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of Debates
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(Hansard)**

Thursday 10 March 2011

Jeudi 10 mars 2011

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 10 March 2011

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA SANTÉ
ET LA SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 9, 2011, on the motion for second reading of Bill 160, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to occupational health and safety and other matters / *Projet de loi 160, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail et la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail en ce qui concerne la santé et la sécurité au travail et d'autres questions.*

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

Mr. Paul Miller: The NDP is pleased to participate in this debate on the government's legislative response to the expert advisory panel on occupational health and safety report.

The NDP understands that Bill 160 represents a set of compromises more or less worked out in the Dean report process. Implicit in these compromises is the fact that neither labour nor the employer community gets everything they want in the way of changes to Ontario's health and safety regime. We understand that, sometimes, politics is about compromise, but even taking this into account, Bill 160 falls somewhat short of what we had hoped for in terms of implementing the Dean report's recommendations.

However, before I get into the changes we might realistically want in the legislation, flowing from the Dean report, I'd like to set forth the NDP's vision of what real, progressive change might look like in Ontario's health and safety regime.

In the NDP review, fundamental change in Ontario's health and safety regime would mean:

External enforcement:

—Enforcement must be based on the principle that the cost of non-compliance is greater than the cost of compliance. There must be an increase in the complement of inspectors, industrial hygienists—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: I hope they're listening; it's very good stuff here—ergonomists, toxicologists, occupational health physicians and scientists at the Ministry of Labour, as well as providing inspectors with ready access to relevant scientific research and databases;

—Introduce a more immediate and effective system of employer and supervisor penalties that can be dispensed by inspectors which do not involve the court system;

—Simplify the prosecution process so that inspectors can prosecute straightforward cases more speedily; and

—The province must develop an effective process to ensure the prosecution of appropriate cases under the Criminal Code.

Internal enforcement:

—Provide certified worker members with the unilateral power to issue stop-work directions;

—provide certified worker members of joint health and safety committees and health and safety representatives with the authority to issue provisional improvement notices;

—employers should be obliged to implement recommendations made by the joint health and safety committees and health and safety representatives;

—provide joint health and safety committees and health and safety representatives with the right to be consulted on the development and implementation of health and safety policies, programs, measures and training;

—provide workers in all workplaces with the right to have health and safety representation;

—provide members of the joint health and safety committees and all health and safety representatives with the right to standardized certification training, with annual renewals, from a training organization of their choice.

Enforce and strengthen the reprisal provisions of the Ontario health and safety act:

—give ministry inspectors the power to investigate alleged reprisals and to reinstate workers and order back pay and/or damages;

—Ministry of Labour must prosecute appropriate reprisal cases;

—provide workers alleging reprisals with an effective, simplified forum to make their reprisal case when an inspector has not investigated or acted on a reprisal allegation.

Improve and expand health and safety training:

—provide all members of a joint health and safety committee and all health and safety representatives with the right to standardized certification training, with annual renewals, from a training organization of their choice;

—the curriculum of certification training programs must be standardized—both part 1, “Basic,” and part 2, “Workplace-Specific Hazard”—to ensure that all certified workers and employer representatives receive equivalent training;

—provide all new employees, supervisors and managers with mandatory, relevant and meaningful health and safety training necessary for them to fulfill the duties of their position safely and competently.

Increase health and safety support and resources for workers:

—adequately fund resources for workers, such as occupational health clinics for Ontario workers and workers’ health and safety centres, to ensure that all workers have access to trusted resources for expertise, health information and training.

Regular reviews of health and safety system, legislation and regulations:

—establish a regular systematic review process of Ontario’s health and safety system, including legislation and regulations to ensure the system and the law meets the needs of modern workplaces and work practices.

Our response to Bill 160 now: That’s where the province would be going if we had a government in power that really cared about the health and safety of Ontario workers, but we don’t.

We have to work from the Dean report recommendations, which would at least provide a solid starting point for dealing with the issues raised above. Given the scope of the topics and questions raised in the Dean report, the NDP strongly believe that this implementation legislation must receive very, very close scrutiny.

Here are the NDP’s initial thoughts on the topics addressed in Bill 160. Efforts to improve collaboration and integration: Ontario’s health and safety system is in many ways fragmented, poorly resourced and not responsive to the changing nature of work and technology in our province. Although there have been some—some—recent attempts to better coordinate the activities of the MOL, the WSIB and the health and safety associations, there continues to be duplication of the effort and lack of communication between these three key players. Even during the high-risk program, where considerable planning was done, there were examples of duplication, such as high-risk companies receiving the fourth mandatory MOL’s inspector’s visit during the same period that a WSIB Workwell audit was under way. That is unacceptable.

One approach to clarifying and aligning the roles of the MOL and the WSIB is to move prevention out of the WSIB altogether, allowing it to focus on its key business, which is administrating the province’s no-fault workplace insurance system. That is the approach being taken

in this legislation. Given the MOL’s role to set workplace standards to protect worker health and safety, it makes intuitive sense that the ministry should play an important role in encouraging the improvement of health and safety conditions, thus preventing injuries and illnesses. Therefore, the NDP supports the notion that putting prevention and enforcement under one roof could enhance the effectiveness of both programs, allowing better communication between the two branches, allowing more effective data and information sharing and encouraging joint prevention and enforcement initiatives.

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That said, there is a danger that a lack of independence from the minister could result in unilateral decisions being made by the minister that could do real harm to Ontario’s health and safety regime. In part, this has to do with maintaining the independence of the four health and safety associations, the Workers’ Health and Safety Centre, and the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers.

First, as Ontario’s designated health and safety training centre, the WHSC provides training for workers, their representatives and employers from every sector and region of this province. In our opinion, they do a really first-class job, and maintaining their independence should be a priority. The same can be said of the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers.

In addition to the WHSC and OHCOW, the other players to be considered are the health and safety associations. Recently restructured to form four much larger associations, these new entities are still in their formative stages. While their main mandate is to develop and deliver education and training programs, they also provide consultation and technical services. The NDP recommends that the new HSAs clarify and communicate that their primary mandate is to act as health and safety resources in their sectors. The HSAs should align their activities annually with the plans and sector strategies developed by the Ministry of Labour in consultation with labour and employer organizations.

It is also critical that the HSAs consult labour as they develop their training and educational materials, to ensure they reflect actual workplace situations and solutions to problems. Technical expertise regarding health and safety issues is not enough to create valuable and effective health and safety education; real workplace experience is needed to make the programs meaningful to participants.

From my own experience in the steel mills, when I was on joint health and safety committees and we did tours of the plant, on many occasions it would go two or three months without an inspection, and sometimes the management person wouldn’t be on the tour, or vice versa. Unions were always there on the tour. We would have to put forth our concerns, and they might not be addressed for anywhere from three to four months. Even though there were time limits set forth by the Ministry of Labour to do these things, sometimes they fell by the wayside. We certainly did not have enforcement, and

even when we complained, it was a long time before an inspector would come in and deal with it. They would send letters between the company and the ministry, warning them that they should be doing their monthly safety meetings and tours, and a lot of times they didn't do it. This is one of the problems of administration and enforcement of the safety programs in this province: They have to be enforced. When one side or the other complains about it and it falls on deaf ears, that's not a good thing.

The chief prevention officer and the prevention council: The NDP supports the notion of a chief prevention officer and a prevention council. However, we have real concerns that these bodies have sufficient independence from the minister to do their jobs properly. To be honest, we don't see that independence in this legislation, and new and creative ways to increase their authority and independence are something we are going to be calling for at every possible stage. In other words, we see strengthening the independence of these organizations as a key to maintaining the integrity of organizations such as the WHSC and OHCOW. We do not want them to be simple creatures of the government of the day; we want them to be vital, independent players in the debate over appropriate health and safety policy in this province.

An example of this lack of independence is the fact that the provincial health and safety strategy that the CPO has come up with must be approved by the minister before it is released to the public. We do not agree with that. We believe that the CPO should have the independence to go right to the public with his strategy.

Training: One of the ways in which employers meet legal obligations to impart health and safety information to protect workers is through training. As mentioned in the Dean report, a recent systematic review by the Institute for Work and Health concluded that workplace training and education have a positive impact on the health and safety practices of workers. According to the Dean report:

"These findings support the multi-faceted approach set out in the recommendations of the panel: filling gaps in training requirements, promoting key elements of OHS performance such as management commitment, encouraging worker participation, influencing societal norms, and creating processes to identify and remove hazards. To make significant improvements to workplace health and safety, all of these elements are necessary."

We are not convinced that this legislation goes far enough in ensuring that adequate health and safety training is done in Ontario workplaces, and we will be looking for ways to strengthen this legislation.

Internal and external enforcement: Effective reform of our health and safety system must include the enhancement of both the external and internal enforcement system. The former involves building the legal regime administered by the Minister of Labour's OHS division, while the latter involves addressing the imbalance of power over health and safety decision-making in the workplace.

The ministry's capacity to enforce the act, its regulations and the Criminal Code in relation to serious health and safety violations must be enhanced. We believe that this legislation must strengthen our current enforcement system. Over the years, the NDP has consistently argued that the most effective incentive for employers to improve health and safety is a strong enforcement system based on the principle that the cost of violating the law is greater than the cost of compliance. There are numerous studies from many jurisdictions demonstrating that increased external inspections and external enforcement result in measurable declines in injury rates.

Strong enforcement is vital to address the imbalance of power in the workplace. The internal responsibility system is predicated on the assumption that when dealing with workplace health and safety issues, all the workplace parties are equal. Even in unionized workplaces, workers know that isn't true. In many workplaces, unionized or not, workers are afraid—actually afraid—to raise health and safety concerns, to demand their rights under the act and to report workplace injuries and illnesses. With no effective protection against employer reprisals for health and safety activity, workers depend on the enforcement agency for support. In workplaces which make up the large underground economy, and those dominated by migrant labour, new Canadians or part-time, precarious workers, the need for a strong enforcement system is even greater today.

The Ministry of Labour needs more inspectors, and inspectors need more resources, such as access to industrial hygienists, ergonomists, toxicologists, nurses, physicians and engineers. They also need easy access to databases and research to assist in addressing new and emerging workplace issues.

We have made it clear that we are open to the prevention services being moved from the WSIB to become a new branch of the MOL. With this, the research capacity with the prevention branch must be enhanced beyond what currently exists within the WSIB. Enforcement must have access to solid scientific data, both on qualitative issues, such as health and safety management systems, and highly technical, quantitative research.

Internal enforcement systems are next on the list. This involves providing workers with enhanced enforcement tools at the workplace. These provisions would address the imbalance of power between workers and employers with respect to making decisions about health and safety matters. We will be looking closely at the provisions in the legislation related to the internal responsibility system and will be making recommendations to enhance them.

We acknowledge that there have been some small steps forward in improving training for health and safety representatives in small employers, as well as significant steps forward in allowing the employee representative on a joint health and safety committee to go directly to the employer with his or her concerns if there is an impasse at the committee level.

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However, we do not think this goes far enough, and we're looking for ways to strengthen this position.

External enforcement system: The capacity of the ministry's OHS division must be enhanced with the development of several disciplines as well as by building the individual capacity of inspectors. This involves the following:

- increasing the complement of industrial hygienists, ergonomists, toxicologists, occupational health physicians and scientists;

- enhancing the skill level of inspectors by regular training; and

- developing a research arm, similar to Quebec's ITSST, that would consist of a collection of toxicologists, industrial hygienists, radiation specialists, scientists, ergonomists etc.

An important issue is reprisals. I want to start off by reading from the Dean report on the subject of reprisals.

"Section 50 authorizes the OLRB to inquire into a worker's complaint and to remove or change any penalty imposed. In doing so, the board's primary goal is to mediate a settlement between the workplace parties. It generally takes from eight to 12 weeks for mediation to begin. If a settlement cannot be reached, an adjudicator will hold a hearing. It can take up to six months for a hearing to be scheduled, and it is held in Toronto. The OLRB receives about 100 reprisal complaints a year. About 20% to 30% are from unionized workers and"—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I'm having trouble hearing myself. If you could call for some order, it would be nice.

"The OLRB receives about 100 reprisal complaints a year. About 20% to 30% are from unionized workers and the rest are from unrepresented workers."

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The honourable member has asked that we keep our private conversations to a whisper or take them outside of the chamber, please. He says he can't hear himself, and I agree.

The honourable member.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

"Concerns have been raised that the way in which section 50 is currently administered discourages many workers from exercising their rights under the OHSA and does not adequately protect from reprisals those who do exercise their rights. The panel heard some key criticisms:

- "MOL inspectors have no role in investigating reprisal allegations"—no role. The inspector has no role.

- "The OLRB procedures are complex and take a long time, and travelling to Toronto for a hearing is expensive.

- "The MOL rarely prosecutes employers for violating section 50.

"Several serious reprisals came to the attention of the panel chair in the course of this review. In addition, information was provided to the panel that described 30 alleged reprisals over a 26-month period. In 28 of these cases, the alleged reprisal was termination of employment." I don't know how that works. You complain about safety problems and they terminate your employ-

ment. Boy, that's scary. "In 29 of the cases, the Minister of Labour issued orders on health and safety infractions. Labour stakeholders stated that for every reprisal complaint made, many more go unreported" because the employees are afraid to come forward.

That should end. Many times over the years, in the plant I was in, people didn't report things because they were afraid of the employer, and about a month later, you'd see either a fatality or somebody seriously hurt. Then the rules changed real quick. But many, many times, we went for years without any kind of support from the company. They were very slow, dragging their feet on trying to fix and make a workplace safe.

We're going to take a very close look at these reprisal sections of the bill, to see if Mr. Dean's concerns have been fully addressed. But I've got to be honest: Even at first glance, there doesn't seem to be any room for improvement in this area, which is a really scary thing.

Legislation and regulations: A look back over the past 30 years indicates that while reviews of the legislation and the system take place from time to time, these reviews are triggered by a crisis: workplace fatalities or an ideological decision by government to make a substantive change to components of the health and safety system.

The most recent OHSA amendment, workplace violence and harassment, was triggered largely by the workplace murder of Lori Dupont and the relentless lobbying by labour, women's groups and Ms. Dupont's family. That's too bad that they had to go to that extent to get something changed.

The most recent comprehensive review of our health and safety system took place in 1997, in the midst of a number of dramatic initiatives by the government of the day to alter the focus and functioning of the enforcement arm of the system, as well as make changes to other important parts of the system. Accordingly, the NDP recommends that the government establish a program of regular reviews of the performance of Ontario's health and safety system, looking at a variety of indicators, such as enforcement activity, including prosecutions, ticketing and field visits; workplace fatalities due to injuries and occupational disease; developing health and safety case law; the effects of the introduction of new legislation and regulation; and new and emerging health and safety issues and hazards.

Workers and employers need an ergonomic regulation. Although excellent work has been done developing the MSD guide and its various tools, it is not considered to be enforceable by the Ministry of Labour and, consequently, has not been widely implemented. The ministry and the WSIB recognize that over 40% of Ontario's LTIs are due to muscular disorders, yet the government refuses to take steps to introduce an enforceable ergonomic regulation to address this critical hazard. More than 50% of WSIB cases are repetitive strain injuries.

In addition, it has recently become clear that our long-held assumption, supported by the MOL practice, that the regulation for industrial establishments would be applied

in places such as educational facilities and correctional facilities is no longer correct; that doesn't happen. The NDP has learned of a number of cases where Ministry of Labour inspectors have been instructed not to apply the regulations—can you imagine that? They were instructed not to apply the regulations; that's pretty scary—leaving the workplace parties to rely on their general duty provisions to try to determine what steps to take to protect workers' health and safety. The NDP suggests that the regulation for industrial establishments be renamed to ensure that it covers all—I repeat, all—Ontario workplaces not covered by other regulations.

The next section is administrative penalties. I want to read at length from the Dean report, as I begin my comments on reprisals.

“Section 50 of the OHSA prohibits employers from dismissing, disciplining or otherwise penalizing a worker for acting in compliance with the act, regulations or orders, or for seeking enforcement of the legislation. It also sets out a process for resolving a worker's complaint of unfair employer discipline: The worker may have the matter dealt with by arbitration under a collective agreement, if any, or file a complaint with the Ontario Labour Relations Board... Section 50 is intended to enable workers to freely”—I repeat, freely—“raise health and safety concerns and to fully exercise their rights under the OHSA, such as refusing unsafe work, without fear of reprisal.

“Currently, the MOL and the OLRB have distinct roles when responding to a reprisal complaint. MOL inspectors will visit the workplace and investigate any health and safety issue related to the complaint and will issue orders for contraventions of the OHSA or regulations. They will also inform the workplace parties of their rights and duties under section 50 and refer the worker to the OLRB. Inspectors typically do not investigate whether a reprisal has in fact occurred, nor do they take enforcement action related to the alleged reprisal.”

This is totally unacceptable. That's their job: to inspect, report and take action. This doesn't happen.

“Section 50 authorizes the OLRB to inquire into a worker's complaint and to remove or change any penalty imposed. In doing so, the board's primary goal is to mediate a settlement between the workplace parties. It generally takes from eight to 12 weeks for mediation to begin. If a settlement cannot be reached, an adjudicator will hold a hearing.” Unfortunately, “it can take up to six months for a hearing to be scheduled, and it is held here” in Toronto. “The OLRB receives about 100 reprisal complaints a year. About 20% to 30% are from unionized workers and the rest are from unrepresented workers.

“Concerns have been raised that the way in which section 50 is currently administered discourages many workers from exercising their rights under the OHSA and does not adequately protect from reprisals those who do exercise their rights. The panel heard some key criticisms:

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“—MOL inspectors have no role in investigating reprisal allegations”—that has to change.

“—The OLRB procedures are complex and take a long time, and travelling to Toronto for a hearing is expensive,” and there are too many delays. In that period, people can be injured or killed because of non-action.

“—The MOL rarely prosecutes employers for violating section 50.”

Can you imagine that? You go on a safety and health tour with your joint committee, and you report a problem to the employer or to the ministry. Then, two months later—because of delays and all that—that exact problem you had has not been dealt with, and that employee gets injured on something you knew about that could have happened months before.

I've seen it hundreds of times over the years in those steel plants. You report a hazard. It could happen, and the only time it happens or when something gets done is if somebody gets killed. Then everybody panics, all the inspectors come in, and they order the company to do something. They don't even fine the company.

The company knew about it. Their joint health and safety committee—at least the non-union—reported it to the managers, and they didn't do anything about it. The person gets hurt in that time period of waiting six months to get it heard, and nothing was done.

That canopy or that machinery was not repaired, the guards weren't put on, the walkways weren't repaired, or the overhead crane rails were not repaired. We've had accidents and accidents and accidents even though we knew about it. We knew the problem was there. Not only was it not addressed; it wasn't inspected, and no action was taken. We have a fatality on our hands. That's not good stuff.

“The Ministry of Labour should enhance the current legislative provisions for penalties by adding administrative monetary penalties”—actually fine them; do something—“as an enforcement tool, and should develop policies and procedures that govern their use.”

The NDP supports the use of administrative penalties which will allow an inspector to impose an immediate—not a year or two years later and give them a rebate on their safety record—immediate financial penalty on an employer. Ideally, we would like to see the following: Certain violations must result in a mandatory penalty relying on a schedule of violations and penalties; repeat violations must result in higher penalties, and penalties must reflect the seriousness of the violation, how long the violation has been occurring, the number of workers affected and the impact on the worker—injuries and illnesses.

Such a system would be speedy and not easily circumvented. Employers and other workplace parties would be aware of the cost of non-compliance with certain sections of the act. Fines gathered through administrative penalties would return to the ministry and could be applied to improving the ministry's health and safety programs.

We notice that there's no mention in the act of administrative penalties, and that's something we are calling for down the road.

I can say that there are a lot of weaknesses in the bill, and hopefully, they'll listen at committee. Hopefully,

they will let the people have their say. Hopefully, we can get some changes made in the right areas. I have my doubts. There are five Liberals on the committee, two Conservatives and one NDP. I don't like our odds. Unfortunately, it shouldn't be partisan, but it becomes that way.

I think safety and health is a very important thing to the working families of this province. We want our kids at their first job to come home safely at night with all their limbs. We certainly don't want any more fatalities, and we do see them on a regular basis.

We need more inspectors. We need stiffer fines. We also need joint health and safety committees that have meat to their ability to get things done, instead of waiting months at a time.

As I've stated, in the plant I worked in for over 30 years, I've seen fatalities. I've seen reports of guys who were so upset they were ready to walk out because they said, "We told you about that concern. We warned you about that concern. Now one of our brothers or sisters is dead. Why didn't you act on it?"

The odd time, they fine them, if it was a really serious thing. But even up to three or four years ago—maybe longer than that—there were two employees killed at Dofasco in a pit. They died from fumes. They were contractors working in the plant. The joint health and safety committee—that's a non-union company; maybe if they had had a joint health and safety committee that was actually in there and saw it, and could have then warned them or had tests done, that may have helped save those guys' lives.

I think every company, every workplace in the province—I don't care if you've got one employee or 10,000 employees—should have the same rights. They should have the ability to come forward with their concerns without fear of being fired. If an employer takes that route, they should be fined heavily for threatening an employee because the employee wants to work in a safe environment. That's wrong. I don't think this government's going far enough with the penalties. I don't think they enforce the penalties as much as they should: You know, rather than install something that might cost a company \$100,000 to make it safe, they get slapped on the hand with a \$5,000 fine. They figure they saved \$95,000, and they still go about it without making the change. That's happened for years in this province. It's got to stop. This government's got to be serious about health and safety. They've got to give those inspectors the ability to fine on the spot, just like giving a traffic ticket—especially if they've been warned before. If they didn't fix it within a reasonable amount of time and they haven't implemented it, then those employers should be held responsible financially as well, because they're putting their workers in a precarious situation where they could possibly be injured seriously or there could be a fatality. I hear everybody in this House stand up and say, "We want our families to come home safe," and that they do care about the health and welfare of people. Prove it. Make this bill tougher. Make it so that employers stand up and listen, and will take action.

You know, it's not just the fact that they're keeping their employees safe; it's the fact that these employees create wealth for these companies. They work most of their lives and put money in these companies' pockets for shareholders or for the individual owners. They deserve the respect from their employers to at least allow them to go home safely to their families. I think this bill falls short of some of the things we'd like to see.

A lot of the independent safety and health organizations are doing a wonderful job in our province. We don't want to eliminate them; we don't want to streamline all the action into one group. We want to keep them active, but we certainly want the Ministry of Labour and the WSIB to work hand in hand and make sure that these situations are improved.

I don't want to see one person die in this province. I know it's a bit of a stretch, because things happen, but I certainly don't want to see anyone hurt or die in this province because of a safety and health concern that was not dealt with.

In closing, we will be monitoring this very closely as it goes along. I hope that the minister and his parliamentary assistant are listening, and I hope that when it goes to committee we can make some changes that will shore up any holes in this legislation—because there are definitely holes in this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. His job is to criticize legislation and to criticize the bill that's in front of us today. He went through various sections. I only have two minutes to respond to his concerns, but I'm sure we will have more opportunities to debate this at committee and get to more of the issues here.

I want to remind the member that we did act on the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety, otherwise known as the Dean report. There are 46 recommendations, and we plan to implement them all. I'll speak from a small section at the very beginning of this report. It says:

"If this report is fully implemented, every Ontario worker and supervisor will receive mandatory information about workplace rights and responsibilities before they start their job; every construction worker will receive entry-level training ...; there will be rigorous training standards for workers who work at heights ...; there will be tougher penalties for those who place workers at risk ...; employers will receive better support in understanding and meeting" the health needs of workers—and it goes on in the report.

We plan to implement everything that the Dean report has said, and I don't see anywhere in the bill where we don't do that. The bill here in front of us, Bill 160, is a mirror copy, almost, of the Dean report. Even though there were various criticisms raised, I don't see where those criticisms are justified. We have placed a bill in front of this Legislature, Bill 160, which responds

directly to the Dean report and the concerns raised in the Dean report.

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The most important thing here is system integration. We're doing that. The concerns that he raised regarding the protection of vulnerable workers, for example, are contained in this bill. And other concerns that he raised are fully implemented or will be implementable in the bill in front of us today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments? The honourable member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm certainly pleased to respond to the comments that have been made regarding Bill 160, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to occupational health and safety and other matters.

This, of course, was triggered by the unfortunate and tragic death of the four construction workers. I do want to compliment and congratulate Tony Dean, who actually served as my assistant deputy minister when I was Minister of Labour, and the people that served with him on the committee for the investigation that they have undertaken and the consultation in bringing forward this legislation.

Workplace safety continues to be an issue that needs to be addressed. In fact, regrettably, in my own community yesterday, we did lose a worker on a construction site on Belmont, in Kitchener. We need to ensure that each and every step continues to be taken to keep our construction workers safe on the site. I think this piece of legislation does make progress in moving forward in this regard. I would hope that this legislation would go out to committee for further consultation, because if we have only one accident, it's one accident too many in the province of Ontario.

At this time, as well, as we go into the summer season, I think it's important that we remember that the young students who are going out to work also need to be reminded of the fact that they can refuse unsafe work.

We just need to do all we can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments? The honourable member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has done an admirable job of trying to lay out the breadth and depth of the challenges in terms of occupational health and safety. People who care about occupational health and safety, activists who spend a lot of time working in the area of occupational health and safety, had great hopes that the Dean report was going to wrestle with all of the issues. I think it would be fair to say that most of those people who work in the area of occupational health and safety were modestly—modestly—happy about the report that was produced. I think it would be an overstatement to say that they were fully satisfied or completely pleased with the report that was produced.

The McGuinty Liberals are trying to say that this legislation now encompasses everything that was in the Dean report. I think what my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has pointed out, and pointed out very clearly, is that there are a number of very large gaps, that this legislation does not address the issues that need to be addressed if we are really serious about taking on occupational health and safety and making significant improvements for workers. I want to thank the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his critique, because it is very clear that this legislation, in and of itself, does not capture the essence of the Dean report, and this legislation, in and of itself, leaves all kinds of gaps that need to be addressed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments? The honourable member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I want to pick up on one point that this legislation deals with, and that is that employees would have enhanced safety training and a more efficient reprisal complaint process: for example, when a worker is fired for reporting unsafe work conditions. This is something that should have been in place long ago, in my view.

A long time ago, I worked in a plant. I was about 20 years old, and I was being shown how to work at a die press, a huge 10-tonne press. It might have been more than 10 tonnes; I can't remember now. I wasn't actually being trained on how to operate it; I was being shown how to operate it, in my view, now that I'm older by some 40 years.

The press, when it came down, formed a piece for the automotive trade. When that press came down, to protect one's hands from being in it there were arm bands that worked in opposite reaction, so when the press came down, your hands were pulled out of the press. The man showing me how to run this press said, "Don't wear the arm bands." Those were the safety feature of the press at that time, some 40 years ago. He said, "Don't wear them, because they fail and they'll leave your arms in there, you won't be able to get them out and the press will come down and crush you."

My point here is that if anything like that existed in today's more modern world, a 20-year-old trying to get his first job, trying to perhaps raise a family etc. and pay bills, should have some place where they can go and be assured that when they talk about the lack of safety, their job is protected. They should know that they have the opportunity to do that, know who to go to to speak about it and not fear that they would be moved from that job or even have the job eliminated.

In my case, I didn't know what to do, so I took the man's advice. I didn't wear the safety equipment, and that was probably the wrong thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has two minutes for his response.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the members from Scarborough Southwest, Kitchener–Waterloo, Kenora–Rainy River and Chatham–Kent–Essex.

All I can say is that, being in the trades, I spent over 30 years in heavy industrial environments. I can tell you that I served on joint health and safety tours and I actually saw fatalities; I saw injuries that we had investigated a year before or eight months before on our tours. We said this to the company and the company didn't take action. We reported it to the Ministry of Labour. The inspector came in and the company got a little rap on the hand, and we had somebody who had either lost an arm or was dead.

It's easy for the parliamentary assistant to say, "Well, we've addressed all this in the legislation." Frankly, talk is cheap. It's all about enforcement. You can write whatever you want in Toronto and put it into legislation, but it's actually going out on the work site and telling the owner of that company or companies that they have to repair this now. It's not about writing things on paper. I can show you lots of safety and health things that have been recommended over the years in legislation and have fallen on deaf ears once they get outside of Toronto, out of this building, and they certainly aren't enforced. You get the odd fine here and there, the odd company, because the community is upset when minors are killed or people are killed on the job. The whole community gets upset. Then this place takes action and they go and do a small fine, or try to placate the people of the community or the injured or the injured's family.

Not good enough. They've got to be stronger and tougher with their fines, they've got to go after these people, and they've actually got to do what they write down on the paper: actually enforce the regulations. Talk is cheap.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The Attorney General has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Orders of the day?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 10:30, at which time we will have question period.

The House recessed from 0949 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Please welcome, in the west members' gallery, a constituent from my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham: Mr. Jag Sharma.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I wish to introduce the fact that the members for Whitby–Oshawa, Durham and Oshawa have kept the pressure on the Minister of Transportation to extend the 407 to Highway—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's not a time for members' statements. The honourable member knows better. This is for introduction of guests.

Introductions?

Mr. Dave Levac: I just want to bring to the attention of the House one more time my little buddy and new friend, Josh, who's going to be a multimillionaire by the time he's six. I want to say, "Hi, Josh." Glad you're here again.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Niagara Falls and page Emily Hutchings, to welcome her mother, Kim Hutchings, to the Legislature today. It is indeed a pleasure to welcome you.

When the members come into the chamber, up on the left-hand side, carved into the wall, is a statement that says, "audi alteram partem." Do the members know what that means?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Yes: "Hear the other side."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Well, I think it's important, and thank you to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville; it is "Hear the other side," and as Speaker, I would very much appreciate it if the members would be cognizant of one another today and allow each other to hear the other side.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Acting Premier.

Interjections.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Okay, someone?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Who's the Acting Premier?

Interjection: They're not sure.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pardon me?

Interjections.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: It's me for now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay, thank you. So it's the Minister of Economic—restart the clock, please.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: May I redirect the question to the Minister of Energy? Thank you.

To the Minister of Energy: There was a time when Premier McGuinty understood that Ontario families need relief on their hydro bills and cannot afford to pay inflated prices for hydro. In 1991, as the Liberals' energy critic, he said, "Ratepayers are owed power at the lowest possible cost." That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now the out-of-touch Premier is making Ontario families pay 80 cents for five-cent power. When did Premier McGuinty become so out of touch with Ontario families that he started believing he should hike their hydro bills?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member wants to quote energy critics. Why don't we quote her own energy critic when he said this—and it wasn't that long ago: "Ontario needs an energy plan and the leadership to see it through. Not having a ... plan is just wasting precious time."

The difference between us and them is that we have a plan. We have a 20-year long-term energy plan that spells out the investments that need to be made. They do not, and if they do, they're afraid to tell us.

One of the reasons they may be afraid to tell us is because we support a clean energy benefit that's taking 10% off the bills of Ontario families. They do not support that, and in all likelihood, their plan will try to take that away. We support taking 10%—

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: There was a time when Premier McGuinty respected the fact that Ontario families foot the bill for hydro bureaucracy. In 1993, he said—another piece of history—"You know, you've got 26,000 people there operating in a bureaucratic landscape. There are too many people with too much power being paid too much money. And now all the chickens have come home to roost."

That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now the out-of-touch Premier has doubled the number of hydro employees on the sunshine list and increased their salary costs by over \$750 million. When did Premier McGuinty become so out of touch with Ontario families that he stopped respecting the fact that they pay for his hydro bloat?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That party, when they were in office and their leader was sitting in cabinet, did not make the investments we needed to make in our transmission and distribution system across this province.

Since we've been in office, we have upgraded 5,000 kilometres of transmission lines across this province. That's like jumping in a car in Halifax and driving all the way across the country to Vancouver. That's a lot of upgrading of transmission lines. We've invested billions of dollars to ensure that we have a reliable energy system in this province. They have opposed our investments every step of the way.

There's a reason why they don't want to show us their energy plan; that's because they have no intention of making these important investments. They want to take us back to the days when transmission investments across this province were driving our system into the—

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: There was a time when Premier McGuinty understood that energy policy should be treated as economic policy. In 1991, he said that Premier Bob Rae's government had set a "dangerous precedent" by using hydro as a tool to carry out social policy initiatives.

That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now the out-of-touch Premier is using his smart meter tax machines to force Ontario families to do

laundry on weekends and have the kids out of the house by 7 a.m. When did the Premier start becoming so out of touch that he stopped respecting families and started treating energy policy as social policy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member talks about energy policy being an important part of economic policy. How can you say that when you want to kill the thousands of jobs that our energy policy is creating? The last time that I checked, creating jobs is good economic policy. The last time I checked, creating 13,000 jobs last year is good for our economy—jobs that that party wants to kill. The last time I checked, creating 50,000 new clean energy jobs by 2012 was good economic policy. Attracting billions of dollars of private sector investment into our economy is good economic policy.

They say one thing; they do another. Bring out your plan so we can see what kind of economic policy you have in your plan—

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

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, to the Minister of Energy: There was a time when Premier McGuinty believed Ontario families needed relief from sky-rocketing hydro bills. In 1992, he said, "You will know that we have a very serious problem in Ontario when it comes to hydro rates. Those rates are going through the roof. At a time when inflation is less than 2%, rates this year went up by 11.9% and next year they'll likely go up by close to 9%."

That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now the out-of-touch Premier has increased hydro rates by 75% to 100%, if you have a smart meter tax machine, and is increasing hydro bills by another staggering 46%. When did Premier McGuinty become so out of touch with Ontario families that they stopped believing—

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: Once again, energy policy is about creating jobs. Good energy policy is good economic policy. The people of Markham know this because I joined the Minister of Economic Development and Trade in Markham just yesterday, where we made an announcement of a \$40-million grid innovation centre that's going to create 146 jobs in that community. That's the next generation of jobs. That's a partnership with General Electric that's establishing this innovation centre that's going to develop and manufacture smart grid products and services for Ontario—not only for our jurisdiction, but for the entire world.

Our energy policies are reaching out to the world. We're building a clean energy economy that's creating thousands of clean energy jobs today to serve our own needs—

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

1040

Mrs. Christine Elliott: When we said their Green Energy Act and its high hydro rates would cost Ontario families their jobs and not create them, they laughed at us. However, in 1991, Premier McGuinty said, “I submit I am not going out on much of a limb when I say there is a direct correlation between Hydro’s rates and our rate of unemployment in Ontario. As the rates go up, so will the rate of unemployment.”

That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now, the out-of-touch Premier is trying to justify his hikes to hydro bills as a job creation program, if you can believe it.

When did the Premier become so out of touch that he forgot higher hydro bills mean higher unemployment?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Smart grids start with smart meters. This is a \$40-million investment that we’re making in Markham. That announcement we made yesterday will create 146 good Ontario jobs in Markham—jobs that your policy, your plan that you’re afraid to share with people, would kill.

It’s time for that party to come clean with Ontario families. Ontario families are going to see right through the reasons why you’re afraid to come forward with your plan. Their plan would kill thousands of jobs in our economy, including those 146 jobs that we just announced in Markham. The \$40-million investment that General Electric is making in that community under our policies would not be taking place under the plan that you’re afraid to share with Ontario families.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: There was a time when Premier McGuinty understood that high hydro bills drive away jobs from Ontario families—and we’re certainly seeing that in Ontario today. In 1992, he said, “If businesses can’t count on a secure and inexpensive supply of electricity, they won’t invest in Ontario.”

Mr. Norm Miller: Who said that?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: That was Premier McGuinty. That was him then, but he has changed now. Now, the Premier’s expensive energy experiments are driving jobs out of Ontario.

When did the Premier become so out of touch that he forgot his expensive energy experiments mean fewer jobs for Ontarians?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We’re still waiting to hear when that party wants to come forward with their plan. We’ve heard from a number of members and we know they’re in an absolute state of confusion over there. Listen to this: The member for Simcoe–Grey said back in October, “We’re close to putting out our party platform.” Then the member for Thornhill said, “Sometime in early 2011.” Well, it’s early 2011—nothing. Then the member for Nepean–Carleton said, “So our platform will be coming out in March.” Guess what? It’s March—still no plan. Then the member for Lanark said, “I guess I’ll let it out of the bag. We’ll be launching our platform in April.” Then the PC campaign secretary, who appears to know

more than the members of that caucus, said, “Maybe in May.”

They’re afraid to put out their plan because they know their plan will kill jobs; they know their plan will take away our clean energy benefit—

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

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Jill Anzarut, a 35-year-old mother of two young children, is fighting breast cancer. Jill’s doctor prescribed a drug called Herceptin, a drug approved for the very kind of breast cancer that she is diagnosed with, but she was told her tumour is not big enough yet, and OHIP would not cover the \$40,000-a-year cost. She wants to know why the McGuinty Liberal government is denying her treatment.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I want to start by saying that when people are faced with health care challenges, health care crises, we want to be there for them. We want to do everything we can to support them in their journey back to good health. Of course, that applies in this case as well.

When it comes to funding drugs, everyone in this House should know that that decision is not one that rests with the Minister of Health; that is not one that rests with the cabinet table. In 2006, we took the power to make decisions about what drugs are funded and what drugs are not funded out of the political arena.

We believe in evidence. We are committed to relying on our experts. The experts are continually reviewing the evidence that tells us what we ought to fund and what we ought not to fund—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Jill is a courageous and determined woman in a terrifying situation. She just started her chemotherapy treatment recently, and she’s a little scared, but a little bit more than frustrated.

I had a chance to talk to her this morning. She asked me why the experts in Alberta, British Columbia and Nova Scotia have all approved Herceptin for use by women with very similar kinds of breast cancer. Manitoba has approved it for use on a case-by-case basis. She wants to know if the Premier and his minister think these provinces are doing something wrong.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite needs to understand that this issue is not one that belongs in the political arena. It is our responsibility as a government to ensure that there is enough money in the drug budget. We took an important step to actually decrease the price of generic drugs so that we could fund more drugs. To make a political issue out of this, in my opinion, is not the direction we should be going. We rely on evidence. Cancer Care Ontario, the Committee to Evalu-

ate Drugs, are constantly evaluating the decisions we make around drug funding, and that is where the decision-making ought to be.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In 2005, the then Minister of Health announced that Herceptin would be available for early breast cancer. In a press release, the government bragged about fast-tracking the review process to get the drug approved. But now, in 2011, why does Jill have to fight both breast cancer and her government?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite ought to know that in 2006 we changed the way drugs are approved in this province. We cannot have a health system where the stories that land on the front page of the paper determine our health care policy. We must rely on the evidence. It would be unfair to those who do not get their stories on the front page if we were to give priority to those who do.

We must take a responsible approach when it comes to funding drugs. We must rely on the evidence, we must always be examining the new evidence, and that is exactly what we are doing in this case.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Acting Premier: In September 2009, the Ombudsman released a damning report on this government's handling of Avastin, a drug approved for metastatic colorectal cancer. The Ombudsman found that the minister had placed an arbitrary cap on the funding of this drug that "disregards the individual needs of medical consumers as well as the ethical obligations of their physicians."

Can the Acting Premier assure Ontarians that his government isn't repeating the same mistakes today?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, thank you for the question. I must reiterate that we do not—I do not, our cabinet does not, politicians do not—decide, and ought not decide, what drugs are covered and for whom.

I do want to refer to the Ombudsman's report on Avastin. This is what he said, and I'm quoting from page 35: "Funding decisions cannot be made in a vacuum, but must take into account a variety of sometimes countervailing factors. The costs associated with the new drug must be weighed against its medical benefits."

We have taken as a significant responsibility increasing funding for prescription drugs. We're able to fund more drugs, we're able to help more people, and the decisions on what drugs are funded—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Jill, as a mom, is facing a situation that no one should have to face. Today, she's at the hospital while her son is getting his tonsils out. That should be enough stress for any mother in a single day. Instead, she's also facing a confusing bureaucratic maze.

The Minister of Health argues that government has no role to play in these decisions. If it's not the government's job to answer for bureaucratic decisions that lack compassion and transparency and common sense, whose job is it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I take it from the line of questioning that the member opposite believes we ought to fund every drug that is approved for use in Canada. If the member opposite actually is taking that position, then I would expect that she put that in her platform as we move forward into this election.

1050

I do think that every government in Ontario historically has had a formulary that lists drugs that are funded by the taxpayers of this province. We owe it to taxpayers to rely on evidence. Much as I would love to provide every drug to every Ontarian, it would be irresponsible of me to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Jill, her family and thousands of people supporting her are simply asking this government to ensure that a medically proven treatment is available to those in need.

Canadians have made it very clear that the size of our bank account should not be a factor when making decisions about our health, yet more and more people are being told to pay for their treatment out of pocket, or to cover the cost of delisted services, or to pay \$1,800 a day to stay in the hospital. Just because Jill and her family happen to call Ontario home, she is being made to fight her health care system as well as fight her cancer.

When are this Premier and his minister going to take some responsibility and deliver a health care system in Ontario that delivers for people when they need it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I don't know how many more times I need to say this. We simply must rely on the expertise of the scientists, the researchers and the physicians, all of whom have a role to play in our evaluation of drugs. This is an issue that belongs with the experts.

Our job is to ensure that there is adequate funding. I am very pleased to say that we have tripled the funding for cancer-fighting drugs since we were elected in 2003. As of January, we've added 171 new drugs to the formulary since we began our drug reforms back in 2006. We fund 44 cancer drugs, and we are investing in new cancer care projects across the province. My—

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

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, today we'll see the latest backtrack from the desperate, out-of-gas McGuinty Liberals. In the latest rollout of their seat-saver plan, the McGuinty Liberals are announcing today that they will complete Highway 407 by 2020.

First the Liberals promised to complete the 407 by 2013; then they backtracked and promised to complete

part of it by 2013. Now they are promising to complete the whole thing by 2020.

After backtracking on a backtrack, do the McGuinty Liberals really believe that Ontario families will believe this latest promise?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would characterize what I'm doing today as moving forward.

We've been listening to the people in Durham region. I've met with the mayors. I've had conversations with the chair of Durham region. What we've heard is that there are concerns about a seamless build. They want to know if we can go a bit farther than Simcoe Road, and they want to know the time frame for the building of the second stage. The folks in Peterborough and Lindsay have the same questions.

We have made a commitment all along to build to 35/115. What I'll be doing today is confirming a time frame.

I understand that the party opposite (a) doesn't understand what consultation means, and (b) thinks that this road should be in private hands, not in public hands.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, the Liberals are basically addicted to breaking promises. They're desperate, out of gas and on the run, and their promises simply can't be trusted. The McGuinty Liberals have shown they will say and do anything in the year of an election to save a seat. From promising no new taxes to putting moratoriums on wind projects, the McGuinty Liberals make promises they never intend to keep.

Do the Liberals really believe that the families of Ontario will believe them this time? After all these broken promises, they simply don't trust you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The party opposite has been pressuring our government to be clear about the time frame. They've been asking us to build the first stage out a bit farther. So it seems to me that we're responding to the concerns both of the community folks and, ostensibly, of the representatives of those folks.

I really see this as a very clear message to the people who live in the corridor between Brock Road and 35/115 that we've listened to their concerns. We've always been committed to building the 407 out to 35/115.

We've also been committed to keeping this road in public hands. We will not sell this road off. The tolling revenue will come to the provincial government. The people of Ontario will benefit directly from the building of this road.

DISCLOSURE OF TOXINS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, Gerry Vautour, who operates a bear management unit, has contacted my office to say that MNR is still using some form of defoliant to clear brush on his bear management unit. He complains that two days after spraying the defoliant, all of the foliage is dead and wonders if this chemical is not getting into the food chain.

The process you are currently establishing to investigate the use of Agent Orange has the very people who used the Agent Orange and are still using some form of defoliant in charge of the investigation. Why will you not now agree that we need to have an independent third party investigate this matter?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to answer the question. I want to state categorically: We are not using the same herbicide, and I don't want anybody to be misled by that. We're not using 2,4,5-T. I want that to be very clear.

I'm very concerned about this issue, and since learning about it I have worked hard, committing to obtaining all the facts. We're in the process right now of getting an independent committee together, and I think it's very important that we have everybody co-operate and provide the information. We've contacted the federal health ministry and asked them to be involved. My deputy has contacted all of the our comparable partners in every province to talk to them.

This was a federally approved herbicide that was used across Canada, and we're determining right now where it was used. We know it was used in the agriculture sector, in transportation as well as MNR, and it's important that we share—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You don't seem to understand what the problem is. The problem is this: It's not an independent investigation that you're carrying out. You're the minister in charge of the very ministry that used Agent Orange and is using some form of defoliant. You're asking the very people who are using a form of defoliant, previously Agent Orange, to investigate themselves and then to turn that information over to another committee that you're going to appoint.

I'm not laying the finger of blame on you or saying that it's your fault, but I want somebody who is independent, who is a third party, who is transparent, who will both gather the information and do the investigation. Why won't you do that?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I appreciate the question, and I'm very pleased to answer the question.

I want your constituent to call our toll-free number—
Laughter.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: —and anybody else in the general public because, you know what? I don't want them to worry. I think this is a very important issue. It's really not a laughing matter.

I think it's very premature for the honourable member to criticize the independent nature of the board. The terms of reference are still being drafted. We're still in the process of selecting the membership, so it's premature to say it isn't independent. We all know that it's important to select a panel that will devote its time to this one issue. I think the people of Ontario expect us to conduct an independent inquiry because this is about people's health. We take it very seriously. I'm very con-

cerned, and we need your constituent to work with us and provide that information.

We've had plenty of people call in. We're working closely with them, and I look forward to making an announcement very soon.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. This morning, our government made an important announcement regarding the eastward extension of Highway 407. In my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I've heard many concerns from my constituents and municipal representatives about building this project in two phases and ending the first phase at Simcoe Street. There have been concerns about impacts this would have on local infrastructure. I know that the Minister of Transportation and officials have been working quietly to address these concerns and to find a solution.

The minister has spoken about the announcement. Would the minister provide some more details for the House?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for his advocacy on this.

1100

As I said, I've been in conversation with many people about this issue, pretty much since I was appointed to this file. We listened to communities, businesses and individuals in the region. This morning, I'm happy to say that we can confirm a workable solution that will allow us to confirm a revised first stage and some dates for the second stage, which is exactly what people, including the member for Durham, have been asking for. We'll be able to extend the first stage of the 407 east to Harmony Road instead of Simcoe Street—it's about three-plus kilometres beyond Simcoe Street—and that extension will not delay our target of the opening of 2015 for the first stage. That's what was critical: that we not delay that first stage. So 2015 is the date for that first one.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary? The member from Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister, for that answer, and thank you for moving forward on this important investment for the communities of my riding.

The Leader of the Opposition was recently in my riding of Peterborough, saying that he would build the 407 to 35/115. But I note, as many others have, that he did not provide a firm date. He also refused to let us know if he would sell off the extension of the 407 like his predecessor did. The 407 ETR was sold for a fire-sale price of \$3.1 billion in 1999 and led to the establishment of a second Ontario Place in Madrid, Spain. The highway is currently valued at more than \$9 billion.

Will the minister please tell my constituents and everyone in Durham, Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes when the 407 extension will be fully completed all the way to 35/115 and who will benefit from this road—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've always said, we are going to build the highway to 35/115. The member for Peterborough has been very helpful in advising me on this and in promoting that we get this road built as quickly as possible.

We're confirming the plan to build the second phase of the 407 east, with an interim opening at Taunton Road in 2017, and all the way to 35/115 in 2020. We're already acquiring property along the corridor, and we're doing other preparatory work so that we can get going on that second stage as quickly as possible.

We're honouring our commitment to build this highway in the most affordable and efficient way possible. Phase 2 has to go through some very sensitive lands, so we have to do this responsibly; it'll be a green, friendly road. We will continue to work with the municipalities along the corridor to make sure that they have the infrastructure they need—and we will not be selling this road off in a fire sale.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Acting Premier. There was a time when Premier McGuinty wasn't so out of touch and actually listened to Ontario families. In 1991, he said, "We like to engage in all kinds of esoteric and sometimes academic arguments in this House.... But the people on the street, I can assure members, are not talking about supply and demand; they are talking about their hydro bills."

That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now the out-of-touch Premier spends all his time making academic arguments on why he is hiking hydro bills. When did the Premier become so out of touch that he traded in listening to Main Street for lecturing to Bay Street?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think what Ontario families would like to know is what one Mark Spiro, PC campaign director, had to say when asked why the Tories haven't put out their hydro policy. This is a quote: "The only people who are demanding our policy at the moment in a booklet form, where it's simple and easy and they don't have to do any work, (are journalists), because they want to take the opportunity to shoot at it."

I can say unequivocally that the people of Ontario want to know what their hydro position is. They want to know, given that you almost destroyed the hydro system, where you get off criticizing the efforts of the government that's made enormous investments in a cleaner, greener, reliable system. Just tell us what you stand for. Will you, please?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I love getting direct answers to direct questions.

There was a time when Premier McGuinty showed respect for Ontario families. In 1992, after learning that Ontario families had paid for a new boardroom on their

hydro bills, he said, “It’s nothing short of an obscenity really. We are in the context of a terrible recession; hydro rates are going up approximately 30% over three years. A hydro boardroom is a luxury ... and we can’t afford it.”

That was Premier McGuinty then, but Premier McGuinty has changed. Now, the out-of-touch Premier hasn’t just bought a new boardroom; he has built an entire new hydro agency, the OPA. When did Premier McGuinty become so out of touch with Ontario families?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think Ontario ratepayers want to know what happened to Eleanor Clitheroe’s yacht that that government bought with hydro money. They want to know: Are you going to go back to untendered hydro contracts for Tory consultants in the millions of dollars that don’t bring anything back? Are we going to go back to rolling brownouts or blackouts?

We won’t, because of the actions of the McGuinty government: building new transmission, cleaning up our energy system and building a better and more reliable system for all Ontarians.

I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to tell people what he is going to do beyond closing hospitals and beyond closing down full-day kindergarten. That’s all we want: just a little hint about what they’re going to do. We think we know what they’re going to do. They don’t want to tell people because they know people will not vote for what they’re going to do.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. For Ontarians living in the London area, the pain and suffering of a hip fracture does not end with the accident. Sadly, it only increases as patients have to wait days and days for the necessary emergency operation. This delay is dangerous and cruel.

How is it that the minister has ignored this situation for so many years as her constituents have suffered?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to say that health care in London is so much better now than it was when we took office that this question borders on the absurd. We have made significant improvements in bringing down wait times for virtually every procedure. We have made significant infrastructure investments. We have far more Londoners able to access primary health care. We are continuing to make improvements.

We know there is still more to do. That’s why we are looking forward to the next four years on this side of the House. We’ve come a long way when it comes to improving health care, but there is still more to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This shameful situation shows more cracks in our health care system. The minister’s prized wait time program has abandoned these patients. Hip fractures occur 14% more frequently in London, the minister’s own hometown, than in other parts of Ontario. Yet, like in many other regions, there are not enough orthopaedic surgeons.

Why is it that, in Ontario, getting access to the health care you need depends on where it is that you live?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think everyone knows that lowering wait times has been a real priority for this government. When we came into office, the government prior to us didn’t even bother to measure wait times, let alone publicly report them and develop a strategy to bring them down.

In the almost eight years that we have been in government, we have seen remarkable improvements. We measure, we publicly report, and we have seen the results of wait times coming down. I am very proud that the Fraser Institute reported that Ontario has the lowest wait times in the country. The Wait Time Alliance acknowledges that Ontario is leading the way.

Let me talk about real results, tangible results, that are meaningful to people. We have been able to take 191 days off cataract surgery, 160 days off hip surgery and 243 days off knee replacement surgery. Health care is getting better—

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

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Bruce Crozier: My question is also for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, I know that Mina Grossman-Ianni’s term as chair of the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network, which serves my riding, is set to expire on April 1. The chairs of LHIN boards play an essential role in our health care system.

LHINs improve health care in our communities, they give people a say in local health care decisions, they determine priorities through community engagement, they support innovative programs, and they remove silos through the integration of care. LHINs are essential in the Ontario health care system, and we need to ensure that strong leadership is in place to support the people of Ontario.

Minister, please tell this House who will chair the Erie St. Clair LHIN come April 2.

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much to the member from Essex, who never stops advocating for better health care for the people in Essex.

I would like to start by offering my heartfelt thanks to Mina Grossman-Ianni for her leadership as chair of the Erie St. Clair LHIN. She has done a tremendous job, and she will be sorely missed.

I’m very pleased to announce that I have appointed Dave Cooke as the next chair of the Erie St. Clair LHIN board of directors. Dave Cooke, obviously, is no stranger to this House. We at Queen’s Park know him well and admire him. He was an MPP from the Windsor area for 20 years. He was Minister of Education and Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs under the NDP government, and he never, ever lost his—

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

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The ability to attract such strong multi-partisan leaders to our local health integration networks really does speak to the strength and importance of the system and, specifically, to the importance of local health care.

LHINs streamline health care so it works for the people. Through local health integration networks and their leaders, we are delivering results in communities and giving those communities a say in their local health care.

We've had many successes across Ontario because of the LHINs, such as lowering wait times and the aging at home program. These programs are so successful because of the local health care model and the leadership behind it.

I know that recently even more strong leaders have come on board to support and drive our LHIN model. Minister, please tell me about other leaders in our local health integration networks.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to have the opportunity to talk about another great new leader in our LHINs. There are many to speak about, but I'm going to focus on one: the new chair of the Champlain LHIN, Dr. Wilbert Keon, a world-renowned heart surgeon and former Conservative senator. He's also a very strong supporter of a local model of governance for health care.

I'd like to read a quote from Dr. Keon that was in the Ottawa Citizen: "My love for health care transcends my political persuasions. I have agreed to do whatever I can to help the local health network make the necessary adjustments to streamline the system as a whole."

Dr. Keon—

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

ANTI-SEMITISM

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Yesterday Nick Day, a student representative at Queen's University, used his position as rector to accuse Israel of committing genocide against Palestinians, in a letter attacking your own federal leader. Will you condemn the comments of Mr. Day in writing, in a letter to the chancellor and the board of trustees of Queen's University?

Hon. John Milloy: I think all members realize that on university campuses, it's about finding a balance. We want to find a balance between the safety and security of students, along with providing an environment where individuals and groups can participate in debate and discussion on a wide range of issues that you and I may not agree with.

Earlier this year, as members know, the Legislature condemned anti-Semitism on our university campuses, especially in the form of Israel anti-apartheid week.

Jewish students as well as faculty must be able to live, work and study at our universities without fear of discrimination or hatred, and I know that all our institutions work hard to create that balance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Minister, you talk about us not agreeing—this House unanimously approved a motion by my friend the member for Thornhill to ban the prejudicial term "Israeli Apartheid Week." All members of this House stood to condemn the word "apartheid" for what it really is: hate-filled.

Now a student representative is not only using the term, but accusing Israel of genocide, in a letter to your own federal leader. Will you, along with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, condemn the actions of Mr. Day in a letter to the chancellor and the board of trustees? Will you do it?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, our government remains committed to fighting discrimination in all its forms. We have spoken out against anti-Semitism. We have very strong ties to the state of Israel. The Premier, of course, led a mission there earlier last summer.

This is about balance. This is about campuses maintaining the right of students and faculty to have discussions about issues that the member or I or anyone in this House may not agree with, and at the same time protecting the rights of students to be able to study in safety. It is a matter of finding that balance. I know from my regular meetings with university and college presidents that they work very hard to maintain that balance, and I have every confidence that these institutions will continue to provide the necessary environment for debate and discussion, and also for the safety and security of students.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This question is to the Acting Premier. Residents in Pronto and Serpent River in the township of the North Shore face a continuing water crisis. Their water rates are soaring by yet another 30%, they are being slapped with thousands of dollars of capital charges to pay for a new water treatment plant, but unbelievably, they still can't drink their water. In fact, these residents have been without potable water in their homes for most of the past 10 years. Why is the McGuinty government refusing to help these residents?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has made unprecedented investments in infrastructure, including water pipes and helping municipalities and others to upgrade their facilities. We take all these matters very seriously. I can assure the member opposite that the kinds of investments we have made—and, by the way, that member and her party voted against the budgets that created the money for those initiatives—every single one of them. I can assure her and this House and the people of those communities that we will continue to work with all communities to ensure they have the highest quality of potable water available to all their citizens.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a government that not so long ago was bragging about being on the leading edge of exporting clean water technology around the world. These residents of the North Shore have been

seeking help from their provincial government for years and years, but today they are still without clean water right here in Ontario.

Communities like the North Shore simply don't have enough residents to pay the full cost of expensive water treatment centres. Many residents in this community are seniors who are on fixed incomes. They have worked hard all their lives, and their water is so dirty that they cannot even bathe in it. How many more years does the McGuinty government expect these families to continue to go without clean water?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: My understanding is that this government has put \$3 million into 20 homes in that community to clean up the situation. I undertake to look into it further. I always want to double-check the information that's provided by the leader of the third party in the House. We will do that. I'm informed that some \$3 million has been invested at this point by the government of Ontario, and we look forward to working with that community and other communities to ensure a clean, potable supply of water for all Ontarians.

SOCIAL WORKERS

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, this week is National Social Work Week. Whether it's the work they do in human rights protection, issues impacting children and youth, or health care accessibility, social workers are on the very front lines of helping Ontarians every day in this province.

National Social Work Week is an important opportunity to recognize the work social workers do throughout Ontario. Minister, what message do you have for Ontario's social workers as they celebrate this important week?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This gives me a good opportunity to thank the member from Willowdale for his contribution. In fact, the member is a recipient of an award from the Social Work Doctors' Colloquium in recognition of his significant commitments to the value of a caring and just society. Congratulations.

This year's theme, Social Workers Are There for You, highlights the commitment and compassion that social workers bring to their jobs every day. Social workers have always been at the forefront of the programs and services the province provides for vulnerable individuals and families.

I want to take a moment to recognize the valuable work social workers do across the province during National Social Work Week. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?
1120

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Minister. I'm very happy to speak on behalf of my many constituents in Willowdale who benefit from the work of social workers and, indeed, who work as social workers. However, in order for social workers to be able to carry out the important work they do, they need the continued support of

our government. Minister, what is being done? What are you doing to give social workers the tools and the recognition they need to assist those who most need their help here in Ontario?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Last year our government passed legislation related to regulated health professions. It includes amendments to the Social Work and Social Service Work Act that governs social workers. These changes mean that people who have earned their doctorate degree in social work will be allowed now to use the title "doctor" when providing health care to individuals.

Social workers are at the forefront of fighting against poverty and helping those most vulnerable in society every day. Every day we hear stories of success of individuals, families, groups and communities who have benefited from the contribution of social workers. Our government will continue to enhance and protect this vital public service as we move forward—

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

COURT INTERPRETERS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Attorney General. Injustice is rearing its ugly head because, under your watch, our courts continue to be plagued by delay. This serious threat to Ontario families has been made worse by a lack of court interpreters. Defence lawyers won't accept partially accredited interpreters. Crown attorneys are offering plea bargains and withdrawing charges. Judges are being forced to compete with each other for the few interpreters that remain. This situation is out of control. Justice in Ontario is being threatened from every corner. Minister, why aren't you acting to ensure the shortage of interpreters won't lead to a mass stay of charges because of this unacceptable delay?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm going to get to the interpreters in the supplementary, but the whole premise of my friend's question is just incorrect. For 18 years, charges in criminal courts took more appearances. For 18 years, the time it took the average case in criminal courts went up. A couple of years ago, we launched something called Justice on Target. It was about working with all of our justice participants and developing a better approach. It was not about more money. Now, for the first time in 18 years—and you can check out the website; we've thrown it up there—the average number of appearances didn't go up; it went down. The time it takes didn't go up; it went down. We're getting it done where you weren't able to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Justice on Target promised a 30% reduction, which is on its way to unmitigated failure. You've barely achieved 5%. It's an unmitigated failure.

In 2005, this government was warned about the potential court interpreter crisis. Your government did nothing for the last six years. Last week, the next twist in this

saga that is threatening the safety of Ontario communities revealed itself: Freelance court interpreters in Ottawa were refusing to work. Minister, is it not true that the Liberal failure to address this problem for six long years is threatening the security of Ontario families?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Since my honourable friend was wrong in the premise for the first question, you can be assured that he's wrong in the premise for the second. We're working very closely with court interpreters to make sure courts have, in this very challenged jurisdiction where you can have up to 200 languages, fully accredited, well-trained and available interpreters, and we'll keep working with them.

But, of course, to return to the premise of the first question, you know they poured millions of dollars into the system. They spent a lot of time and effort. They did reports and they accomplished absolutely nothing. By reducing the time it takes for the average case, we make sure that police are on the street protecting. We make sure that citizens' time is respected. We strengthened our system of justice. That's progress. They'd take us back to the old days. It's time—

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

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Yesterday, the minister received an urgent letter from Joan Murchison of Sarnia. Her 16-year-old daughter Stephanie has rapidly become legally blind.

Joan is on CPP disability and ODSP. Her daughter is being seen at the University of Waterloo's School of Optometry, and up to now, ODSP and assistive devices have covered Stephanie's appointments and other needs.

Stephanie needs crucial tests to determine the cause of her blindness. ODSP refuses to fund the \$220 cost. Ms. Murchison asked for an internal review and was denied. What is this minister going to do to help prevent Stephanie from going blind?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I thank the member for bringing this matter to my attention. I have not received the letter yet, but I'll pay very much attention, like I do with all my files, when I receive it.

I would like to investigate it more. I'm very surprised with the statement of facts that the member is bringing to the House today. One thing I can say is that under ODSP, all the eye exams are covered. I'm very surprised to hear about that matter this morning in the House, but I'll make sure that myself and the Minister of Health look into that file and that we have an agreeable solution to that case.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I have copies here for the minister, and I will give her copies as soon as we break here today.

This young woman's vision deteriorated from 10/100 to 20/300 now. These tests will show why she became

blind and determine if her blindness can be improved or reversed. The tests will show if there is available treatment to prevent her from becoming worse.

Her mother cannot afford to pay. Stephanie can't wait for the Social Benefits Tribunal, which she has been sent to, to give her a hearing date. The minister has the authority to make the right decision in order to help Stephanie now, before she becomes worse. Will this minister immediately order the ODSP to pay the \$220 for Stephanie's tests so she doesn't turn blind while she's waiting for reviews?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's not the way that I go about my file in my ministry. I will say that I will review the file and I will be speaking with the Minister of Health, because I'm very surprised that this is not covered under the health plan. I will take this matter to heart and I will come back to the individual about what we will be doing with this request.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Recently, our government tabled its plans, through proposed legislation, for a long-term affordable housing strategy. While my constituents in Guelph are pleased that there is new affordable housing for seniors under construction at St. Joe's in Guelph, concerns remain on the subject of housing. They wonder if we are doing enough for those who are less fortunate.

This is an issue that my constituents and I are very passionate about. To the minister: Can you please outline what has been done for housing in the province of Ontario and how this proposed new long-term affordable housing strategy will complement what we are already doing?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for Guelph for the question and for being such a devoted advocate for affordable housing.

We listened to her, to her constituents and to those people across the province of Ontario who told us that the framework for more flexible, locally driven approaches to housing delivery have to happen municipality by municipality. We listened to the member for Guelph, who said that we have to make sure that we build our foundation and we build our future in our municipalities—that one-size-fits-all didn't work in the past and won't work in the future.

We listened to them, and we're ensuring that our local provider, our municipalities, our service providers are given the tools to deliver affordable housing in a very meaningful way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am happy to hear that our government is recognizing the expertise of municipalities and continuing to seek their input. During the debate on Bill 140, the long-term affordable housing strategy, there were several concerns levied by the NDP and PC housing critics. They suggested that because there is no specific funding attached to this strategy, it won't accomplish much.

As you can imagine, this has raised some questions in my riding of Guelph. Speaker, through you to the minister, can he please outline for this House what this government is doing to ensure that those who require housing and support in Guelph and throughout Ontario are receiving it?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Because of the advocacy of people like the member for Guelph and other members in this House, the reality is that our government has been investing an unprecedented amount since 2003. More than \$2.5 billion has been invested to date, which is more than any other government before us. These investments have built or repaired more than 260,000 units. That's the equivalent of helping more than 680,000 Ontarians.

The sad part is that the NDP voted against every one of these investments. As for the Ontario PC Party, well, when they were in power, they said, "We're moving out of the affordable housing business. We're cutting 17,000 units"—

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

HOME CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. Home care services at our CCAC were cut last year, and yet the Central West CCAC has refurbished an executive suite, complete with a new luxury bathroom, a kitchen with stainless steel appliances and an office with cherrywood furniture, to the tune of \$300,000.

Minister, is it acceptable to you for the Central West CCAC to spend health care dollars on luxury renovations instead of providing front-line care to the residents of my riding?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me just begin by saying that home care has not been cut in the member opposite's riding, nor has it been cut in any riding in this province. So let's start with the truth on this one.

We are seeing significant improvements in home care in this province, and I'm very delighted that we are, in fact, treating hundreds of thousands more people now than we did when we took office. On this side of the House, we're committed to improving health care. We are committed to investing more in health care.

Your party position is to cut health care spending. It's what you did when you had the chance before, and it's what you will do again. So if you're really, truly concerned about improving health care, I think you might want to revisit your decisions to cut taxes at the expense of health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity to ask all members to join me in thanking this wonderful group of pages for their hard

work and dedication. We wish each and every one of them all the best in their future endeavours. Thank you very much.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Jim Stephenson is with us today, in the members' gallery. I'll make reference to him later on, in my remarks associated with the bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Niagara Falls and page Emily Hutchings, to welcome her father, Brad Hutchings, to Queen's Park today. Thank you for joining us.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ARMAND La BARGE

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian who has served our province and his community with distinction. Former York region police chief Armand La Barge has earned his reputation as a person who gets things done for the benefit of his community. His tireless, lifelong volunteer efforts have earned the respect of political, business and community leaders who continue to look to him for counsel, advice and inspiration.

Armand La Barge's enthusiastic leadership and hands-on involvement with community organizations have enriched countless lives and have inspired humanitarian and cultural projects that will benefit Ontarians for generations to come.

Armand La Barge's volunteer contributions reflect his conviction that active participation in community life is not only a privilege; it is also a responsibility.

Today I join with Community Living Newmarket/Aurora district, his family, his many friends and associates, and community members in congratulating Armand La Barge as the recipient of the Community Service Award for a Lifetime of Excellence in Service.

No one is more deserving of this honour than my friend Armand La Barge. On behalf of all members of the Parliament of Ontario, I extend our best wishes and sincere appreciation to this exemplary citizen of Ontario and of Canada.

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to inform the Legislature of a local concern in my riding known as the

quarry lands, located in the vicinity of Victoria Park and Gerrard. This particular site is vacant land that was formerly a brickyard and then became a dump site. Part of this land is owned by a company that is proposing to build four high-rise buildings in the area.

Since my election in 2003, I've been strongly opposed to this development. In 2004, I brought this matter to the attention of the Minister of the Environment. At that time, I was assured by the minister that the environment and the health and safety of the community would be protected.

I wish to emphasize that the proposed development of the quarry lands is a planning matter, which is a city-of-Toronto matter and not a provincial matter. However, if the city, the province or the municipal board approves any development on the quarry lands, I'm going to ask the province to require the applicant to undergo a record-of-site condition for the property, to ensure that the lands are not contaminated.

I wish to reassure the concerned citizens of the quarry lands development and all local residents in my riding that I will do whatever I can to assist them to put a stop to this proposed development in its present form, and to work with the residents to make sure that we get proper development in the area.

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Toby Barrett: Recently I was honoured to address the 56th Field Regiment of the Royal Canadian Artillery at the Brantford Armoury. This was my first regimental parade since graduating as a gunner with the 56th Field Regiment in 1963. There was no war then.

More than 25 Afghanistan medals were handed out to soldiers assembled from armouries in St. Catharines, Brantford and Simcoe. An overwhelming 75% of the regiment has served overseas. They were a very impressive bunch.

I'm very proud of the accomplishments of Task Force Afghanistan 110 and Operation Athena. Accolades were presented on behalf of their commanding officers, the mayors of Brantford and Simcoe, MPP Levac and myself.

I spent time in Afghanistan in 1969. It was a hellhole at that time, with the heat, the dust, the sand and the rocks. The difference: no war then. So I can only imagine the tough times our military have been going through. They do it with courage, good spirit and commitment.

The ceremony reminds us that we have a duty to others, and we see that duty exemplified in the men and women in uniform.

To our troops, wherever they may be, wherever we may find them, we say thank you for your sacrifice and we send good wishes for the future.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Kormos: I want to tell you about Barbara Harrison. She's a good person who has lived all of her

life playing by the rules. She's 74 years old and a widow. She lives in a small apartment in Port Colborne and survives on a meagre old age security pension and a widow's pension.

She lives in dread of her monthly hydro bill. She brought the last one to our constituency office down in Welland: \$150.07. Month after month, her hydro bills have been increasing, and she's fearful about simply not having the money to pay for that electricity. The apartment is heated by natural gas.

This woman, at the age of 74, is more frugal than you and I have ever been or ever could be. She knows about turning lights off and about not wasting electricity. She knows about conservation. It's part of her DNA.

Of that \$150.07 bill, of course, \$17.26 of it is Mr. McGuinty's HST.

Here's a woman who has played by the rules and who is going to be forced out of her home by the Liberals in Ontario and their electricity policy that's imposing more and more debt and greater burden on hard-working folks like Barbara Harrison every day of every month of every year.

TRACY WONG

Mr. Reza Moridi: I am pleased to rise in this House today to recognize an exceptional young athlete from my riding of Richmond Hill. At the Canada Winter Games, the highest level of national competition for up-and-coming athletes, Ms. Tracy Wong won a silver medal in badminton.

Held once every two years, this year's contest took place in Halifax between February 11 and 27, 2011. These games are key in the development of Canada's young athletes, and Ontario once again showed its prominence in amateur sport by winning the Canada Winter Games flag for the 19th time.

Beyond the accolades, the community spirit of the winter games and the air of volunteerism among those involved can be celebrated from coast to coast to coast. This level of enthusiasm bodes well for Ontario's next big sporting event, the 2015 Pan American Games, which will attract thousands of jobs, tourists and investment in sport infrastructure to the province of Ontario.

This government's increased support of 162% for amateur sport has helped foster the success of young athletes at both the national and international levels.

Please join me in congratulating this remarkable young athlete on a job well done and give her your best wishes for her budding sporting career.

HUNGER

Mr. Ted Arnott: Too often, some of us take for granted one of life's most basic necessities: food. Yet even in our own province, many go without reliable access to nutritious food. People of faith are working to change that.

This morning, Anglicans from the Toronto region held a rally at the Frost building, focusing attention on hunger.

Organized by the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, this event demonstrates the church's sincere interest in ensuring that no one goes without the nourishment they need.

Last fall, the member for Whitby–Oshawa and I participated in the donated diet challenge. For three days, we ate only what a client of a food bank would eat. It isn't the diet that I would choose, but many don't have that choice. Children go to bed hungry and go to school hungry. People unable to work get by however they can, and often without a nutritious meal.

I want to congratulate the member for Sarnia–Lambton for his Bill 78 regarding the food bank donation tax credit for farmers, which would make a real difference in alleviating hunger in our communities. Regrettably, the McGuinty government is stalling this bill in committee.

To end hunger, all of us in society must be part of the solution. Families, individuals, churches, schools, community organizations and, of course, governments at all levels all have important responsibilities to our fellow citizens.

1310

I would suggest that the words of Isaiah are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago: "And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like noonday." Let's work towards finding that light in the darkness.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Tuesday, March 8, marked International Women's Day. The origins of this celebration date back to the beginning of the 20th century in Europe and the United States. This event was made official by the United Nations in order to encourage every country around the world to celebrate and honour women's rights.

La Journée internationale de la femme met en lumière des femmes ordinaires qui ont fait l'histoire.

In my riding, I was delighted to host Laurel Broten, our minister responsible for women's issues, for a celebration of women in our community who are committed to the advancement of women and girls in Ontario.

I would like to acknowledge the following 13 women from my riding: Linda Carrière-Séguin and Lise Clark from Alfred-Plantagenet; Julie Bourgeois et Francyn Leblanc from Casselman; Helen MacLeod from Champlain; Denise Dallaire-Coulombe of Clarence-Rockland; Anne Comtois Lalonde of Hawkesbury; Linda Rozon and Linda Séguin from East Hawkesbury; Annie Levac from North Glengarry; Estelle Patenaude of Hawkesbury; Mary McCuaig of The Nation; and Georgette Patenaude of Vars.

The outstanding performance and leadership of these women is a strong model for all of us.

TIM HORTONS BRIER

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I would like to congratulate the city of London for hosting the 2011 Tim Hortons Brier. This event is the Canadian men's national curling championship. It began this past Saturday and will run until Sunday, March 13.

I would like also to acknowledge the hard work done by Peter Inch, chair of the 2011 Tim Hortons Brier host committee, the members of his committee and all the volunteers. They have put together an incredible event. I had the opportunity to attend the opening ceremonies this past Saturday, and it was fantastic.

The Brier is having a very positive impact on tourism and the local economy: 60% of the 100,000 tickets sold were purchased by people from outside the London area, and the direct economic impact for the city of London and surrounding area is estimated at \$20 million.

Along with the 2010 Olympic gold medal team from Alberta, there are two teams representing Ontario at this year's Brier: one from the Coldwater and District Curling Club and one from the Soo Curlers Association of Sault Ste. Marie. I wish them all luck and success and the best in this event. I also want to congratulate the city of London and all the municipalities that participate in this event.

Mr. Speaker, before I finish—I have about 10 seconds—I would like to congratulate and wish all the pages good luck in their future. I want to thank them for supporting us for the last three weeks, bringing the water and all the paper we need. All luck and success, and hopefully we will see you again in this place, taking our jobs.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Bob Delaney: The leader of the Conservative Party's brand of vicious personal attack politics yesterday delivered an open-handed slap in the face to the millions of Ontarians and their friends and families who grapple with addiction and mental health issues.

In his usual snide and insensitive manner, the Conservative leader equated the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member of a statement that I made in this chamber on Monday, asking that we be respectful to one another. Twice in his statement now, the honourable member from Mississauga–Streetsville has made some comments that I don't think are respectful to the Leader of the Opposition. I'd just ask that he would be conscious of that during the remainder of his statement, please.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker.

The Conservative Party presents to Ontarians a future with no room in their tomorrow for the one in five Ontarians who will confront a mental health issue in their lifetime. This is indeed the same Conservative leader who made up a story about patients being treated in a garage at Credit Valley Hospital.

Our province has asked a special expert advisory group to help build a mental health and addictions system

to provide the right supports when Ontarians need them and as close to their homes as possible. Ontario will develop and deliver a 10-year comprehensive strategy to make life better for those Ontarians.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHRISTOPHER'S LAW (SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY) AMENDMENT ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 MODIFIANT LA LOI CHRISTOPHER SUR LE REGISTRE DES DÉLINQUANTS SEXUELS

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 163, An Act to amend Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000 / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi Christopher de 2000 sur le registre des délinquants sexuels.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will reserve my time for ministers' statements.

SICKLE CELL AND THALASSEMIA CARE ONTARIO ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 SUR TRAITEMENT DES AFFECTIONS DRÉPANOCYTAIRES ET DES THALASSÉMIES ONTARIO

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to establish Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Care Ontario and to proclaim Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Awareness Day / Projet de loi 165, Loi créant Traitement des affections drépanocytaires et des thalassémies Ontario et proclamant la Journée de sensibilisation aux affections drépanocytaires et aux thalassémies.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: Some of these names are difficult, but the diseases are more difficult than the name.

This bill establishes Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Care Ontario as a corporation without share capital. The objects of the corporation include taking measures to improve the coordination and quality of health care for individuals who have sickle cell/thalassaemic disorders and promote awareness of these disorders, and to essentially create an umbrella to give comprehensive care for people with sickle cell anemia and thalassaemia.

The bill, if passed, would also proclaim June 19 each year as Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Awareness Day in the province of Ontario.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(e), the Speaker shall put the questions on the two ballot items to be considered during private members' public business on Thursday, March 10, 2011, after the conclusion of debate on ballot item number 69.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): 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

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I have the honour to present for consideration of this House a bill to amend Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000.

Ontario's sex offender registry, the first of its kind in Canada, was sparked by the tragic 1988 murder of 11-year-old Christopher Stephenson at the hands of a convicted pedophile on federal statutory release.

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At the inquest into Christopher's death, the coroner's jury recommended creating a national registry for convicted sex offenders, requiring that they register with their local police service as soon as they are released from jail. In April 2000, the Ontario government passed Christopher's Law, 2000, to establish and maintain a registry of sex offenders that police can use proactively for investigative purposes. The act was proclaimed into force on April 23, 2001.

I would like to note that in the gallery today we have with us Christopher's father, Jim Stephenson. Jim, we welcome you to the House today.

On April 1, 2004, the federal government created a national sex offender registry. Since then, Ontario has asked the federal government for changes to the national registry to make it as comprehensive as the Ontario registry. These changes are reflected in Bill S-2, which received royal assent on December 9, 2010. When Bill S-2 is proclaimed, there will be differences between the

registries in several areas which the government wants to address, including reporting obligations, addition of offenders convicted outside of Canada and addition of offenders pardoned under the Criminal Records Act.

The bill I am introducing today would, if passed, align Christopher's Law with the recent changes to the federal registry by removing existing legislative offender reporting timelines of 15 days; adding a new regulation-making authority to prescribe the timelines for reporting in sections 3 and 7 of the act; requiring offenders who have been convicted of a sex offence outside of Canada and who have been ordered to report to the national registry to also report to the Ontario registry; and allowing the Ontario registry to maintain the records of registered offenders who receive a pardon under the Criminal Records Act.

These changes would align the Ontario sex offender registry with the national sex offender registry legislation as amended by Bill S-2. These amendments, if adopted, will maintain smooth and efficient sharing of Ontario's sex registry information with the federal registry.

Today, we have a sex offender registry in Ontario with a 97% compliance rate, one of the highest rates of any sex offender registry in all of North America. The Ontario registry is an effective tool to help police investigate sex crimes and monitor offenders in the community.

We would welcome the support of all members of the Legislative Assembly for this legislation.

NUTRITION MONTH

Hon. Margaret R. Best: March is Nutrition Month in Canada. This month gives our government the opportunity to spotlight healthy eating and nutrition and to encourage Ontarians to make healthier food choices for themselves, their children and their families.

The Dietitians of Canada led the national Nutrition Month campaign for more than 30 years. This year's theme is "From Field to Table," which aligns with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs's Foodland Ontario campaigns, highlighting Ontario's farmers, food producers and local offerings.

Our government wants to increase awareness of the fact that making healthier food choices, such as making healthy homemade meals and snacks, eating less pre-packaged or fast food meals, reducing salt intake, and eating more fruits and vegetables can reduce the incidence of obesity and prevent heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some types of cancer.

Our government's healthy communities fund provides additional support for projects that focus on physical activity and healthy eating, among other government priorities. Since 2009, \$22 million has been awarded through the healthy communities fund to more than 360 organizations to deliver programs benefiting approximately one million Ontarians.

The Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport is helping Ontarians make informed decisions about their most important asset: their health. To support Ontarians in all

regions, the EatRight Ontario program provides free access to registered dietitians via telephone and through an integrated website. EatRight Ontario also offers a menu planner, an interactive online tool that can help Ontarians prepare nutritious meals and snacks, achieve and maintain healthy weights, and eat the recommended servings from all five food groups, as noted in Canada's Food Guide.

To further encourage healthy eating by our children, the ministry provides funding for more than 300 Ontario after-school programs, reaching over 18,000 children and youth in high-priority neighbourhoods across the province. Through this program, young Ontarians have access to healthy after-school snacks, as well as nutritious education and other health-related programs in a variety of community settings such as schools and community and recreation centres.

To further support healthy eating in remote regions of our province, our northern fruit and vegetable program is currently providing 18,000 children in 110 schools with two weekly servings of fruit and vegetables. As well, the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport has been working with a variety of ministries and partners to ensure that school vending machines offer healthy options and that food in cafeterias is trans-fat free. Also, Ontario's schools will have standards of nutrition in place.

The Ontario government is working to make our schools healthier places to learn. Nutrition Month is a perfect time to get on the right track with healthy eating. Ontarians are encouraged as much as possible to buy local, eat fresh and be informed about the foods and beverages they eat and drink.

On Monday, the federal Minister of Health announced a national dialogue on healthy weights. We are pleased that the Harper government has finally joined us in our fight against obesity. Our government has been leading a seven-year effort to help families and children lead healthy, active lives, and I call on the opposition to support our efforts.

As our Ontario athletes return home from the Canada Games, I welcome them as role models. As world-class athletes, they keep their bodies and minds in tip-top shape by eating healthy food and embracing physical activity, and they returned home with the Canada Games flag. This is integral to the success of the athletes, and certainly they are great role models, again, for our children.

Healthy eating is an important investment in the individual, community and overall health of our great province. Indeed, our health is our wealth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to stand today and comment on the speech by the minister on the amendments to the Ontario sex offender registry. On behalf of Tim Hudak and our caucus, Mr. Stephenson, I'd like to welcome you here. You've truly shown leadership on this file from the very beginning, and we really appreciate that.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, and to the members of the Legislature, this was a bill brought forward originally by David Tsubouchi under the Mike Harris government. We are very proud of the Ontario sex offender registry and Christopher's Law. We know that over the years it's done remarkable improvements for Ontario citizens and been a very positive influence.

I've actually toured the Ontario sex offender registry at OPP general headquarters on three or four occasions, and I've been shown how the information they collected can be dispersed. If there is an offender having any kind of a problem where they should have reported, they can almost immediately identify the area, within a few people, where that offender may be.

With all the information that's been collected over 10 years, it's also become an investigative and crime prevention tool for the police services in Ontario. I can tell you that, talking to staff members who work at the Ontario sex offender registry—they're people who are very proud of their work and dedicated to making sure that this system, which we believe could well be the best sex offender registry anywhere in North America, can be improved upon at any time.

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It's also interesting to note that this year is the 10th anniversary. They've had 10 years of collecting valuable information to help our police services.

I'm also told that many police chiefs from across the province are going to the Ontario sex offender registry, looking for information that they can use—in other cases, in other police services outside of the province of Ontario.

Because this bill aligns itself with Bill S-2, there's no question that we will be supporting this. We want to make sure that the Ontario sex offender registry we have today is improved upon as a great one for the future as well.

NUTRITION MONTH

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It is my pleasure to rise today to respond to the Nutrition Month statement by the Minister of Health Promotion.

I'd like to thank the Dietitians of Canada, who have led this campaign for more than 30 years.

This month provides us with the opportunity to raise awareness about the need to live healthy lives through eating healthy foods. Unfortunately, the consequences of unhealthy diets are very serious.

This year's theme for Nutrition Month is "Celebrate Food ... from Field to Table!" This is a very appropriate reminder of the fact that much of our food does come from the field, and we need to celebrate that.

I also want to say that this is an opportunity to educate all Ontarians and encourage them to expand their nutritional horizons. Most of us do indulge in unhealthy treats from time to time, but hopefully we recognize, and we can encourage others to recognize, that that must not become the norm. We do know that healthy diets and lifestyles not only provide us with slimmer waistlines,

but they lessen the burden on our health care system and, ultimately, increase our life expectancy.

I'd just like to talk about life expectancy at this point in time. This is an issue that has been raised recently by the Ontario Medical Association. According to their research, the life expectancy of children who are obese may not be as long as that of their parents if the rates of obesity continue to skyrocket.

Obesity is a serious problem, and we have some of the highest rates here, and we have to combat it. It also increases the likelihood of adulthood diabetes.

What we must do during this month is enlighten not just adults, but also our children, about the need to eat healthy. Then, hopefully, we can decrease the rates of obesity and also the rates of diabetes in our province.

Today, on behalf of our caucus, I'd like to commend the dietitians for their commitment to promoting a healthy lifestyle. We can achieve better results and healthier lives.

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Peter Kormos: On behalf of New Democrats here at Queen's Park, I'm pleased to respond to the Solicitor General today.

I recall the process of the Christopher's Law legislation through this House, and I recall participating in the debate as well as the committee hearings that considered it. I look forward to the committee hearings around this legislation as well.

There are two areas of serious omission that continue to make the sex offender registry in Ontario less than it should be. One is the omission of convicted persons who were young offenders. What that means is that a person who is 17 and 11 months old, who is convicted of even a serious sex offence, is immunized from being listed on the sex offender registry. We list people on the registry so that we can identify people who pose a threat to the community, and so that we can locate them in a speedy way when somebody is at risk or has been harmed. New Democrats think it's a serious omission to not include young offenders who have been convicted of sex offences on the registry.

The other element that remains of concern is the absence of retroactivity. We welcome the inclusion of persons convicted outside of the country, but the absence of retroactivity—and I appreciate that as time progresses, that will be eliminated. Still, at the age of only 10 years, this particular legislation—what it says is that there's a huge number of sex offenders in the community, in the country, in the province, who aren't registered because their convictions occurred before the creation of the sex offender registry.

I'm looking forward to the committee on this; I don't expect a protracted debate on second reading. We will be addressing it in the House on second reading. I'm confident that the minister will ensure that the bill goes to committee. We're looking forward to addressing some of those specific concerns during the course of committee hearings.

NUTRITION MONTH

Mr. Michael Prue: In response to the Minister of Health Promotion on nutrition week, I have to say that I listened to her with some incredible awe and disbelief as she spoke. It's not because of what she said, because we all believe we should be eating homemade foods, that we should have less salt, that there should be more fruit and vegetables. Certainly, we all believe there should be healthy snacks and a healthy weight and that people should eat all five groups of food, but how little this government has done to make this a reality for so many of our citizens.

I listened to her, and she talked about two servings a week going to First Nations reserves in northern Ontario. The healthy eating guide says you should have five a day. This is the government's plan, to give them two a week? That is like 6% of what they're supposed to get.

Today, this very day, before question period, there was a group of Anglican ministers and parishioners who were out in front of the finance minister's office. They were protesting that this government has done nothing to stop hunger and nothing to make sure that people eat healthy foods. They are asking for a \$100-a-month supplement so that they can buy fresh fruit and vegetables, so that they can eat healthy food. This government has done nothing, absolutely nothing, to let that happen. They want to do what this government is suggesting that we all do. They want to be able to give themselves and their children the kinds of food that will make them healthy and productive. They want to eat carrots. They want to eat lettuce. They want to eat simple things that we all take for granted, but you can't get those from the food bank.

This government has done nothing around all of the important issues: calorie labelling, so that people know how many calories are in the food. They've done nothing on a ban on advertising to children on junk food. They have done absolutely nothing on the whole issue of farmer tax credits, which—my friend the member from Sarnia has a bill in this House, and they've done nothing at all to make sure that farmers can get tax credits to donate surplus food, rather than plowing it back into the ground, so that the poor can actually eat some good food and decent food. They have done absolutely nothing on local food procurement.

So I ask the minister—yes, it's important to tell us all to eat food. Yes, it's important we do it. Yes, it's important; absolutely. The dietitians are right. But surely that applies to the poor. Surely that applies to First Nations communities. Until it does, then you're not including all Ontarians. You're not including the people who tend to be the most vulnerable. When this government starts to do this, maybe we'll all pay more attention to what the minister has to say.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to give the member from Eglinton–Lawrence an opportunity—I

understand that some of his guests were delayed for the introduction of his bill, and I will give you that chance to introduce them.

Mr. Mike Colle: I thank the House. They were just rushing upstairs.

As you know, I introduced the bill on the Sickle Cell and Thalassemia Care Ontario Act. The real heroes behind the passionate fight for sickle cell and thalassemia patients in Ontario are here with me. I just want to introduce them, and some of you may know them.

First of all, there's Ms. Lillie Johnson, who is the founder of the Sickle Cell Association of Ontario. She just received the Order of Ontario last month. Ms. Lillie Johnson is here. We also have Dr. Isaac Odame, who is a specialist in haematology at Sick Kids hospital; Dr. Rob Frankford, who used to sit in this House, a long-time advocate of sickle cell care; Sherman Moore, who is a sickle cell survivor, who is doing this for his late sister Gloria, and he tells an incredible story; Riyad Elbard, who is the president of the Thalassemia Foundation of Canada; Joseph Bodun Macaulay, who is the president of the Sickle Cell Foundation of Canada–Eglinton Community Support Group; the world-famous George Marcello, who just got back from Phoenix, Arizona, where he is trying to help save people from that new legislation there in Arizona, and he's in the House, from Step by Step and from Torch of Life; Yvonne Clarke, who is from Camp Jumoke, which raises money for kids with sickle cell; and from the Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario, Isatu Bah is here, and Neneh-Iye Bundu is here. Thank you all. I hope I didn't miss anybody. Don is also here, their great cameraman. Thank you so much.

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MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: My point of order relates to standing order 23(i), specifically in response to the statement by the member from Mississauga–Streetsville. I was tempted to allow this to pass without further comment, but I'm compelled to raise it with you.

The member, in his statement, made highly offensive remarks and imputed motive, not only to the leader of the official opposition, but expressly, through his statement, to every member of the official opposition. He made specific statements that are offensive from the standpoint that he leaves the impression that the leader of the official opposition and members of the official opposition have a disdainful attitude towards people in this province who are attempting to cope with mental illness.

You interrupted him, and I thank you for doing that; however, his statement stands. I believe that it would be incumbent on the member to voluntarily stand in this place and withdraw his remarks. People watching this place have no concept of what took place when the Leader of the Opposition made his remarks, and I believe that it is only fair that the member would take it upon himself and do the right thing: stand in this place and

withdraw. I believe he also owes an apology to the Leader of the Opposition and every member of the official opposition for his remarks.

I think it's important for people to know that there was a motion that was introduced as an opposition motion that in fact came to the defence of people in this province who are coping with mental illness and encouraged the government to move quickly on that issue.

Speaker, I leave it in your hands. I leave it, more importantly, in the hands of the member from Mississauga–Streetsville to do the right thing.

Mr. Ted Arnott: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: I certainly would have wanted to intervene earlier, but I didn't want to interrupt the government announcements or the responses.

The fact is, the member for Mississauga–Streetsville gave a statement in the House this afternoon that represented a calculated and scurrilous attack on another member of this House: the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook. The member for Newmarket–Aurora is absolutely right: This member, in fact, owes the House an apology.

Standing order 23(j) says that a member shall be called to order if he “charges another member with uttering a deliberate falsehood,” and I would submit to you that during the course of his statement he actually did that. I would ask you to call him to order and ask him to withdraw that statement and to extend an apology to the members of the opposition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member from Newmarket–Aurora and the member from Wellington–Halton Hills and I remind them of the importance of the timeliness of points of order. Notwithstanding the fact that the government may have been proceeding, I would encourage you in the future, if there's something that has come to your attention that you are displeased with, to rise on that point of order.

Once again, I have, on numerous occasions within this chamber, reminded members on both sides of the House of the use of inflammatory language, because the rise in the use of language of an inflammatory nature leads to what we're experiencing right at this moment.

I did stand up and comment to the honourable member from Mississauga–Streetsville at the time of my concern over some of the comments that he had made. If the honourable member from Mississauga–Streetsville so chooses, if he wants to comment any further, I'll leave it with him. If not, I'm going to move forward.

PETITIONS

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Jim Wilson: “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 school 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 this petition, and I will sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a petition, certified by the Clerk, addressed 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've endorsed the petition.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here, signed by a great number of people from the north end of my riding, around Hickson and Tavistock.

“The government of Ontario has directed local governments to permit industrial wind turbine installations that minimize the impact on agricultural operations.

“We, the undersigned, object to any approval of industrial wind turbines in our local municipalities until there is a full independent assessment to address the viability of industrial wind power, the impact of construction on wildlife and the environment, as well as the adverse effects on livestock, people's health, quality of life and investment in our properties. It is important for the provincial and local government to ensure that all concerns are addressed before the construction of wind turbines permanently changes our community.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to read that petition.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Mr. Barry Burton of Creemore for sending me this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Collingwood Street bridge, built in 1913, located in the township of Clearview, in the county of Simcoe, is scheduled for destruction and replacement;

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

“To have the bridge declared to have significant historical value under the Heritage Act, protecting it from destruction; and

“To have the bridge restored while maintaining the existing structure.”

I agree with the petition and will sign it.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition regarding paved shoulders on provincial highways, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“Whereas” the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka’s “private member’s Bill 100 provides for a minimum one-metre paved shoulder for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

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

“That” the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka’s “private member’s Bill 100, which requires a minimum one-metre paved shoulder on designated highways, receive swift passage through the legislative process.”

I give this to Ira.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It’s a petition that has been in circulation for quite a length of time, but on behalf of the citizen that presented it to me, Rebecca Gingrich of 11 Church St. in Princeton, I want to present it, as it just arrived in my office recently. It’s a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario families are struggling to help put their kids through university;

“Whereas students in Ontario graduate with an average \$26,000 in debt and have the highest tuition and largest class sizes in the country; and

“Whereas Ontario tax dollars should be kept in Ontario to help Ontario students, not sent overseas;

“We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the McGuinty government to

cancel its plan to give foreign students scholarships of \$40,000 a year and reinvest these funds in scholarships for Ontario students.”

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

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PENSION PLANS

Mr. Jim Wilson: I have a petition on behalf of Simcoe county paramedics.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

“That the Minister of Finance support Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s resolution that calls upon the government to address this issue immediately and ensure that any legislation or regulation allows paramedics in Simcoe county who were affected by the divestment of paramedic services in the 1990s and beyond to transfer their pensions to OMERS from” the Hospitals of Ontario Pension Plan or OPSEU Trust.

I agree with the petition and will sign it.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it is from people in Kitchener-Waterloo, London and Guelph. It says,

“We, the undersigned, are opposed to the cuts to the literacy and basic skills program. We recognize education as a basic human right. We acknowledge the volunteers who have dedicated their time to helping people overcome these obstacles.”

I here affix my signature and agree.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Robert Bailey: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas soaring hydro costs across the province are making electricity unaffordable for many hard-working Ontario families and seniors;

“Whereas energy experts suggest that over the course of 2010” and 2011, “residential hydro bills in Ontario will increase 26% or more, costing a minimum of \$304 per year for the average homeowner;

“Whereas, over the last year alone, the McGuinty Liberal government has added \$150 per household in hydro generation premiums, \$50 in smart meter fees and then placed \$98 in harmonized sales taxes on the average Ontario household’s hydro bill;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s smart meters are forcing hard-working and busy Ontarians to pay exorbitant premiums to do regular chores, such as laundry, outside of the Premier’s ‘preferred’ time-of-use energy schedule;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the” McGuinty Liberals “immediately reduce hydro rates for all Ontarians, cease with the time-of-use pricing and remove the HST tax placed upon electricity, as it is an essential service to hard-working Ontario families.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and send it down with Ira.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to restore medical labs in Tottenham, Stayner and Elmvale and reduce lineups throughout Simcoe–Grey;

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have here a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, signed by a great number of people in and around the great town of Tillsonburg.

“Whereas the picketing of the homes of people with intellectual disabilities alienates people from their auto-

nomy; security; privacy; relationships with staff, neighbours and community; and also causes discrimination and harm to citizens who should be free to enjoy their homes without harassment and intimidation;

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

“To support Bill 83 and prohibit the picketing of vulnerable people’s residences during a strike.”

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario families are struggling to help put their kids through university;

“Whereas students in Ontario graduate with an average \$26,000 in debt and have the highest tuition and largest class sizes in the country; and

“Whereas Ontario tax dollars should be kept in Ontario to help Ontario students, not sent overseas;

“We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly to call on the McGuinty government to cancel its plan to give foreign students scholarships of \$40,000 a year and reinvest these funds in scholarships for Ontario students.”

I will sign the petition, and I certainly agree with it.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROPERTY TAX DEFERRAL ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 SUR LE REPORT DES IMPÔTS FONCIERS

Mr. Shurman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 143, An Act to provide property tax deferrals to low-income seniors and low-income persons with disabilities / Projet de loi 143, Loi visant à accorder des reports d’impôts fonciers aux personnes âgées à faible revenu et aux personnes à faible revenu atteintes d’une invalidité.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Peter Shurman: First of all, I’d like to thank my friends the member for Welland and the member for York West for co-sponsoring this bill. They have clearly agreed with my view that it was an important step for these times.

It’s also, in a very real way, the completion of a circle for me in this Legislative Assembly. I arrived here in 2007 and very quickly learned that members got a very small amount of time but nonetheless a period of time approximately once a year to debate their own personal private member’s business. The first thing that I put

before the assembly at the time was Bill 72, which contemplated exactly what this bill does, but it got shot down, and the reasons it was shot down were a number of things that I hadn't contemplated.

So Bill 143 is a redo of that bill with every single one of those elements addressed, so that it now should, by all rights, be acceptable to all sides of this Legislative Assembly, and I suppose for that reason we wound up with sponsorship from all three sides.

In any event, I would like to proceed with the debate and first of all welcome to the assembly these visitors: Dominic Lee, Peggy Lee, Rene Wan, Kim Liao, Ronnie Lee, F. Jeng Lee and Anna Cheun, who are all members of the board of directors of the First Chinese Senior Association of Vaughan, in my riding. Morris Jesion of the Ontario Society (Coalition) of Senior Citizens' Organizations is also with us, and I see that a certain Carole Shurman, my wife, has just entered the assembly.

Interjection: That's your daughter, right?

Mr. Peter Shurman: No, it's not my daughter; it's my wife.

I'd like to acknowledge the support of Susan Eng, president of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, as well as Warren Carroll, a founding member of the Thornhill Seniors Centre. I'd like to acknowledge the support of Josephine Mastrodicasa, president of Concord West Seniors Club, also in the riding of Thornhill.

Approximately 49% of Ontario's population is from the baby boom generation. Many of the people in this Legislature, indeed, are from the baby boom generation, which began in 1946 and ended in 1962. Being born in 1947, I guess I'm what's called leading-edge and approaching that period of time where I'm going to be considered a senior. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we put in place conditions that assure that this cohort does not create an unnecessary burden on the health and long-term-care system.

By 2017, the largest segment of the Ontario population will be 65-plus. Think about the ramifications on the health care system, on long-term-care beds, on retirement homes, on everything that has to do with people who are in an aging milieu. That period of time will see us with the largest cohort of 65-pluses ever in Ontario.

Dignity and respect are the by-products of staying in one's own home longer. The financial benefits accrue to the entire system as well. Bill 143, a complete redo of this earlier attempt to reduce the burden on fixed-income seniors, touches every button here: It keeps people in their homes with dignity, does it at no cost to anyone at all, and makes the entire process easy. Some will say we already have property tax assistance programs, and we do, but they are neither cost-free nor uniform across the province of Ontario, and that's what we are seeking to address here.

By way of background, in 2006, Toronto had an uptake of 2,367 applicants for this city's cancellation program and 70 applicants for their deferral program. Many municipalities—and I include places like Muskoka, Niagara, Sudbury and Thunder Bay—had no participants

despite very high senior citizen populations and hardship. That's because the programs are different from place to place, so there is an inconsistency, and people don't even know they exist.

1400

To date, in Canada, property tax deferral programs are offered at the provincial level in British Columbia, in Prince Edward Island and in Nova Scotia. Similar programs are offered at the state level across the United States.

In Ontario, property tax deferral programs are available at the municipal level, as prescribed through the Municipal Act, 2001, and the City of Toronto Act, 2006. My bill contemplates replacing all of that with a uniform and cost-free Ontario-wide property tax deferral system for those who require it.

This act will allow eligible owners to defer their property taxes. That doesn't mean they don't pay them; it means they defer them. This would allow them to remain in their own homes while offsetting the burden of property taxes.

The eligibility criteria are quite clear. You have to be a Canadian, you have to be an Ontario resident, or you have to be a resident for 10 years or longer. Being a senior citizen of 65-plus or a recipient of ODSP is mandatory. And the equity in the property in question must be a minimum of 25%. That's very important, because if you're going to defer payment of the property tax and it's going to be taken at the disposition of the property, there has to be some equity to go against, because there's a lien registered.

The property taxes are deferred; they are not lost. Taxes must be repaid with interest at the earliest of either the death of the owner or the change of permanent residence of the owner.

This bill comes at a time when Ontario seniors are being hit very hard. They're being hit with MPAC assessments that they never anticipated getting. They're being hit with the additional costs incurred because of HST application on things that have to be purchased for their homes. One example is electricity. Another example is heating fuel: natural gas or whatever it happens to be. They're being hit with hydro increases—and every side of this assembly has a different view of why the hydro increases are there, but nobody can deny that they are—and for people on fixed incomes, who are mostly 65-plus and retired, it hurts.

Property tax increases also play a part. Property taxes are rarely stable for very long, so if those rise again, that fixed income, generally the result of a nest egg, often-times one that has been hit hard over the past couple of years during the recession—it creates a further problem in terms of ability to pay. Ability to pay is what drives this bill. This bill, then, offers Ontario seniors the dignity and the respect that they deserve after contributing so much to their province and to their society.

There's broad-based community support for this type of approach. The First Chinese Senior Association of Vaughan, well represented here today, has said in a letter

to me, "Living on fixed incomes, many members of the seniors' club would be eligible ... this would be a great relief."

The Thornhill Seniors Centre, which has been there a long time and is very active—there are over 1,000 members, most of them living in their own homes—has said, "Coupled with spiralling energy costs and HST on services previously not taxed, some of our members worry about keeping their homes."

I can assure you, and I think everybody in this Legislature, from all sides and from all corners of the province, would agree—you've all received letters, you've all received emails, and all of them do more than allude to that; they say, "You know what? I'm in jeopardy." There are many cases like that.

From the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, CARP: Susan Eng, whom I mentioned earlier, couldn't be with us today, but says in her letter, "With energy costs expected to rise precipitously over the coming years, a property tax deferral program should help older Ontarians stay in their homes longer and with greater financial security."

Regardless of what you're talking about in this Legislature, whether you're talking about the availability of long-term-care beds, whether you're talking about alternate level of care, whether you're talking about retirement homes and the ability to accommodate people, or whether you're talking about home care and the ability to deliver services to people—all of these things come into play, and all of us want to keep our seniors in their homes for a longer period of time. Goodness knows, the seniors themselves want the ability to live independently and with dignity in a place that they, through their sweat and tears, have purchased—usually the largest single purchase in anybody's life—and maintained, and they want to be able to continue to maintain it.

In terms of disability, a disability should not be a prison sentence. People who are able to live in their own homes should be entitled to this small element of respite or relief. The bill restores dignity and respect to a segment of the population that struggles with a stigma every single day.

This bill addresses the disparity in the rollout of social services in Ontario's numerous and diverse regions by creating an environment where people with disabilities can receive services in their own homes and not in an institutionalized setting, at no cost to anyone—no cost to the taxpayer, no cost to government coffers.

Bill 143 helps to keep seniors living in their own homes with respect and dignity. This bill would help reduce government spending. It would alleviate the pressures on retirement facilities by reducing the number of residents who would be in need of them.

Bill 143 has already received the support of my co-sponsors, one a Liberal and one from the NDP. It is clear that tax relief for seniors and persons with disabilities is needed now, and it transcends partisanship. When I presented the precursor to this bill, we hadn't gone into a recession yet; now we have, and people on fixed incomes

derive those fixed incomes from investments that are no longer as large as they once were. We have to remember that.

The bill helps to protect seniors and persons with disabilities, who have given so much to society throughout their lives. This is a method for the province to be able to give back to them with a hand up, not a handout.

By mandating property tax deferrals for low-income seniors and low-income persons with disabilities, we are ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our community are able to remain in their own homes and maintain the level of dignity to which they are entitled.

Bill 143 is about making Ontario affordable for all Ontarians. Neither low-income seniors nor persons with disabilities should be put at a disadvantage. They deserve, and are entitled, to remain in their own homes. Considering that under Dalton McGuinty, the wait-list for long-term-care beds has more than doubled, to over 25,000, it would seem that the only option the McGuinty government has is to support seniors living in their own homes longer.

If that doesn't make the difference, consider this: The province invests tax dollars and reaps interest from those investments. There's always some amount of churn or money in the bank. With Bill 143's passage, some of that investment becomes the investment of money in virtual loans through deferred taxes, at a rate of return commensurate with the marketplace.

There's no reason to deny these people that opportunity, and there's no reason, from a cost perspective, to deny it either.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure to join in the debate this afternoon on Bill 143—I thank the member from Thornhill for his comments—and to have the opportunity to be part of the discussion.

I wanted to start by talking about the proposed bill. I am concerned, of course, about the cost of the bill. We heard the member say that, in his words, there's no cost to the government coffers. I do have concerns that there will be costs to the government coffers.

The proposed bill would require the province to establish a new property tax deferral program for low-income seniors and low-income persons with disabilities. The proposed bill provides that annual property taxes—which include municipal taxes, education taxes, provincial land taxes, for instance, where applicable—would be deferred to a maximum of \$5,000, as we heard, upon the approval of the application to the Minister of Finance. The repayment of the deferral with interest would take place upon the death of the owner or transfer of the property from a surviving spouse.

Under the proposed bill, it appears that the province would, in fact, bear the costs of the creation and administration of the deferral program. I reiterate the concern about the cost of establishing something like this.

The proposed bill would provide an eligible applicant, as we heard, with deferrals of up to \$5,000, but it would

provide the homeowner with a generalized tax break, which, combined with interest, would carry a significant cumulative cost. Again, I go back to the costs, and I think that's something we can all agree should be a concern.

1410

The operational issues, specifically, that occur: Municipalities would have to finance the cost of the deferral as well—as I just said the province would—of the municipal portion of the taxes. Again, that's going to cost the municipalities money. Under the proposed bill, I just wanted to add that the province may register a lien on properties, which would likely be viewed negatively by seniors and by the disabled.

I wanted to just go over the municipal mitigation programs. Currently, through the property tax system, municipalities are required to provide relief from re-assessment-related property tax increases to homeowners who are, or whose spouses are, low-income seniors or low-income disabled persons. The eligibility criteria and the form of the tax relief, of course, are at the discretion of the municipality. The authority gives municipalities the flexibility to respond to the particular circumstances of each of the ratepayers.

The municipalities can also provide property tax relief to residential property owners whose taxes are what are called “unduly burdensome.” The eligibility criteria of something being unduly burdensome and the amount of relief are determined by the municipality.

I think it's important to look at the larger picture as well in what already exists. To go back to the comments of the member from Thornhill, he did acknowledge that we do have existing programs that also are not cost-free, so kudos to him for acknowledging that. Some of those programs are great programs that support our seniors, our disabled and our persons of lower income in the province of Ontario.

For instance, we know the Ontario energy and property tax credit is delivering almost \$1.3 billion in annual support, so \$1.3 billion per year to low- and middle-income people in Ontario and to seniors. Ontarians who own or rent a home can receive up to \$900 in tax relief, and the number that seniors can receive in tax relief is up to \$1,025.

Before I go on, I wanted to, of course, welcome the members from the Chinese seniors' association of Thornhill for your advocacy and what you do in my area of Kitchener–Conestoga, which serves Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich and all of south Kitchener.

I have John Thompson as chair of CARP locally in chapter 25. Talking about initiatives like the Ontario energy and property tax credit, John has this to say: “In my opinion, the Ontario energy and property tax credit ... for seniors is a very positive, progressive and compassionate strategy to assist Ontario seniors,” many of whom are on fixed incomes.

“A tax break for the necessities of life—shelter and energy—will provide additional personal resources for seniors to enhance their quality of life in other discretionary aspects of their personal budgets.

“The credit increase for seniors is a wise decision to assist those who have, over their adult lives, contributed so much to the prosperity of the province of Ontario.”

It's important that we continue to focus on the good things that are happening, the benefits that our seniors are receiving in the province currently, and I'll leave it for my colleague to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a privilege to have the opportunity to rise to speak in support of my colleague from Thornhill and Bill 143, which will make a positive impact on the lives, clearly, of so many who need it.

I'm also proud to be part of a PC caucus that's committed to real tax relief for hard-working Ontario families. Heaven knows that after eight years of Dalton McGuinty's government, they need it. They've been hit with the HST, hydro increases and soaring MPAC assessments, to name a few among the litany of reasons why it's becoming increasingly costly to live in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

Few groups are suffering more out there than low-income seniors and low-income people with a disability who are living in their own homes.

I know there are seniors and disabled folks in my own riding of Leeds–Grenville who will be watching the debate today very closely. I hear from these people every week when they contact my office to talk about the fact that they're worried about being able to maintain their dream of home ownership. They're excited at the prospect of anything that will allow them to maintain their independence as long as they are physically able to do so.

What's great about my colleague's bill today is that it targets two very vulnerable groups. It offers them a chance to take a time out and catch up on the bills that keep raining down upon them, by deferring their property taxes.

I know that in some parts of Ontario residents have had the opportunity to take advantage of this deferral program. This bill will ensure that Ontarians who qualify will have the opportunity to get some relief.

I note with interest that it has been co-sponsored by the member for Welland and the member for York West. It's great to see that those two individuals are supporting the initiatives of the member for Thornhill. I know that if the government does the right thing and gets behind Bill 143, it will prevent seniors and disabled Ontarians from facing that terrible day when they'll lose their independence simply because they can't afford to pay a municipal property tax bill right away.

Keeping people independent in their own homes is clearly good for the individuals themselves, but let's not ignore that it's beneficial for society as well. When people are forced out of their homes, they turn to institutions like long-term-care facilities that are already finding themselves increasingly unable to cope with the demand for their services. Certainly in my riding there are long wait lists for long-term-care homes and for affordable housing. It makes no sense to add to that demand when

the no-cost solution being proposed is at hand. Again, I want to commend the member for Thornhill.

No one would argue that it's not in everyone's best interest to create an environment in which people can afford to live independently at home for as long as their health will allow. It's particularly important that we create these conditions now. At a time when our population is aging, we must prepare the groundwork to take the pressure off our long-term-care and health systems. This bill, I believe, can be an important part of those efforts.

I'm delighted to speak in support of this bill presented by the member from Thornhill, which gives low-income seniors and disabled residents of Ontario a fair chance of maintaining the dream of home ownership. I only hope that the government opposite will also recognize the value of what's in this bill and work hard to see it adopted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: This bill embodies a good idea, a sound proposition and a timely proposal. Its sponsor, Peter Shurman, the member for Thornhill, should be applauded and commended for bringing it into this chamber.

I'm grateful to the member for Thornhill for allowing me to be a co-sponsor. I recall speaking to his proposition when he first put it on the floor of this chamber and supporting it then. I also recall my disappointment, my amazement, my shock at how government members were disinclined to share the enthusiasm that so many on this side of the House had for the Shurman proposal in its first incarnation.

As the sponsor, Mr. Shurman, points out, he has addressed, in the course of drafting Bill 143, all of those concerns that were raised last time around, which is why I sit here—I stand now, but a few minutes ago I was sitting while I was listening to the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Finance read the notes that had been prepared for her by the ministry. I want you to know that I like that member. I have a great deal of affection for the member for Kitchener-Conestoga and I want her mother to know it. I understand that, as the parliamentary assistant, she has to do things that she may find somewhat distasteful from time to time. I'm hoping that today is one of those days.

I don't want to read anything into her demeanour, but I do note that when she delivered her address on behalf of, I presume, the Minister of Finance, she didn't do it with the same enthusiasm and personality that usually accompanies her addresses in this chamber.

1420

I'm hoping—sometimes against hope—that this wasn't marching orders from the ministry. I'm hoping that government backbenchers understand that this is private members' public business and that these sorts of votes should not be whipped.

Why, for the life of me, would members of this assembly want to throw a wet blanket, want to dampen, want to

obstruct a good idea from Mr. Shurman? Beats me. It rots my socks to think that Thursday afternoon of each week, when private members' public business is debated—it just curls my hair to see partisan interest intervening and obstructing good, sound ideas like the proposal from Mr. Shurman today.

Look, the reality is that people are already deferring their property taxes. They do it by simply not paying them. Well, it's the case. I've talked to several municipal finance department clerks, the people who work the front desk, the people who take your taxes, guys down in small-town—the real Ontario, where you and I come from, Speaker. People go to their city hall, they line up at the counter and they pay their taxes. They know the name of the clerk, and the clerk almost inevitably knows them. It's hello and there's a little bit of chitter-chatter, and then the people pay their taxes. It's as much a social event as it is anything else.

Several municipal clerks have told me that they have never seen a higher rate of default on property tax payments—never before. I'm talking about clerks with experiences of 15, 20 and 25 years in their city halls. That's pretty disturbing stuff.

You see, people are already deferring their property taxes. The problem is that they're paying outrageous, usurious interest on the deferred taxes. The problem is that after three years, of course, the hammer comes down, and your property is at risk of being sold in a tax sale.

In fact, because there isn't a program like the one Mr. Shurman contemplates and proposes today, municipalities feel highly pressured to proceed with the process, which means literally a tax sale. Then you've got these incredible scenarios right out of the Depression era with the sheriff loading people's furniture out on to the street while they're being dispossessed.

We're not talking about scofflaws. We're not talking about people who are irresponsible. We're not talking about people who are burying their money somewhere in the Cayman Islands and trying to scam their municipality. We're talking being hard-working folks. We're talking about people who have built their homes, at least where I come from. A big chunk of the houses in Welland and Port Colborne and Thorold and Wainfleet are homes that people built with their own hands and paid for. If they sent kids to college and university, they usually paid for them twice, because there was a second round. Just about the time your kids are old enough to start going to college or university, you've got your first mortgage, the first round, paid off. Then you get another mortgage to pay college and university costs for your kid or kids.

I talked earlier today about Mrs. Harrison down in Port Colborne, with monthly hydro bills climbing every month, this most recent month \$150.07, one of the largest single chunks of that being \$17.26 of Mr. McGuinty's new HST.

This legislation contains safeguards, because Mr. Shurman very skilfully and wisely has imposed that

minimum 25% equity. What that means is that the person utilizing the program that Mr. Shurman proposes would only be able to defer taxes up to the point where their equity was brought down to 25% and no less than that. At that point, it wouldn't happen.

Let's look at this in the real world. Let's look at some of the examples of people who are going to use this modest proposal by Mr. Shurman—modest but, oh, so appropriate.

I do want to mention that Mr. Shurman demonstrates with this bill what it means to be a good member of provincial Parliament. The member from Thornhill shows us and the audience today what being a good MPP is all about. It's about participating in the debates of government bills and analyzing them and, if need be, criticizing them, opposing them when they're bad or trying to make them better when they could be better, but it's also about bringing ideas to the chamber.

Here we've got a good idea, and I say it's good enough at the very least to be sent to committee for further consideration, and to be sent to committee so that folks like the folks sitting in the visitors' gallery here today have a chance to speak themselves to this proposal contained in Mr. Shurman's Bill 143. If this doesn't receive second reading today, this chamber is denying seniors, persons with disabilities, people like the people sitting in our visitors' gallery today—this assembly is denying those people the right, I say, to speak about Mr. Shurman's Bill 143 and what it means to them and to talk about ways in which maybe it could be improved.

I say to the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Finance, she of the wet blanket today, that that would be her opportunity on behalf of the government and the Minister of Finance to discuss with the committee in a public way, in a transparent way, amendments that might make the bill better. I can't speak for the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Shurman, but I suspect he'd welcome that. I suspect that the sponsor of the bill, Peter Shurman, would enthusiastically accept not only commentary but even criticism if its purpose and its design and its goal was to ensure that this good idea contained in Bill 143 becomes a reality.

Let's look at some examples. Because of the nature of the bill and the reality of folks out there who are struggling, and the fact that this is capped at \$5,000, you're going to have people who perhaps realize they have maybe only one or two more years to live in their home. You're not going to have people utilizing this proposal 20 years into it, because there's a limit of having to maintain 25% equity and there's a limit of \$5,000 per year. What this will mean is that those folks who can live at home in their senior years but for the fact that they can't afford to live in their own home that they paid for once, and probably twice if they sent kids to college and university, might enjoy one, two or three more years in that home.

Well, let's talk about costs, shall we? It's a hell of a lot less expensive for somebody to live in their own home than for somebody to live in a long-term-care facility,

never mind those long-term-care wings of hospitals. It makes a lot more sense to help people live in their own homes both in terms of the humanity of it and the morality of it as well as, if you want to be that way, the dollars and cents of it. It makes a lot more sense to help people live in their homes until they reach that point where they do need some other living accommodation that supports them in their most senior years.

So I'm here. I'm going to be voting for this bill enthusiastically. I encourage other members to vote for it. Once again, I thank Mr. Shurman for letting me be a co-sponsor. I want to make it clear that this is his idea and his proposal, and he and his constituents should be very proud of him for bringing this to this Legislature today. I look forward to its passage and its appearance in committee.

1430

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm delighted to enter the debate on Bill 143, the Property Tax Deferral Act, 2011, which was brought by the member from Thornhill for the second time, and this time he came with some kind of sponsorship from the NDP and Liberal Party members. I know he's passionate about this issue; that's why he brought it again.

All of us in this House bring issues to debate. Especially today, we're talking about seniors. We owe seniors respect and it's our obligation and duty to give them whatever we can to support them to live in their homes with comfort and dignity.

I just want to speak a little bit about the HST and hydro. The member knows we doubled the tax credit for seniors to \$500 per senior. Also, we gave home energy tax credits for seniors and low income, and everyone making less than \$160,000 can get a 1% credit on \$36,000. All together, if you want to combine it, every senior across the province of Ontario would benefit from \$1,025 in their income tax return every year. When you do taxes you can see it. I'm not creating anything. The people of Ontario will know, I guess, now that it's tax season, exactly how much they're getting back. That's not the issue.

The issue here is how we can support seniors in the province of Ontario. It's a good, important topic. I studied it very well and I want to support them. If you defer your taxes and the municipality is responsible, they have to pay interest. The interest will cost 15% across the province of Ontario, because municipal interest rates are higher than banks. You can go to the bank, have a reverse mortgage and you can get it at a lower rate. Any seniors who have equity—\$100,000, \$150,000, it depends where you live—easily can go to the bank and the bank will give you a reverse mortgage at a lower rate.

We are debating this issue here to find a solution for seniors. Why do we have to create those issues for seniors to go to the municipality, defer taxes and make it a complicated issue for municipalities? The municipalities live off the taxes they collect on a regular basis to

support the municipalities. If 200, 300, 1,000 or 2,000 seniors go to the municipalities and ask for deferrals, it would cost them revenue, which means less income for the municipalities, which means less ability to serve the people of these municipalities.

Another thing: This ability for municipalities to defer taxes already exists. Toronto exercised their right. You are in the city of Toronto.

Interjection.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm talking about—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: You're cheating these people and you know it, Peter.

Interjections.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The honourable member for London—Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the issue is not against my colleague opposite from Thornhill. We have open debate here. We want the best solution for seniors to remain living in their homes. I think our obligation is to find a suitable place for them, to give them the health care assistance they need, to give them the support and the protection they need, all the elements in our capacity to support them to live in their homes with dignity and respect.

It's not an issue of, "Against them, with me, get the member from the Liberal side, the NDP side and the Conservative side, which means the bill will be perfect, let's go pass it." The issue is how we can find a workable solution for all of us to support seniors.

I looked at this bill and I spoke in the past in 2008 when he introduced it the first time under number 78 and debated it in 2009 under Bill 171, property tax deferral. I'm looking at my speech and I don't think anything changed since that time. I'd love to support your bill but what's your premise? I don't see any need and reason just to play with the minds of seniors and people of Ontario. We have to find them a complete solution, not just talk and no action. The action is when we're trying to do an action, when we are trying to propose bills. We have to find concrete solutions that can solve and help the seniors to remain in their homes.

What did I see in this bill? Nothing. We ask them to defer the taxes until a different time. Then how much is the interest, I ask my colleague? The interest is about 15%. It's easier for you to go to the bank; you get it for 3% or 4%. More importantly, you have no obligations when you go to the bank to pay the legal fee because the bank will do it for you. So it will be cheaper, as a matter of fact, and less complicated.

Also, we have to respect the officials from the municipalities who get elected—the mandate by the people of Ontario. We cannot force them to do something against their will. If they want to do it, they'll do it on their own.

Again, I believe the debate is important to find a solution for all of us in the province of Ontario. I think that when we talk about seniors, we talk about our future, because all of us are future seniors.

I don't see any reason for me to support this bill. It makes no sense and costs more money for the seniors and the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm really pleased to join this debate on Bill 143. I want to commend my colleague the member from Thornhill for introducing what I believe is a very critical piece of legislation that would provide tax relief for Ontario seniors and people with disabilities, and I congratulate him for doing so.

Fundamentally, this bill is all about ensuring that our low-income seniors and our people with disabilities can continue to live at home independently, and that they can do so with dignity and respect. Certainly, when I spend time with my mother, who is a senior, and with her friends, I can tell you that there is nothing more important to these individuals—many of them with low incomes—than being able to remain at home. It is increasingly becoming much more difficult for these individuals, because we've seen an increase in fees and taxes. Obviously, energy costs are creating severe financial hardship for these individuals. This bill would alleviate some of that stress and some of that pressure.

The other thing this bill would do is alleviate the pressure that we currently are experiencing in this province when it comes to individuals looking for accommodation in retirement homes and long-term-care homes. There simply is no space. This government has not taken the time to formulate a long-term plan so that those who are going to be needing long-term-care homes can be properly accommodated. Currently, we can see what has happened, because in our hospitals we have about 19% of the beds occupied by people who have nowhere else to go. We don't have community or home support. We don't have long-term-care beds.

This bill goes a long way, as I say, to keeping people independent in their own homes. It's coming at a time when they are being hard hit by these skyrocketing hydro rates and the HST is hitting their pocketbooks hard.

So I thank the member for Thornhill. I appreciate the consultation that he has done with his constituents.

And I welcome people here. You can be assured that we strongly support you; I'm disappointed that my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga and the Liberals are not able to. I believe we need to give relief to these people. You can be assured that we want to do what other jurisdictions are doing—British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, which have similar tax deferral programs. Unfortunately, in the province today, we have a series of tax deferral programs, but they're inconsistent and it's a bit of a ragtag system.

This would bring everything together. It would provide the relief that is so necessary today. It would provide fair and equal treatment.

I'm going to be supporting this bill; I would urge others to do so as well. Let's demonstrate to Ontario seniors and persons with disabilities that their government cares about them and that their government is

listening and wants to do everything that it can to allow them to continue to live independently, with dignity and respect, in their own homes.

I conclude by applauding my colleague the member from Thornhill for having identified a need and bringing forward a bill to address this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments on Bill 143, An Act to provide property tax deferrals to low-income seniors and low-income persons with disabilities.

1440

I want to congratulate my colleague Mr. Shurman and the other co-sponsors of the bill for allowing this to be debated today. I was always under the impression that when a bill was co-sponsored we had the support of all the parties on it. I didn't understand that today. I saw clearly that the government does not support this bill.

I don't know how many people spend a lot of time with their constituents. I spend a lot of time in my constituency and I talk to an awful lot of senior citizens. The one thing that I can tell you today, and I think a lot of people probably will agree with me on this, is that there's a lot of fear out there. Particularly if you are a low-wage earner or you're on a fixed income, there is a real concern out there about what everything is costing you today.

I have people coming up to me—I have levees every year and I have seniors' days etc. Each and every time I have those, people come to me and they say, "Garfield, we're really worried about what is happening out there today with some of the costs that are going up: our water bills, particularly our hydro bills, the new harmonized sales tax." These are all things that they can't counteract. I can tell you that there's a concern out there about people living in their homes and keeping their homes. I just think this is a wonderful idea. There may be some complications as far as the Ministry of Finance and how it's administered, but, you know, if you can administer the hydro bills that we receive today, you can pretty well administer anything, because no one understands what they mean any more, other than that they continue to rise and rise and rise.

I think for that reason alone this is a bill that would be really nice to see go to committee and have input from organizations and groups like those that are here today, from the Ministry of Finance, from all three parties, from people right across the province. Maybe in the end it doesn't make any sense, but it does seem to be a really sensible bill to me and I can see how this bill would allow a lot of Ontario seniors to live the last few years in their homes in a very comfortable and more relaxed atmosphere and not under this anxious worry of always having to wonder where the next dollar is coming from to pay the hydro bill, because there are people who are choosing between paying the hydro bill and eating. That's a fact today, and I see it all the time in some of the little rural Ontario homes. The reality is, this is an oppor-

tunity for the government to show real leadership in difficult economic times.

As well, it fits into the strategy they've got called aging at home. We've heard about that. I don't know where they spent any money on it, but I've heard about this strategy in special documents that they've provided, and that they think people should age at home. There's a real strategy out there around that. Imagine if you could allow a person another three or four years of their life not to be in a long-term-care facility or a retirement home, but actually living in their home near their friends and neighbours, near their families, just in the comfort they've enjoyed as citizens of their communities throughout their lives.

I came into this debate today thinking it was kind of a slam-dunk, that all the parties would be supporting it and that we would be moving on to committee. Apparently, that won't happen. I don't know if it's going to be a whipped vote or not. But the reality is, if we're really doing justice to our low-wage income earners and our senior citizens here in the province, I think this is a bill that would be very important for us, as parliamentarians in the province of Ontario, to support.

So I want to thank my colleague Peter Shurman, the member from Thornhill, for bringing this forward. Obviously, he's passionate about this particular case, because it's not the first time he has brought it forward. But as this debate comes to an end, I really hope people on the opposite side will take a second look and support this and give us some real credibility, as parliamentarians, that we really do care about those low-wage income earners and the senior citizens who helped build this province to make it the greatest place in the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Thornhill, Mr. Shurman, has two minutes for his response.

Mr. Peter Shurman: You know, not too long ago, the rules in this Legislature changed to allow people to create co-sponsorships of bills, to put parties together so that you could transcend the lines and see what people's points of view were, so that we could put bills like this on the table for discussion. And now I can see why, a couple of days ago, my co-sponsor, the member for York West, said he wouldn't be debating this bill. It's clear that the Liberal Party does not want this bill to pass, at least not coming from this side, or maybe very particularly coming from me; I don't know. But what's unfortunate is that it was never meant to be a partisan bill. It's not about partisanship, and that's why there were three parties co-sponsoring this bill. It is about helping seniors.

When I hear the member, for example, from London—Fanshawe say that he's here to try to come to some consensus, and then run through a litany of all of the wonderful things that the Liberal Party has done to help seniors and add them up to form a total of \$1,000, and you put that up against what happens when you've got \$5,000 in property tax hitting you every year, where you no longer have that \$5,000 as part of your cash flow, you can see where the sentiments of the Liberal Party really are.

The same thing in the lacklustre presentation of the member from Kitchener–Conestoga in basically parroting what she was told to say from the finance department of the Liberal Party. I've got to tell you: Both of those members, and some other ones, but specifically both of those members, should expect to see the member from Thornhill in their ridings during the coming election campaign to tell their constituents just how much they care about seniors' issues.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Shurman: You don't give a damn because you're screwing them, that's what you're doing, and your constituents are going to hear about it.

I want to thank you very much for your debate, and I know the vote is a foregone conclusion.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The time for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The time for this ballot item has expired. We'll vote on it in about 50 minutes.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, in recognition of the role Ontario's firefighters play every day in keeping our—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sorry, Mr. Brown.

You guys, it's Thursday afternoon. We have important business, and some of us would like to go home, so behave.

If you'd like to start over, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, in recognition of the role Ontario's firefighters play every day in keeping our communities safe, and in recognition of the evidence of health and safety risks to firefighters over the age of 60, and in keeping with recent Human Rights Tribunal decisions, calls on the government to introduce legislation allowing for the mandatory retirement of firefighters who are involved in fire suppression activities in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Brown moves private member's notice of motion number 67. Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The first thing I would like to do is recognize some friends of all of us here in the Legislature who are in the public gallery: Fred LeBlanc from Kingston, Barry Quinn from Ottawa, Warren Scott from St. Thomas and Mark McKinnon from Toronto, who are all proud members of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, with Fred being the president.

I also want to recognize from my own personal and riding perspective the hard work of Randy Richards, who

is the vice-president from District 6, and is presently, as I'm told, in Kirkland Lake doing good work with the firefighters of Kirkland Lake.

It's kind of an odd thing for a member who represents, in total, eight professional firefighters. In the constituency I represent, Elliot Lake has the only professional firefighters in their own city. They work hard. They're represented by Darren Connors. They provide us with a great service in the city of Elliot Lake. The rest of our firefighters are volunteers, and we commend all the work that they do.

I want to say, and we all know, that we think of firefighters as the people who run into the buildings when everybody else is running out. They do an admirable job in fire suppression, in keeping people safe. But they're also, almost always, the first people at the scene of any emergency, whether it be a car accident, whether it be a heart attack in a home. Who's there first? Usually it's not our emergency services, the ambulances; it is usually the firefighters.

I want to commend them not only for all their work across the province in making society and communities safe through their fire suppression work, but also for their highly skilled abilities to help people in those critical situations.

So, why are we here? We're here because there is a problem with the retirement age. The motion that I'm putting forward today is just asking the government to move forward on a suggestion that I've heard for the last, I think, three years from the firefighters, where they are asking particularly that we provide a mandatory retirement age of 60. I think that strikes the correct balance between recognizing the rights of firefighters to determine when they wish to retire and the responsibility of fire services across this province to ensure the health and safety of firefighters and the community.

The Human Rights Code currently allows for mandatory retirement where a bona fide occupational requirement is found by a court or tribunal. Mandatory retirement for firefighters who have reached the age of 60 has been established as a bona fide occupational requirement in Ontario since 1986. As a result, mandatory retirement policies have been commonplace in firefighters' collective agreements for many years. Despite this, fire services across the province continue to confront expensive, time-consuming legal challenges to their mandatory retirement policies.

The Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario recently considered this issue again in a case called *Espey*. The tribunal took into account extensive medical evidence, including evidence showing an increase in the incidence of coronary artery disease once firefighters reach the age of 60. The tribunal once again found that mandatory retirement for firefighters who have reached the age of 60 was consistent with Ontario's human rights laws. It is a reasonable approach—one that prioritizes the health and safety of Ontario firefighters in the communities that they serve.

There is still considerable risk, however, that mandatory retirement will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis

before a court or tribunal. The time has come for Ontario to amend its laws to establish some certainty and allow for mandatory retirement of firefighters who have reached the age of 60.

This government has always demonstrated its commitment to fire services in Ontario. Fire safety is a priority of this government, which is why we have:

—made Ontario's homes even safer by amending the Ontario fire code to require working smoke alarms on every level of a home;

—provided municipalities with the Ontario fire grant, which distributed an unprecedented \$30 million to fire departments across the province to assist in training, equipment and prevention programs;

—worked with our fire services partners to release the 2007 fire code, replacing the 1997 one, written in an objective-based format that promotes greater flexibility and more uniform enforcement;

—worked with firefighters to establish presumptive legislation—that's really important—ensuring that full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters, as well as fire investigators, now qualify for benefits under the WSIB when suffering from eight types of cancer, as well as heart injuries within 24 hours of fighting a fire or a training exercise; and

—created the Ontario firefighter memorial, just over here, a place where Ontario's fallen firefighters will be remembered always for their bravery, heroism and sacrifice.

We continue to look forward to working with our firefighters.

I'm urging all members to support this. It's important for all of us to ensure that our firefighters can work in a safe—it's very unsafe, by its nature—occupation and be able to retire with dignity at age 60. I would ask all members to support this resolution. I believe it's in the interests of the people of Ontario, the communities they serve and all the firefighters. Thank you very much. We look forward to your interventions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise today and support the resolution put forward by the member from Manitoulin. I want to welcome the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association here as well today, led by Fred. We see a lot of Fred around this building, year after year. Always one of the most interesting days of the year is the firefighters' lobby day, and I think all of us get included in the meetings.

Certainly, what you're asking for in the resolution today is something that for at least the last three or four years has been one of the requests that the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association has asked for on lobby day. It will be interesting to see, to the member from Manitoulin, how far the government will go with this.

Our caucus supports this, and there are a number of reasons why. First of all, there has been strong advocacy here at Queen's Park, but I know that all the associations

outside of Queen's Park in our individual areas—I can think of the work I do with Kevin White from the Barrie fire service association, Glenn Higgins from the Orillia fire service association and Michael Gagnon from the Midland fire service association. I work with all these gentlemen all the time. They're great people to work with, and this is something that they feel is important to them.

What I think is important is that as we get a little older, we don't realize that we are deteriorating a certain amount and we don't have quite the physical stamina that we did at one time. This is what they're saying here. As critic for community safety—and I'm sure the minister would agree somewhat with this, and some of the former parliamentary assistants who are here as well—I think this is a public safety issue, and it's not only a public safety issue for the safety of the firefighter who might have a heart attack or something after—because the statistics will show you that that can happen—but it's a safety issue for his or her partners as well, and for the citizens they represent and who they're suppressing these fires with. I think it's important that we listen to this. From what I understand, there are three decades of statistics that back this up, to indicate that as we get to a certain age, these sorts of things happen.

This is one thing we might as well know right now: If we move forward with this, we're probably going to have people who are in excellent shape, these masters guys who are in better shape than anybody, and they will probably say, "Do you know what? I can fight fires until I'm 80 years old"—but we're going by the statistics here. Also, I should point out, on the opposite side, that there are probably firefighters and people who are not in as good shape and may not be as strong or physically fit as someone who is 60 years old.

But the statistics show overall that the magic age of 60 to suppress fires is something that would be a public safety issue, so they've asked for this. It's against some of the other legislation that we have here, but as parliamentarians, we have to look at all the factors, and I think that in the end, our caucus, the Progressive Conservative caucus, does support this.

I wanted to say something else on top of that—and I want to thank Fred LeBlanc and some of the fellows I mentioned, in particular Glenn Higgins from the Orillia fire service, because there's something I wanted to put on the record today. I don't know if you folks all understand this. It involves the death of a firefighter. I'm glad the minister is here, because he might be able to help me with this as well. A young man in my riding died last year of cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, after 30 years as a forest firefighter in the province of Ontario. His name is Tom LeBlanc. His wife, Kim, has asked me to address this and to work with all the different ministries. Fred, I want to thank you for already giving me some indication that it's something that could be brought up in some human resources type of thing.

He was a firefighter with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and he's not covered by the pre-

sumptive legislation. I can remember the day when Jim Wilson asked for unanimous consent for second and third readings of the presumptive legislation, and just last year, we asked for the presumptive legislation to cover our volunteer firefighters in our communities. That's all good news, because we were lobbying for that, and I want to thank Parliament for agreeing to all that.

But now we do have some of these cases like Tom's case, where he fought fires for 30 years—not only here in Ontario, because the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources would send him to California, to BC, to Alberta, all over, basically—wherever there were forests in North America to fight these fires, and he did so for over 30 years. He's not covered. His family was not covered by this presumptive legislation.

1500

I'm asking, as a member of this Parliament, if we can move forward with at least looking at that right now, because we have about 100 full-time forest firefighters in the province of Ontario and I think that it would only be fair that they be included in this. I'll bring this up later, maybe in a resolution or a question in the House or letters to the different ministries, but I do want to put it on the record that this guy lost his life to cancer and it's a sad thing. She's come forward and asked me to see what I could do to help not only him, but other forest firefighters in the province of Ontario as well.

We can talk a lot about some of the other factors, but I think the proponent of this bill, Mr. Brown, has done a good job in explaining what we want here and what is required under that resolution. I would say, on behalf of the PC caucus, that we'll be supporting the resolution today, and we'll ask the government to take a serious look at this and perhaps bring it into law as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate deeply the opportunity to speak to my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin's resolution. He's a friend, a colleague and a concerned citizen for the firefighters in his riding and across the province. I want to start by thanking him for bringing this forward. Obviously, I want to thank my friends in the gallery, who are here on an ongoing basis, not just for today, for their advocacy as leaders in their organization for bringing good things to their people. Thank you very much for all the good work you do in our communities.

Let me give you a little bit of a background as to why I can stand and wholeheartedly support this resolution. Something little that happens across the province, and of course North America and around the world, is a little competition called the combat challenge. It's denoted as being the toughest two minutes in sport. It was referenced before about the masters division. We're talking about 50-year-olds and older who are capable of doing that combat challenge, probably as good as any one of us here when we were in shape at 23 years old. I wanted to make sure that I was supportive of those who have kept in shape and have done their jobs well under a confined

circumstance and not in front of a fire and not in front of a building that's falling apart and going inside of it, which is a different set of circumstances. I think this resolution speaks very largely about what the firefighters themselves are asking for.

One of the other things that I've done is that I was fortunate enough to have a bill passed in this House called the Firefighters' Memorial Day Act, to acknowledge those who have lost their lives doing their job. I was helpful, I believe, in the presumptive legislation, and before I even got elected, I formed a group in my riding called the Friends of the Firefighters. We've raised, to date, over \$250,000 for equipment and materials that are needed by our firefighters in our community: thermal imagers before they became part of the normal truck piece, and CO detectors, to complement my colleague from Oxford's desire to have CO detectors in homes across the province. So I'm supportive of those things.

Confession is good for the soul, they say; probably I'm a closet firefighter. I'm not sure whether or not I should be confessing to that, but I have a very strong affinity for firefighters and the work they do.

In particular, I've made it clear that I've also—

Mr. Frank Klees: You have their calendar, too.

Mr. Dave Levac: I have their calendar?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I bet you're not on the calendar.

Mr. Dave Levac: That's a little too far. Speaker, it's unbelievable heckling that's taking place from across the way, to assume that I couldn't make it to their calendar. As a matter of fact, I got asked to pose in their calendar one time.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Forty years ago.

Mr. Dave Levac: Forty years ago. Not in the Toronto Sun.

Having said that, I stand before you in full support of the member. I also suggest very strongly that there is a legitimate reason why they're asking what they're asking. Somebody started to go through the process of why it's a safety issue, and I do agree with my friend from Simcoe North. My friend from Simcoe North brings up a very good point that's extremely important: to make sure that we recognize the safety side. We want to have the best of the best coming into our homes to protect us. We want the best of the best to protect our industry. We want the best of the best to be healthy at the end of their careers. That's another part.

And the last comment that I want to bring to you which, for me, continually resonates, and I know the members know this, is the families: to make sure we say thank you to their families for the gift of these firefighters, and the fact that at the twilight of their careers, I want their families to get them back whole. To ask us to do this is not about a selfish concept of being able to say, "Get out; you're done." It's about making sure that when they do leave, they leave with as much as they can, physically and emotionally, and give it back to the families who have given them to us.

As a community and as a province, I think it behooves us to listen carefully to what is being asked in this resolution. Just to make sure that people understand we're not asking the impossible, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario has already said this, and I quote: "The tribunal once again found that mandatory retirement for firefighters who have reached the age of 65 was consistent with Ontario's human rights law."

What I am suggesting to you very clearly is that this ask, through a motion, is also to put into motion—it's not asking for it immediately today. It's to put into motion the discussions that we have to have to get to the point where we can offer what the firefighters are asking for. We've already got some rulings in different sectors that make it clear that it's very doable. There may be some challenges, so we have to make sure that's understood clearly. There may be some challenges. But overall, what we found out is that there's a place for this to happen.

I'm in full support of the member from Algoma-Manitoulin's resolution. I will be voting in favour of the resolution. I thank the member for bringing it forward. I thank the member from Simcoe North for his comments about not only his own constituent but, more importantly, understanding that this is an important aspect of who we are as a Legislature and our belief in and support for firefighters across the board.

I look forward to the comments and the evaluation of the NDP, because I'm curious as to whether or not they believe there is room for this to happen. I'll listen carefully to them, because I do understand, in my conversation with the member from Welland, that he has nothing but admiration and respect and will support this. But I leave it at that and will find out what is going to happen.

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Levac: This isn't politics. This is about making sure that in this time we hear exactly what the concerns might be, if there are any.

I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to rise in support of this private member's bill, ballot number 69, by the member from Algoma-Manitoulin. I certainly support this as well. I've met with the professional firefighters here at Queen's Park; they've recently been in my office to speak about these issues and others. I've also had the opportunity to speak with my local fire department, Chief Patrick Cayen from the city of Sarnia, and the rank-and-file membership there as well, who also support this. I talked to them as recently as today to make sure that they knew this bill was being debated here today and that it had been introduced. I said I intended to rise and speak in favour of it.

I did some research on that, and most of it's from the professional firefighters. They were kind enough to leave some information with me when they met before. So, just to put on the record the genuine concern for health and safety of Ontario citizens as well as firefighters, there is

statistical, medical and other evidence over three decades that has shown that as firefighters age, they demonstrate a decline in physical fitness, an increased rate of coronary disease, and a loss of both cognitive functions and other capabilities which would lead to possible stresses and injuries in the workplace.

The code currently permits mandatory retirement where there is a bona fide occupational requirement. This must, however, be proven on a case-by-case basis. The effect of challenging these claims, however, introduces—I don't know whether anyone has spoken about this yet today; I had to step out for a minute—a fiscal burden on both the municipalities and the local associations having to go through great legal steps and paying lawyers to fight these exemptions. So having the exemption for firefighters identified in legislation would recognize this bona fide occupational requirement.

Most recently, a decision in a case in London handed down by the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario found that collective agreement provisions requiring London firefighters to retire at age 60 did not violate the code, and therefore upheld that mandatory requirement.

1510

In my conversations with the firefighters from my local municipalities in Sarnia-Lambton, when I spoke with them, they spoke also in favour of this. They asked that I speak in favour of it today, and I'm certainly pleased to rise. Of course, our critic from Simcoe North also spoke quite eloquently about the other issues that are to do with the forest firefighters, who also face significant risk. As that member said, they travel across Canada, not just Ontario, fighting fires.

On that, I'd like to retire. I'd say that, because of the positions of the numerous human rights tribunals and decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada, the money and time invested by all parties in these matters would certainly be resources that could be put to a better use; to move on from that. Let's ask the government to draft the legislation, bring it before committee and try to make the types of improvements that would make this bill, certainly, more acceptable and make sure that we could do the mandatory retirement for firefighters engaged in suppression and those types of activities.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to rise today and to speak in favour of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand on behalf of my caucus, I think—certainly on behalf of Mr. Kormos—to support this motion. We believe that the time has come to ensure that there is mandatory retirement at age 60 for those officers involved in fire suppression activities.

We support the motion in spite of the fact—and I guess because it's a motion. It's not a bill. All that happens in a motion, just so that people who might be watching this on television—it's not binding on the government, but it is a form of moral suasion, so that the government, or perhaps the next government, might take a very solid look at this and put the entire machinery of

bureaucracy and government around crafting a bill which will have the desired effect.

I do know that, given the relatively short time left in this particular Parliament, it is not all that likely that a bill can be brought forward from the passage of this motion today, should it be passed—and I'm reasonably sure it will. There's not a strong likelihood, in any event, that a bill could come, be debated, go through first, second and third reading and committee, all of those things, in the limited time that is left of this Parliament. I guess what we are saying today is that a future government, perhaps after October of this year, might want to come and take a look at the motion that was passed and start the necessary machinery towards making this a law.

I stand here, as well, mindful of my friend, a firefighter and former fire chief of the borough of East York, who died this year. He died at Christmastime. Many of us who knew him were quite shocked that such a relatively young man, who had just retired not that long ago, died. And of course, like so many, tragically like so many firefighters, he died of cancer. I think it can be reasonably assumed that that cancer was contracted during the time that he was a fire suppression officer.

His name was John Miller. There is a fire hall located at the corner of Cosburn and Donlands which is the John C. Miller fire hall. We named that after him upon the time of his retirement, which coincided with the time of amalgamation. There were six fire chiefs in what was then Toronto, and only one fire chief remained following the amalgamation. John was not chosen to be the first fire chief of Toronto, although I'm sure he would have made a good one. He retired and he went to live in Tillsonburg.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: That's a good place.

Mr. Michael Prue: A good place, yes. But before he did that, he was my neighbour. He lived in East York, in the lovely little area known as Parkview Hills, which is where I live. As I said, we were surprised when we learned over the Christmas holidays that he had succumbed to cancer.

I think why I'm saying all of that is because we need to put forward a bill to protect the John Millers. We need to put forward a bill to protect all of the firefighters who put their lives immediately at risk every time there is a fire call, but who put their lives at risk in a long-term fashion simply by the nature of the job that they do, simply by being there in the fires, amongst those agents that cause cancer: the burning of chemicals, the burning of wood, the inhaling of smoke. All of those things can be injurious to health, not only immediately but in the long term as well.

The member from Brantford talked about the NDP and what our position was. We do have some concerns—not with this motion, because this motion merely asks the government to come forward with a bill, and we support that. But when and if the government comes forward with a bill, there are some details that are going to have to be looked at. I raise them today not in any kind of negative way, in terms of what the member is saying, but in terms of what is going to have to be negotiated with

the various fire departments and with the associations of firefighters both in Ontario and in their respective cities.

The first one that comes immediately to mind is that some fire departments in Ontario have mandatory retirement at age 60. Certainly, the motion is attempting to have all of them do that. Some have it at 65. They have other ages. I asked this morning if the city of Toronto has mandatory retirement for fire suppression officers at 65, and my informant told me that that was negotiated into the contract by the firefighters themselves.

So I think we need to take a good, hard look, and discuss with those unions and with those members whether or not they wish to keep the age at 65, and if so, why, because a lot of futures are predicated on that as well. I say that because if a person joins a fire department when they're in their 20s, there's probably no harm at all in the age 60. If they do so a little later in life, say after 30 or 35 years of age, and they don't have the kind of seniority they need by the age of 60, do they get a full pension? It's really important to people who spend a lot of time in one particular job that they get a full pension.

We in the New Democratic Party believe very strongly in pensions and in the rights of people to look at that age when they can retire to ensure that it is as full and as complete a pension as possible. There is no sense sending people away—if they don't have enough money, after they have risked their lives, after they have dedicated themselves to public service—and saying, "Well, you started too late, so you don't get a full pension, and now you have to go at age 60."

We want to make sure that those people are protected and that there is some kind of negotiation or some kind of phase-in within the bill that will protect all of those people who have come to expect a certain lifestyle at the end of their service, and who also, I think, pretty much are banking on the monies that they're going to get at the time of their retirement. It's very difficult to take that away, and then some bitterness might be caused. We don't want there to be any bitterness whatsoever for any members as a result of what is happening here.

So I merely raise this issue, hoping that a government, either now or in the future, will take a look and, when crafting the bill, will work with the firefighters' unions to ensure that everyone is protected and that no one is forced to retire earlier than he or she would have wanted to, especially as it relates to their pension and the pensionable monies that would accrue to them.

1520

I think, too, that a good point was made by the member from Simcoe North about looking at firefighters who are not traditional firefighters in the way we see them in the towns and cities of this province, but who are firefighters in remote areas—those who go into forest fires, those who work in other locations—to ensure that they have some of the same opportunities. They certainly have many of the same risks. They certainly are subject to smoke and, I assume, a lot of carcinogens, which they're forced to breathe in or to live with. They too need some kind of protection.

If a bill is being crafted, I commend him for bringing this up, because I had never really thought of those people. When you think of firefighters, you don't think of those who fight forest fires in quite the same way, but in fact the point was a very good one. This government, or a future government—not to water down in any way what we're doing for firefighters—might want to take a good, hard look at this.

So I think—Peter, do you want some time?

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. So I think I'm going to conclude and leave a few minutes for my colleague from Welland, who I think also wants to address the issue.

I would implore all members to vote for this. It sends a direction to a government. It tells them what this Legislature thinks and what we believe to be right and correct. It asks them to start doing the heavy slogging and the lifting now, so that we can get this law passed as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Just before I ask for further debate—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you very much—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Just one moment, member from Guelph. I just want to make an announcement that the third ballot item today won't be heard. We'll be voting in about 10 or 12 minutes on both ballot items, so if you're in your offices and that, you may want to come down for the vote. It will be early today.

Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to speak in support of the motion that's been brought by my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin on this whole issue of mandatory retirement for firefighters. Welcome to the representatives of the OPFFA who are in the gallery this afternoon.

I come from a university town. As many of you will be aware, university faculty, or at least some university faculty, were strongly opposed to mandatory retirement provisions. They actually took this all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and were successful in getting the Supreme Court of Canada to strike down some of the traditional mandatory retirement provisions that businesses and institutions had. As a result of that, in part, we changed the legislation here in the province of Ontario to relax the rules around mandatory retirement and to allow people to work past the normal retirement age if they choose.

Having said that, however, it's very important, especially when we look at a group like firefighters, that we reach the right balance between the right of people to choose when they retire, as outlined by the Supreme Court, and also the responsibility of the fire service to ensure both the health and safety of its own members and of the community at large.

I've also had the opportunity, while I've been an MPP, at the invitation of Colin Hunter, the president of the Guelph firefighters' association, and Shawn Armstrong, who is the fire chief in Guelph, to attend an event that

they do periodically, which is to get the politicians in town to come in, suit up, go into the smoke house and get some sense of it. If you can imagine me, decked out in the full regalia of a firefighter, going into a smoke-filled building and trying to rescue, as it turns out, a rolled-up rug and lug it out—I've done that. What that really does is give you some appreciation for the physical conditioning—that I obviously don't have in order to do that with a real person—that a real firefighter needs to have to do the job and meet the expectations of the job when required to go into a burning building and rescue people. It's for that reason that human rights legislation does allow, where there are bona fide work requirements, to have mandatory retirement.

This motion which Mr. Brown has brought is very well crafted, in my opinion. He talks about recognizing the evidence of health and safety risks to firefighters over the age of 60. As the member from Simcoe North mentioned, there are decades of research supporting the idea that there are physical requirements that people who are older are not going to be able to reach. There's also very dramatic accumulated health and safety risks to their own personal health for firefighters.

The motion also says "in keeping with recent Human Rights Tribunal decisions," because as many have mentioned, since the change in the legislation there have been a number of cases before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal where the tribunal has said that yes, there is a bona fide job requirement in the case of firefighters that they be allowed to have mandatory retirement at age 60. Then my colleague goes on to say that we need to bring in legislation to allow for the mandatory retirement of firefighters who are involved in fire suppression activities because that's where the bona fide job requirement is.

I think my colleague across the way from Beaches-East York brings up an interesting point about pensions. In fact, the response to why this is a motion and not an act is that when you do an act there's often a need to have transitional language in it, and one of the transitional things we would have to make sure of is that if you're going to have mandatory retirement at age 60, the pension arrangements max out at age 60 so that you can go on full pension. Those are the sorts of things that actual legislation would have as transitional requirements.

So thank you to my colleague. Absolutely I will be supporting this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank member from Algoma-Manitoulin for presenting this motion. I think it's a very important motion when we look at the nature of firefighting. Having done that for 25 years, I realized the importance of the people you're working with being capable of looking after you when you go in there with them.

Obviously, from all the things we've heard today, there's no way of accurately measuring on an ongoing basis whether one would meet that requirement or not. So

I think it's important that the things that have been negotiated in contracts up until now are allowed to stay in place, which is saying that you reach a certain point in your life and then you can no longer be in the fire suppression business, for the protection of everyone.

I'm a little concerned about the question about the pensions, because it would seem to me that if we already have a lot of the contracts that contain the retirement age at 60, the pension would be set up to do that and the fact you mandate it for everyone wouldn't change the ability of getting a full pension at 60. So I think that's maybe something that doesn't require quite as much debate and concern as one might think.

It's very important to recognize that the process that was set in place to get rid of mandatory retirement was predicated on the fact that the ability of people wasn't necessarily directly related to the age you were. It's reasonable to assume that those members in the Legislature who have passed retirement age are still as capable today as they ever were. But I'm sure that if they put me back on a fire truck and made me fight a fire, I would not be able to do it. So I see no reason why we shouldn't have legislation to prohibit that from happening and protect the other people who are still there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: While my colleague the member for Beaches–East York has made it very clear that New Democrats support this resolution, I suppose the question that should be asked is, what the heck's been going on since the government, with all its fanfare, eliminated retirement ages? Firefighters have made it clear from the get-go that they wanted to be included as an exception to the broader rule. The resolution reflects that desire, that wish, of firefighters. Through their professional association, they've been here lobbying for a couple of years now, at least.

I'm cynical enough, I suppose, to wonder why the government won't throw this into legislation that it's going to try and pass before it rises for the summer so as to lure firefighters back into their camp in time for a fall election. I suppose at the same time, though, firefighters are winners. Firefighters are not going to be inclined to want to support losing campaigns, so maybe even that kind of legislation isn't going to be particularly effective at luring firefighters into their camp. But the government should have delivered the goods on this rather than relying upon a backbencher to put forward merely a resolution that will be supported.

Gosh, Henry Labenski down in Welland, who I think is a year older than me—so that would make him around 59—retired two years ago, for Pete's sake. He's a long-time firefighter, a president of the local association. He and I went to elementary school together, a long-time friend of mine. Mike Fowler, who's the president now of the professional firefighters' association down in Welland, is another good friend of mine, an excellent, outstanding firefighter, a great leader amongst his colleagues. It's for Henry and Mike, amongst so many

other women and men in the firefighting services, that we support this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Algoma–Manitoulin, Mr. Brown, has two minutes for his response.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to thank the members for Simcoe North, Brant, Sarnia–Lambton, Beaches–East York, Guelph, Oxford and Welland for their indication of support for this resolution.

I think it's very important that we recognize that our firefighters across the province are asking for this to happen and that it is a reasonable thing to happen, and it is an efficient thing to happen. It avoids municipalities and locals of the firefighters from engaging in long legal disputes about things they don't need to have long legal disputes about. The tribunals clearly indicate that this is not a problem. It can happen, and it should happen.

I am particularly happy that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services was here to listen to most of the debate. I think it indicates that the government itself is very concerned with this issue and wants it to move forward. I think today's decision by this Legislature will help that along the way.

I have been here for a long time and I know that the support of the Legislature from all sides helps legislation move forward. I appreciate the comments that people have made. They've made some interventions that I don't think I thought of, and I think that's a good thing. I think that the firefighters of Ontario should know we in this Legislature want this to happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has now expired.

PROPERTY TAX DEFERRAL ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 SUR LE REPORT DES IMPÔTS FONCIERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll first deal with ballot item number 67, standing in the name Mr. Shurman.

Mr. Shurman has moved second reading of Bill 143, An Act to provide property tax deferrals to low-income seniors and low-income persons with disabilities.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard some noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion the ayes have it.

We will call in the members after we vote on the next ballot item.

FIREFIGHTERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with ballot item number 69.

Mr. Brown has moved private members notice of motion number 67.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those oppose will please say “nay.”

In my opinion the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1534 to 1539.

PROPERTY TAX DEFERRAL ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 SUR LE REPORT DES IMPÔTS FONCIERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Shurman has moved second reading of Bill 143. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm
Bisson, Gilles	Klees, Frank	Miller, Paul
Clark, Steve	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Shurman, Peter

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Dickson, Joe	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qaadri, Shafiq
Balkissoon, Bas	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Best, Margaret	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Levac, Dave	Sousa, Charles
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Moridi, Reza	
Dhillon, Vic	Pendergast, Leeanna	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 12; the nays are 25.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll open the doors for 30 seconds.

FIREFIGHTERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Brown has moved private member's notice of motion number 67. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Dickson, Joe	Miller, Paul
Arthurs, Wayne	Dunlop, Garfield	Moridi, Reza
Bailey, Robert	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Best, Margaret	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bisson, Gilles	Klees, Frank	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Kormos, Peter	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Clark, Steve	Levac, Dave	Shurman, Peter
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Marchese, Rosario	Takhar, Harinder S.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Opposed?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 36; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now call orders of the day.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard some noes.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Carried on division.

Just before we adjourn, we thank our pages and wish them well in life.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): This House stands adjourned until Monday, March 21, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1544.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion and Sport / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé et du Sport
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, P.C., Hon. / L'hon. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie

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Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC) Elliott, Christine (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB) Fonseca, Peter (LIB)	Oakville Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of 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	

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Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Kim Craitor, Bob Delaney
Garfield Dunlop, Peter Fonseca
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Maria Van Bommel
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Lisa MacLeod, Leeanna Pendergast
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Reza Moridi
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Ted Chudleigh, Mike Colle
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Peter Shurman, Norman W. Sterling
David Zimmer
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**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
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Jeff Leal, Gerry Martiniuk
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Michael Prue, Lou Rinaldi
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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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Group and the London Stock Exchange Group / Comité
spécial sur la transaction proposée entre le Groupe TMX et le
London Stock Exchange Group**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Frank Klees
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Gilles Bisson, Michael A. Brown
Frank Klees, Gerry Phillips
Peter Shurman, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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