparent and ensures that we protect the public health.

I want to thank the former Tembec employee for bringing this forward to the minister's attention as well. In fact, the minister was speaking this past weekend over the telephone with this individual and assured him personally that she will do everything in her power to reach out to those who may have been affected by the herbicide spraying program dating back to the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

To the member opposite: Certainly, as a fellow northerner, I expect answers on this issue and I expect that we're going to get answers on this issue. What I can tell you at this point is that MNR is working with a number of ministries: the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. They are actively working together to gather the information around this particular issue. The minister has created a herbicide project team to lead the cross-government efforts to investigate this particular matter. The minister is also appointing an independent fact-finding panel that will report back and provide information on the issue that the member has raised and that has been discussed publicly over the last number of weeks. Our priority is to ensure that anyone who was exposed to the herbicides 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D through the herbicide spraying program dating back to the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s will get the support they need and will get the information that they need.

We are also concerned about not only the MNR employees and anybody who is currently working with the MNR or is a past MNR employee, but individuals who may have been working in the private sector in the area or any other citizens who may have been in the area with respect to these programs taking place during this time period. We want anyone out there in the province of Ontario who thinks that they may have been impacted by this to get the necessary information and to come forward. I'm going to provide some further information on that in a second.

As the member is aware, or should be aware as well, the minister has also directed that this information be

posted on MNR websites regarding herbicide use during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, as well as steps that former employees, private sector individuals or any other individuals can take if they believe that they've been affected by this.

I should also say for the record, and as the member is aware, that the federal government, through Health Canada, regulates the use of herbicides in our country, and I can tell you that MNR stopped using this particular herbicide in 1979, about 32 years ago, six years before the federal government put in place, in 1985, a ban on the use of these herbicides in the province of Ontario.

MNR has also been in contact with WSIB, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and it's their role to review all work claims related to the occupational disease component.

What I'd like to provide at this point as well are a couple of numbers for the benefit of the public and all members. MNR has established a toll-free line for the general public so that anyone with any information about the use of the spray program can contact us. The number is 1-888-338-3364. It's available on a number of ministry websites, and that's for the general public. As the member knows, the numbers around the WSIB occupational disease information line are 416-344-4440 or toll-free at 1-800-387-0750. We want to make sure that anyone who has information about this or believes that anyone may have been affected has the ability to come forward.

I want to say to the member opposite that I represent a riding in northern Ontario, as does the member, and unfortunately we can't go back and change the past on this particular issue, but I want to assure the member and all members of this House that we want to do everything possible to get this information to anyone that has been affected. I can certainly say that if any of my family members were involved in this, we'd want to make sure that they have the information, just as we want to make sure that any member of the general public or any past employee of MNR or anyone working in this sector has the information they need, and that we have the ability to provide the appropriate responses and get them the attention that they need with respect to this.

Again, our government continues to take steps to address this and to ensure that all Ontarians are made aware of what we learn in an open and transparent process.

I want to thank the member for raising the issue today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1810.

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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Richmond Hill York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murdoch, Bill (PC) Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R (LIB)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB) O'Toole, John (PC) Oraziotti, David (LIB) Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC) Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB) Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB) Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre Durham Sault Ste. Marie Oshawa Kitchener–Conestoga Elgin–Middlesex–London Scarborough–Agincourt	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (NDP) Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Beaches–East York Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) Ramal, Khalil (LIB) Ramsay, David (LIB) Rinaldi, Lou (LIB) Ruprecht, Tony (LIB) Sandals, Liz (LIB) Savoline, Joyce (PC) Sergio, Mario (LIB) Shurman, Peter (PC) Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord London–Fanshawe Timiskaming–Cochrane Northumberland–Quinte West Davenport Guelph Burlington York West / York-Ouest Thornhill Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Sorbara, Greg (LIB) Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB) Sterling, Norman W. (PC) Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Vaughan Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud Carleton–Mississippi Mills Toronto–Danforth	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB) Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB) Wilson, Jim (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex Perth–Wellington Simcoe–Grey	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC) Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB) Yakabuski, John (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Robert Bailey
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Kim Craitor, Bob Delaney
Garfield Dunlop, Peter Fonseca
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Toby Barrett
Bob Delaney, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Pat Hoy, Helena Jaczek
Norm Miller, Leeanna Pendergast
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Jim Brownell, Steve Clark
Kuldip Kular, Dave Levac
Amrit Mangat, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, David Oraziatti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
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Donna H. Cansfield, Aileen Carroll, P.C.
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Lisa MacLeod, Leeanna Pendergast
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Reza Moridi
Bas Balkissoon, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Ted Chudleigh, Mike Colle
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Reza Moridi, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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Sylvia Jones, Amrit Mangat
Norm Miller, Yasir Naqvi
Michael Prue, Mario Sergio
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Shurman
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David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Peter Shurman, Norman W. Sterling
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Ted McMeekin
Shafiq Qaadri, Khalil Ramal
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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