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Tuesday 17 May 2011

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Mardi 17 mai 2011

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Government Services

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Services
gouvernementaux

Chair: Garfield Dunlop
Clerk: Sylwia Przedziecki

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 17 May 2011

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The committee met at 0901 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Good morning, everyone. Minister Takhar, welcome, and all the folks from the Ministry of Government Services. We're here to resume the consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Government Services, vote 1801. There's a total of five hours and 35 minutes remaining. When the committee was adjourned, the official opposition had 11 minutes left in its 20-minute rotation. It's now back to the official opposition. You have 11 minutes, Mr. Bailey. You can start.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome, Minister and staff. I'd like to start out here today, Minister—the sunshine list of bureaucrats paid over six figures shows that you handed one of the former deputy ministers—Ron Sapsford—three quarters of a million dollars in 2010, despite the fact that you say he quit in 2009. Minister, when did Ron Sapsford actually leave employment with the government of Ontario?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The sunshine list was set up, I think, in 1996, and the amount was \$100,000 at that point in time. If you adjust that amount to today's numbers for the cost of living, I think the number may be very close to \$132,000. If you take that into account, I think 73% of the people who are on the list would most probably not be on the list. That is the number one point.

The number two point that I have, I publicly stated already. The Ontario government is a large organization and a very complicated one from that point of view. Whenever you hire people, you need to hire people in a way that they can actually manage and lead such a complicated organization. Forty-three per cent of our total budget goes into health care. When you hire qualified people, you enter into a contract with them, and if, for any reason, their services are not required, then you basically have to still honour the contract that you entered into. Employees normally have the option either to take their severance in a lump sum or take it on a monthly basis over a period, as stipulated in the contract.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Our records show—you say that he quit in 2009, but he's still on the books receiving a salary. So when did Ron Sapsford actually leave employment with the government of Ontario? Would it be 2009 or was it after that date?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I already answered that question. What I said was, when you hire somebody in that senior position, you enter into a contract. If, for a reason, the contract is terminated, the employee has the option to get his salary paid in a lump sum or over a number of months, whatever is right for them.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Mr. O'Toole?

Mr. John O'Toole: Just following up on that, if you would, Minister. Mr. Sapsford's salary went from \$500,000 in 2009 to \$762,000 after he reportedly quit. Can you explain that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think this is a question more appropriate for the Minister of Health. I don't have access to his contract.

Mr. John O'Toole: Can you talk to why the McGuinty government gave him a raise in 2010 after he quit? Do you have any knowledge of that at all?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I don't have any knowledge because I don't have access to the contract. I think the contract was signed—

Mr. John O'Toole: Wait a minute here. I thought all deals and contracts crossed your desk. You're the minister in charge of all that, and you had no idea?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I am not in charge of all contracts. Contracts are individually signed with individual ministries, and they have the details of the contract.

Mr. John O'Toole: So the civil service: You have nothing to do with it, then?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I have to do with the civil service, but I don't have access to those contracts.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, I'm just wondering. So you had no part of the secret deal with Ron Sapsford; is that what you're telling me?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I have nothing to do personally. It's not a secret deal. It is a contract between a senior manager and the ministry that employed him, and they might have the details, but I don't have the details.

Mr. John O'Toole: Do either one of your deputy ministers have any information on this?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I can ask the deputy minister—

Mr. John O'Toole: We're trying to get to who approved this sort of secondary pay stream for Mr. Sapsford.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: My name is Ron McKerlie, for the record, Deputy Minister of Government Services,

associate secretary of the cabinet and secretary of Management Board of Cabinet.

I can't speak to the details of Ron Sapsford's employment contract. Those details aren't available to us. He is entitled, though, to severance payments and any banked vacation that he would have had that would have been untaken, those types of things, and they can be paid out, as the minister has indicated, either as a lump sum or they can be paid out as salary continuance, and that would impact his—

Mr. John O'Toole: So was this a severance that he got?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: That would impact his payments and what would be shown on the sunshine list.

Mr. John O'Toole: I thought severances didn't show up on the sunshine list.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Any payments that you get show up on the sunshine list if they're on your T4.

Mr. John O'Toole: When you were in your position as secretary to Management Board, you would have been privy to—was the Premier involved in that decision at all—

Mr. Ron McKerlie: I couldn't say.

Mr. John O'Toole: —of how to dish out this taxpayers' money? Because this seems to me completely repulsive. With respect, it was you, your minister, Mr. Takhar, or the Premier or the Minister of Finance, the very highest level, who made this special secret deal. The people of Ontario are repulsed by this idea that he showed up on the sunshine list after he quit.

So can you explain, Minister, how that could possibly happen? I don't want to blame the civil servants; their hands are clean on this, as far as I can see, and they were forced to do it.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I have already explained it. I think this is a more appropriate question for the Ministry of Health, when you see them. All the information that I have—I already told that I don't have access to the contract, and I think it's unfair for you to ask—

Mr. John O'Toole: It seems unfair—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —whether the Premier had anything to do with it or not. I don't think the Premier gets involved in these contracts.

Mr. John O'Toole: I don't think he gets involved in quite a few things here, from what I can tell. There's mostly secret stuff going on that I'm wondering—so the Premier, you say, wasn't directly involved. Was it the Minister of Health who said, "How can we ditch this guy that screwed up the eHealth model?"—or at least took the fall for it anyway. It might have been George Smitherman, who left also. But was the Minister of Health involved directly in the decision?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Mr. Chair, I can't answer that question. I think you should ask that question to the Minister of Health if she appears before the committee, or you can ask that question in the House.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think we have kind of asked the question in the House.

Was Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford, who resigned in the wake of the eHealth scandal, fired or did he quit? That sort of ties into whether you get severance or not. Do you know if he was fired, or did he quit?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I have no information on this that I can share with you.

Mr. John O'Toole: I don't know which stream of questioning to take here, the fired one—if you're fired, you don't get severance, to my understanding, unless it's in a secret contract provision. If he quit, then he would be entitled to severance, and it seems like he's getting both the pay and the severance. The severance is usually tied to a portion of your pay. He was being paid by Hamilton Health Sciences to cover up his actual pay.

This really isn't a very tasteful discussion here. Do you know anything about how Ron Sapsford was paid, who was paying him? Did the Premier make those high-level decisions? It appears you weren't involved at all.

0910

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We've got three minutes left in this round.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's not really enough time. I'm going to ask for more time.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Through you, Mr. Chair, let me say that I think the Deputy Minister of Health, at that time, was seconded to Hamilton Health Sciences, and that is also a practice that has been used by various governments at various times.

Mr. John O'Toole: You're just shifting; you're dithering; you're denying. You're using the Dalton McGuinty strategy—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No, but let me just answer it.

Mr. John O'Toole: He's dithering—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You just want to go on. Let me just answer it now.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm going to ask for unanimous consent for more time so I can pursue this line of questioning for 10 more minutes.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: And you're going to get that; right?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm sure you're going to deny it.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): It's denied. You're now down to two minutes.

Mr. John O'Toole: The minister's trying to rag the puck here, so we're going to try to get the puck back.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: He needs two minutes to ask a question.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, we've got the questions. You just have no answers.

We want to finish this section, if we could. Do you know anything about the secret deal with Ron Sapsford, the former Deputy Minister of Health, in any respect?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm not sure which secret deal you're talking about.

Mr. John O'Toole: He was the former deputy. Do you think it was the Minister of Health or the Minister of Finance or the Premier who wired this secret deal?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I don't know which secret deal you're talking about, so it's very hard for me to answer that question. There was no such secret deal, so I—

Mr. John O'Toole: If it's no secret, why don't you tell me?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I don't know what you're talking about. I said that if you have a question—

Mr. John O'Toole: It's in the disclosure that he got a raise—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —regarding Ron Sapsford, you should ask the Minister of Health—

Mr. John O'Toole: Let's sum up here. In 2009, he was making \$500,000, and then he went to \$762,000 after he quit the job. Why did McGuinty give Ron Sapsford a raise in 2010 after he quit? Do you know anything about that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Mr. Chair, I think my critic is more concerned about asking questions than listening to what I have to say. I've answered this question I don't know how many times back and forth. I think what I have said stands on the record.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We're down to a quick 30 seconds here, Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. John O'Toole: Was the large increase part of a severance agreement? That's what the Minister of Finance said in the House. I thought you weren't supposed to talk about these things.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: If he said that in the House, then you should take that as an answer.

Mr. John O'Toole: So you're blaming it all on the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm not blaming him. I said if he said that, then take that as an answer.

Mr. John O'Toole: You're the czar of the ministry. All deals, all contracts, all powerful decisions are made—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Guys, that's going to clean up this first 11 minutes.

Mr. John O'Toole: I am so disappointed that there's—

Mr. Kim Craiton: Thanks, John. That was good.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We'll now go to the third party. You have 20 minutes, and then to the government members.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank Mr. O'Toole for winding everyone up for me.

Actually, good morning, Minister, deputy ministers and the throngs of backup. I always say that because I'm all by myself. There's only one of me—

Mr. John O'Toole: It's lonely at the top.

Mr. Paul Miller: Lonely, yes, very.

Anyway, getting down to the nitty-gritty here, in your budget, Minister, on labour relations, public service reform, it reads, "To provide advice on reforms that would help accelerate its plan to eliminate the deficit while protecting education and health care, the government will establish a commission on broader public sector reform. Building on reforms already under way, and on the

approach to enhanced public service delivery laid out in this budget, the commission will examine long-term, fundamental changes to the way government works. The commission's work will include exploring which areas of service delivery are core to the Ontario government's mandate, which areas could be delivered more efficiently by another entity and how to get better value for taxpayers' money in the delivery of public services."

This is what it says.

Don Drummond has been appointed chair of this commission. My first question would be: Who else is a member of this commission?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: To the best of my information, I think he's the only member of the commission, but if the deputy has any information, he can share it with you.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Sure. This is a Ministry of Finance issue. Don Drummond will report to the Ministry of Finance, but there will be some public servants who will support Mr. Drummond as he carries out his work. It'll be a small number.

Mr. Paul Miller: So there'll be nobody from the public sector unions, there'll be nobody from other organizations in the province? Just a one-man show with hand-picked people; is that what you're saying?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: I can't answer that question. I don't know who else the Minister of Finance may ask to sit on that committee with Mr. Drummond. I do know there will be a small number of public servants who will help as they go through the review.

Mr. Paul Miller: If you're establishing a commission, to me, that's multiple. That's not individual. A commissioner is individual. It says "commission." So you have no facts or who's going to be on it or anything about that.

I would like to know who's going to be on the commission, what areas of the public service sector you're going to appoint—not elect; appoint—to this commission. It certainly is a grey area right now. It sounds like a one-man show. I certainly would like to have more details on how this is going to operate.

What is the specific mandate of this commission? Can anyone answer that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: This is the commission that is appointed by finance. My understanding is that finance is next up before the estimates committee. I think that will be a more appropriate question for you to ask the Minister of Finance.

Let me just say this: I think we have gone through the two worst recession years, and it is important for the government to look at every area under their responsibility to make sure that we are getting the best value for the taxpayers' dollars.

Also, our partners, like the unions and all of our employees, are also helping us to accomplish the fiscal realities that we are facing at this point in time.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Minister, this is a commission that you're organizing. Now you're trying to say it's the finance minister who's going to have control of it. Is that not passing the buck? I want to know what involvement

your ministry and the guy you're appointing as commissioner, and what jurisdiction—obviously, you've changed jurisdictions. Now you're saying I should talk to the finance people. I'm not talking to the finance people; I'm talking to you. I'm asking you and your deputy minister the question. I don't want to hear about finance. This committee isn't about finance. It's about your ministry. If you're forming this commission, or have a part in forming the commission, then you should have answers. Don't pass it to the finance minister. I don't want to hear that.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But this is a commission that is actually being organized, appointed, by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Paul Miller: Then why have you got it in your report? Why isn't it in his report and not yours? What's your role?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Our role is going to be to support him in the tasks that he will be performing. If he needs any help from our ministry, we will be providing that. Some of those things might be to look at the Ontario public service: how it's organized, what kind of service it delivers, and so on—

Mr. Paul Miller: So I would assume, Minister, you're playing a large part in that, not just a small part. It's all about your ministry and how it's run, how it's financed. You're telling me, on this committee, to ask the finance minister what you're going to do. I have a little problem with that. I think that if you're going to be that involved, to that level, then you certainly should have answers for me and not tell me to ask the finance minister. That's very disturbing.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Deputy Minister?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: I think there's some confusion. It's a Ministry of Finance committee. It's not our report that you're looking at. It's in the budget for the Ministry of Finance. We will provide, as we do for any initiatives that would be undertaken anywhere in government, public service support if they need public service support. That would be a typical role that MGS would play.

It's not our commission. We didn't appoint Don Drummond. If there are other appointees, we're unaware of them. That would be a question that you could ask—

Mr. Paul Miller: But, Deputy Minister, would it be safe to say that this appointment of Mr. Drummond and whoever—if you want to say the finance minister did it, it doesn't matter to me. Whatever; fine. But it certainly would have a lot to do with the expenditures in the government, and you're a huge part of expenditures in the government—probably one of the biggest. So for you to tell me that Mr. Drummond and the finance committee is going to take care of that when I would say 75% of it involves your ministry—and you're saying you're playing a support role. I don't follow that.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: First of all, we're not a big part of any of the expenditures of government. Our budget is just slightly over \$2 billion, which includes all the—

Mr. Paul Miller: Two billion?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Two billion.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's not a lot.

I'm not talking about health. I'm not talking about education. I'm talking about your role in this investigation or committee or whatever you want to call it. You say it's a support role. You're just going to feed him information, and he's going to make the decision for your ministry on money allocations. I assume that; is that correct?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Well, hold on. I think that this commission has not started its work yet. When the work starts, the mandate will be determined, and any role that our ministry will have to play, we will play that. But he's looking at the overall government; he's not looking at just the—

Mr. Paul Miller: But, Minister, if you're going to put this in your report, if you're going to come to this committee and make it part of your presentation that this is coming down the road, why would you put the cart before the horse? I mean, if he's going to play the most active role in it, why would it be part of your situation here? I don't understand.

0920

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: What you are talking about, as the deputy already said, is you are pulling things out of the total budget, right? When this person is appointed, he's going to look at the total organizational structure of the government; look at what some of the opportunities are for us to save money, or to do things differently, if not save money; and how we can operate effectively. I think you need to do that at any organization on a regular basis.

Whatever role we will be asked to play, we will play that. But I think it's more appropriate, because the Minister of Finance announced this appointment, that maybe he can give you a little bit more information than we can give you at this point in time.

Mr. Paul Miller: Has the commission developed a work plan? You don't know that either.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But I just said to you—

Mr. Paul Miller: I heard you, but I'm a little concerned.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: If I said that, that's what I said. When the commission is working, there will be a mandate developed and we will provide a support role.

Mr. Paul Miller: Once again, putting the cart before the horse. Does the commission have a permanent OPS staff appointed to it?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think this is exactly what you're doing: putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. Paul Miller: No. It's in this documentation.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We said we will provide you—

Mr. Paul Miller: Have you appointed anyone?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No, we haven't appointed anybody.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you. That's all I want to know.

Does it have a consulting budget?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: This person, when appointed, will be paid a certain amount, but that will be determined, again, by the Minister of Finance. It will be in his budget wherever it's appropriate at that point.

Mr. Paul Miller: I guess I'm sitting on the wrong committee, then.

When will the commission issue a report?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think this is a question that you should be asking the Minister of Finance, like I said.

Mr. Paul Miller: But it's a big part of your ministry.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: How is this a big part of my ministry?

Mr. Paul Miller: Because you're appointing a finance guy to report to the finance committee about how the government is run, how he can improve your situation.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But the government is not just the Ministry of Government Services; the ministry is—

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm not asking about the rest of them; I'm asking about your role and your ministry.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I already said that we will supply support—

Mr. Paul Miller: So you don't have an answer. Okay.

Can you table any documents related to this mandate, which is in your report? Can you table any documentation?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I don't have any documents.

Mr. Paul Miller: You don't have anything. Okay. That's all I need on that one. That's a good start.

Let's get into diversity. As the minister responsible for diversity in the OPS, I'd like to ask a couple of questions. First, what percentage of members of the OPS are visible minorities?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We have—

Interjection.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Thanks very much. When people join the OPS, we don't ask them, and we don't keep stats in terms of what their ethnic, religious or other backgrounds are—

Mr. Paul Miller: That's not what I asked you; I just asked—

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Let me finish, if I could. The only way we have is through self-declaration, which happens on an employee opinion survey that we do every other year. Through an employee engagement survey, people can self-disclose and declare their background: their ethnic origins, their religion and so on. I don't have that information in front of me, but that would give us an indication of what percentage of the population in the OPS is visible minorities, which was your question.

Mr. Paul Miller: My question was what the percentage was, and you didn't answer me.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: It's 19%.

Mr. Paul Miller: Nineteen. Thank you. How has that changed, Deputy Minister, relative to the year 2000 and

the year 2005? What's the percentage change from 2000, to 2005, to 19% now?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Perhaps I could ask the head of HR Ontario if she has that information, if Angela is here and can join me.

Ms. Angela Coke: Good morning. I'm Angela Coke, associate deputy minister of HR Ontario.

As the deputy mentioned, we do not collect this data through our regular system, but we do have people self-identify in our OPS employee survey. We started the survey in 2006 and do the survey every two years. The data that we've been collecting related to people self-identifying what diversity groups they're in. We do not have the information prior to that, so the information that we have is from the 2009 survey. At that point, visible minorities made up 19% of the population.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay. Thank you. What percentage of the members of the OPS upper management are visible minorities—senior management?

Ms. Angela Coke: I don't have that information with me here at this time.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like that information, please.

What do you feel the barriers to greater numbers of visible minorities in the OPS, especially in senior management positions, are? What barriers do you see in your public service sector?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think we are making every stride possible to make sure that the workforce at all levels in the OPS is reflective of the whole population. I think the number now—you had asked about the visible minorities—has gone up to 19%. I think that, gradually, some of the employees will move on to the management ranks and so on.

The data maybe is not available, but you can see, if you would just walk around, that people at all levels in the OPS are from the communities—

Mr. Paul Miller: With all due respect, Minister, I don't have time to walk around all the buildings to find out who works for whom. I would have no way of identifying, by walking around, who works for what ministry in what. That's kind of a grey area for me. Maybe you could give me some numbers on that. I'd appreciate that.

What are the major programs offered by the diversity officer?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm going to ask the deputy and maybe—

Mr. Paul Miller: What programs to entice or to attract minorities to your service?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Thank you. There's a number. The first one I'll talk about relates directly to your previous question, which is some of the barriers in terms of getting people of diverse backgrounds up into more senior positions. One is a mentorship program that was put in place a number of years ago—I think it's three years old at this point—where all deputies and ADMs in many ministries—directors—mentor one or two individuals of different backgrounds, so either they are a visible minority or somebody with accessibility issues or some-

body from the GBLT community, the idea being to give them access to senior leaders in the organization and also for the senior leaders to understand what sorts of barriers those individuals face in terms of their own career. The mentorship program has been very successful.

We also do online training and education—awareness. Those programs have been in place. All of the staff in the OPS goes through training in terms of diversity training. We also have in place—it's relatively new—an OPS diversity Inclusion Lens, which we're starting to use on the front end of all policy development. The lens would be used, for example, to help us identify, before we create policy, barriers that might prevent people from different backgrounds, in terms of being—

Mr. Paul Miller: You're talking about LHINs?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: The lens—L-E-N-S.

Mr. Paul Miller: A lens, okay.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Yes. So the diversity lens is something that has been recognized internationally in terms of leading best practice. It was created here in the Ontario public service and is being looked at by other jurisdictions now across the country. That's one of the reasons we won Canada's best diversity employer now for the last four years—

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, here we go with the sales routine.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Well, we are one of the few organizations in Canada that has won the Canada's best diversity employer four years in a row. It's pretty impressive.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Deputy Minister, let me just—

Mr. Paul Miller: My next question—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me just touch on one more program I think that needs to be talked about. It's the internship program for new immigrants.

Mr. Paul Miller: How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): You've got three minutes.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The internship program for new immigrants is a very successful program. The new immigrants are given about six months' experience in the OPS so they can get the experience that they need to be successful, and 80%-plus of employees actually end up at the OPS.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

My last question, for now, is: What is your ministry doing to defend the public dollar when it comes to consultants and to contracts that you sign with people? Have you looked into the area of severances that are exorbitant? Have you looked into, when you sign a contract with someone and they're fired, that they would get nothing for bad performance instead of walking away with hundreds of thousands of dollars? What is your ministry doing, around the cabinet table, to address the concern of the public about these crazy buy-outs, crazy severance packages, and people who are not working and

are still collecting money, as was mentioned by Mr. O'Toole? What is your ministry bringing to the table to stop that practice?

0930

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me just start with the overview first. In 2002-03, when our government took power, the total consultant expenditure was in the range of \$656 million a year. That number is down almost 50% right now. So the consultant expenditures have come down. We have put very strict guidelines in place to make sure that the consultants are hired in an open and accountable fashion, and even their expenditures have been limited, what they can claim on their expenditure—

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't think that was the question. The question was about the contracts and what you're doing with those contracts you signed when these guys walk away with these nice packages of severance and still aren't working, and could be let go for bad performance or could have been fired. That was the original question. I didn't ask about what percentage or how it dropped, or all that. That wasn't what I—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think you asked the question, "What are we doing to protect taxpayers' dollars?" That's the question you asked in the beginning.

Mr. Paul Miller: I asked about contracts. I didn't ask about what you're doing about benefits for consultants or things like that. I want to know exactly—it's a specific question—what your ministry is doing around the table to address contracts where people get fired and walk away with hundreds of thousands of dollars. Are you stopping that practice? I don't want to hear about how many you've dropped in your ministry or how many—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): You've just got a minute left here, folks.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I will ask the deputy to answer this.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Sure. There are different sets of contracts. In contracts with large consultants, we have built-in off-ramps that give us times when we can actually exit the contract without making substantive payments. That's something that has been in place for the last couple of years and has helped us to develop significant off-ramps.

In terms of employment contracts, an employment contract would have provisions in it, generally, that would limit our payment in the case of firing for cause. So if somebody is released for cause—

Mr. Paul Miller: Limit or exclude?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: There's still legislated severance that we have to pay in some cases—

Mr. Paul Miller: Why?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We're running out of time here, Deputy.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: If we're required by law to make payments, obviously we'd carry that out, but we try to limit the liability in other cases.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Thanks, Deputy. Thanks, Minister.

We now go to the government members. Mr. Mauro?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Good morning to you and to everybody here, Minister. Thank you. Good to see you this morning. I came in a little bit late this morning, but not too late to hear the member from the official opposition, in his questions to you, bouncing a little bit all over the place and putting questions to you that were obviously not relevant or contained within the purview and authority of your ministry.

The one I'm always interested to hear the opposition talking about is the eHealth piece. It was interesting that that part was put to you by a member from the official opposition, the Conservative Party, when in fact the eHealth piece had begun under their watch. As I understand it, when we came into government in 2003, approximately \$200 million had already been expensed into eHealth. As I also understand it, when we came to government in 2003, for that \$200 million there was not one person who was on an electronic health record in the province of Ontario.

I also understand that at this point we have, I think—and I stand to be corrected—about four and a half million people in Ontario, give or take, who now are going to be on an electronic health record. In fact, I think there was just a big announcement here in Toronto last week in terms of what they were doing to coordinate a lot of different agencies and hospitals and such so that there could be sharing when it came to electronic health records. So, in fact, it's a major step forward. I'm always a bit surprised to hear the members of the official opposition, who started eHealth and spent \$200 million with actually zero results, continue to try and mine something out of that particular area.

What I wanted to talk to you about today, however, was the cost savings that your ministry has been able to find and identify and move forward on. I think it's important—and the context for my remarks would be that families in Ontario, obviously, have found themselves in very difficult circumstances as a result of what the planet has just gone through, that being of course the greatest recession, as some have described it, since the Great Depression. Beginning, I guess, in late 2007 or in 2008, 30 million to 40 million jobs have been lost across the planet. Obviously, this has placed many families in very difficult circumstances. As a result of that, families have had to try to find efficiencies, and I know that they look to governments to be doing the same.

One of the things, though, before I get to the formal question, to provide some context for the recession that we did as a government, some of the process that we involved ourselves in that we all need to talk about a bit is our government's massive investments in infrastructure. I tie this back to the recession and families having to try to find efficiencies themselves. I think one of the things that we can be most proud of as a government is that we were investing heavily in infrastructure long before the recession had even started. I think \$30 billion was the commitment we made in the first mandate of our government, and we had identified that very quickly as one of the three deficits that we found when we came to government in 2003.

We identified an infrastructure deficit, we identified a services deficit and we identified a financial deficit. We were left with a \$5.5-billion deficit by the outgoing Conservative government, as verified by the auditor of the day. That \$5.5 billion is even more remarkable to us when we consider that we were just coming out of one of the greatest periods of economic growth in history, and yet we managed to be left with a \$5.5-billion deficit—in fact, after one of the largest tax shifts in the history of the province, if not the largest, when the Conservatives downloaded significant services on to the back of the residential property taxpayer. I remember that very clearly as a municipal councillor in Thunder Bay at that time.

On top of that, when the recession hit we invested about another \$32 billion—a very significant investment in infrastructure which created a tremendous amount of jobs, many of them in my riding. I've got example after example that I could quote within my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan that still to this day is just now even beginning to create more jobs—large infrastructure projects like the brand new courthouse in downtown Thunder Bay, a \$200-million job that's going to create hundreds of construction jobs for years; a brand new long-term-care home, a \$100-million project; and two new coal plant conversions—or not new coal plants, but conversion of two coal plants in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, neither of which was committed to by any other party. All three parties committed to closing coal, but the other two parties did not commit to anything in terms of retrofit.

The reason I mention the coal plants is that these are the kind of green energy jobs that the Leader of the Opposition is committed to shutting down. What that would mean in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan would be the loss of over 200 jobs; it would mean the loss of \$300 million in construction work; and it would mean the loss of a significant tax base to the city of Thunder Bay and the town of Atikokan. So these are very big, important pieces. That infusion of capital—and I tie this back to efficiencies within government—through infrastructure and job creation was during extreme recessionary times. As a result of that, our government has found itself in deficit, which is one more reason why families in Ontario want to know what we're doing to find efficiencies.

When we talk about the deficit in Ontario, I think it's always interesting to note that our deficit in Ontario, relative to the deficit at the federal level, is relatively in line when you consider that Ontario is about 40% of the economy of Canada. When you look at the numbers and you compare them, federal government to provincial government in Ontario, I think you find that Ontario is not at all out of line. Of course, this is not something that is remarked upon by the opposition parties when they talk about the deficit position that Ontario finds itself in. They often find themselves asking us to spend even more money on certain things at the same time as they are criticizing us for the deficit position.

If I could close with one remark on deficit, it would be that: Relatively, we are very much in line with the same position that the federal government finds itself in. I think it's important to remind people that if there was ever a Prime Minister and a government federally that was ideologically predisposed against running deficits, it would be this current federal government that we have now, and yet we find ourselves very much in line with exactly what they've done. So I think it's important to put that on the record, that we find ourselves in this position.

We tie that back in to where we want to see your ministry going. Just very quickly this morning, I thought of a few examples of efficiencies that we as a government have identified. For example, the 2009 budget identified, I think, a 5% reduction in the OPS—I think that was about 3,400 people—and the 2011 budget committed to a further reduction of 1,500 people. I'm assuming most of those will be through attrition.

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It's interesting that in the 2009 number, the 3,400, about 1,100 or 1,200 of those were people who formerly had to collect the PST and no longer have to do that. They're no longer employees of the province of Ontario. They're now employees of the federal government, which again is interesting when you think of a federal Conservative government that likes to position themselves as not being about big government, but to allow Ontario to go forward with the HST, they were willing to take on 1,200 more employees, or something like that. That's a reduction on our side: 1,200 fewer employees.

I think we led a bit by example, I don't mind saying as well, when we froze MPP salaries. I think that began as a one-year commitment when the recession came in. I think we've extended it by another two, so it's a total of a three-year commitment to MPP salary freezes.

These are just a few examples of things we've done when it comes to finding efficiencies in government.

What I would like to hear from you, though, if I could, is something a bit more specific to your ministry, and that would be with one of the programs and areas of your responsibility, which is the Shared Services Bureau. It's my understanding that there are efficiencies that last year alone have saved as much as \$16 million within the Shared Services Bureau. I guess my question to you would be: Can you expand for us a little bit on what has occurred within the Shared Services Bureau and, in fact, other examples?

Before I ask you to respond, I want to go back briefly to the point you made about consultants in response to a question from one of the members. I remember very clearly, when we first came into government, that one of the first commitments we made was to reduce the use of consultants by the government. I think your remark was that we've reduced the use of consultants by about 50%, from about \$650 million down to \$300-and-some-odd million.

We know that the official opposition was in love with the use of consultants, and we know that many of those consulting contracts sometimes went to people that they

had, let's just say, an affinity or close relationship with. That's where those consulting contracts landed.

We met that commitment, so there's \$350 million. Some of that came in-house, and we believe there are instances where the government can more efficiently, from a taxpayer perspective, deliver a certain service than by using consultants. We all know that there are specific tasks that will always require the use of consultants, where specific expertise is not contained within a particular ministry. There is always going to be good reason to use consultants from time to time, but certainly not to be in as great a relationship with them as the official opposition.

I guess if I could get back to my question, Minister, it would be about the Shared Services Bureau and any other examples you might have in terms of efficiencies that your ministry has been able to identify over the last few years.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member for asking the question. Let me just pick up on some of the things he talked about.

The Ontario public service—even though people work in different ministries, they are still the employees of our ministry. The 5% reduction is a 3,400-person reduction that we have already targeted, and we are well on target to achieve it.

You talked about the retail sales tax people. It's going to save about \$100 million to the taxpayers every year, and about \$500 million in savings to business people in the way they file their tax returns as well. So not only is it a tax saving from our point of view, but I think it's a more effective way to do business as well, and that is in line with the HST as well.

In addition to that, we are moving ahead to reduce the workforce by 1,500 more people, and that is also outlined in our budget.

Let me just talk a little bit about the Ontario Shared Services Bureau. Shared Services, as the name suggests, is basically putting some of the common services together in one ministry so you can deliver the services more effectively. This was started in 1998, but it's getting international attention for how successful this program is.

In January 2010, Ontario Shared Services was recognized as the leading-edge public sector shared services organization by Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, and that is the engine for the transformation of government organizations into high-performing enterprises.

Here is the quotation on that, and let me just read it the way it is: Ontario Shared Services' initiative "has made Ontario a model for other governments hoping to take their shared services enterprise to the next level. Since its inception in 1998, Ontario Shared Services ... has evolved from an organization that simply provided back-office transactional support to an entity that is helping to drive transformational change across government." So this has been one of the very successful programs that we have.

I'm going to ask the deputy to actually take you through the details of what this program is all about. But

before I do that, I also want to say to you that we have made significant savings, even in our travel and entertainment expenses. Most of our employees now can do their work by using technology rather than travelling to different destinations; even the meetings are held online by the use of technology as well. We have made significant savings in our information technology as well.

So the deputy is going to tell you all about the Ontario Shared Services, but then he can also talk a little bit about what we have done in the IT area as well.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Maybe I could just start by clearing up some misinformation that was provided the last time we met at estimates. There was a question from one of the members, a statement that spending was estimated in Ontario Shared Services to go up by \$166 million, a 124% increase. It's one line in our budget; that's \$1.66 billion, not \$166 million—

Mr. Bill Mauro: Just for the sake of a decimal point. I wonder who that question was from.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Overall, Ontario Shared Services' total operating expense for 2011-12 is \$165 million, compared to \$176 million in 2010-11. In fact, if we go back to our results-based briefing book, in 2004-05, the OSS budget was \$184 million; it represented 1.9% of the total budget of government.

In 2010-11, it was \$162 million or 1.17%. It's the reason, as the minister said, that in a report called Shared Services: Horizons of Value—this was a report done by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard—the only example they could come up with worldwide in terms of their highest tier of transformation for shared services was Ontario. So we have a lot to be proud of. They had American examples for the first three levels, but for the top tier of transformation for shared services, they used the Ontario government.

Ontario Shared Services has a 10-year track record for consolidating and transforming internal service delivery in the Ontario government and relentlessly works to make its programs and services more efficient and more effective.

OSS's key focus has been ensuring that Ontarians get the highest-quality public services and the best value for the taxpayers' dollar. In doing this, it has streamlined and it has improved internal operations, leading change in areas such as supply-chain management, allowing ministries to concentrate on delivering their core services while at the same time freeing up tax dollars for government priorities. OSS has also played a key role in enabling better compliance with internal policies and directives in areas such as procurement and financial management. This, in turn, has generated cost savings for the Ontario government.

Just a little bit more about the role of Ontario Shared Services in helping transform the Ontario public service. Ontario Shared Services is the Ontario government's enterprise business and employee service provider for back-office administration and supply-chain management services. They really operate in four key business areas: financial processing, pay and benefits processing, supply-

chain management, which is all about procurement, and enterprise services.

Just to give you a bit of very quick history: In 1998, Ontario Shared Services began to integrate and standardize a patchwork of inconsistent and redundant services performed by more than 20 ministries into a single shared-service organization. Its early mandate was to reduce costs and increase efficiency by aggregating common administrative services such as payroll, accounts payable, and mail and print services.

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In 2004-05, the Ontario government established Ontario Shared Services by joining government-wide procurement and purchasing functions and the government's financial system, the integrated financial information system, with the existing functions. OSS also consolidated operations from 22 locations in the province to six communities. These include Toronto, Peterborough, Orillia, North Bay, Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

In 2004, Ontario Shared Services established a long-term strategy that really focused on four key areas: (1) reducing the cost of products and services; (2) simplifying and automating transactional processes; (3) streamlining policies; and (4) promoting smart consumption.

So we're focused on reducing the cost of products and services by devoting resources to support strategic controllership function. OSS enables the government to get the best value from its vendors and from its service providers. Over the last five years, OSS has focused relentlessly on ways to simplify and automate transactional processes with the understanding that keeping it simple will make it easier and less costly to deliver these services.

We've looked for opportunities, working with internal partners, to streamline policies to ensure effective controllership and to ensure effective use of government resources. Streamlined policies make it easier for vendors to do business with the Ontario government and promote effective controllership over government resources.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): You've just got a minute left, Deputy.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Thank you.

A couple of things that OSS does: It administers the government's provincial budget; it processes about \$5 billion in monthly transfer payments; it manages an accounts receivable portfolio of about 360,000 accounts; it processes the annual payroll—it responds to about 80,000 payroll and benefit inquiries every year—and a host of other things.

Great progress over the year in terms of managing down costs: We continue to shrink, as I mentioned, as a percentage of the total government spend, from 1.9% in 2004-05 to 1.17% in 2010-11.

We will continue to focus on finding cost efficiencies in government. We continue to reduce the number of staff it takes, for example, to run major processes by implementing automation. Recently this year, we consolidated six different print operations in government to provide some economies of scale and a more efficient print. Our

goal is take about half of the cost of our printing out of government over time. For example, we mandated double-sided printing, which has saved us almost 70 million pieces of paper a year.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Thank you very much, Deputy. We'll now go to the official opposition for the next 20 minutes.

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, I'm going to go back to the secret deal with Ron Sapsford. I'm still convinced that we're chasing the rabbit here, and I'm trying to get it to go down the hole so we can contain it. I'm just going to report from a few of the media things that I've sort of been briefed on, which lead me to be suspicious, so I want you to be as direct as possible.

On April 6, you were asked questions in the House—and there was kind of a misreference here. On April 6, Health Minister Deb Matthews was asked directly about the secret deal with Ron Sapsford—this is the article I'm looking at here—and why it was above the salary guideline. The health minister told the media to speak to you. That's what the health minister said.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: And I did speak to the media.

Mr. John O'Toole: Is that appropriate? Was she correct there?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Regarding the media, sure.

Mr. John O'Toole: Okay. However, later on, in question period on April 7, you referred the question about the secret Sapsford deal to Minister Duncan. Was that deliberately misleading? Did you do it deliberately when you know you should have referred it to Minister Matthews? After all, he was the Deputy Minister of Health.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I just said to you that any question regarding the ranges of the deputy minister is a fair question to me. Any question regarding the contract with Sapsford can either be answered by the Acting Premier or the Ministers of Finance or Health. I have no details.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think you've pretty well wrapped it up for me. It could have been the Minister of Health who referred it to you, or it could have been the Minister of Finance whom you referred the question to, even though you've just said you should have been—or it could have been the Premier. I think this is at the very highest of levels, and that's the concern that I want registered here today on behalf of the people of Ontario. Did you know anything about the secret deal? Let's start there.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: First, I don't know which secret deal you're talking about.

Mr. John O'Toole: Do we have to go through all this again? I'll go back to my initial questions, then. Sapsford was paid \$500,000, approximately, in 2009, and a year later, in 2010, he was paid \$762,000. Were you aware of that deal? That's well above the guideline, by the way. Were you aware of the deal?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I made that very clear. I haven't seen the contract.

Mr. John O'Toole: Do you think the Minister of Health approved the deal?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would be just guessing. I think you need to ask this question to the Minister of Health.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think we should go right to the Premier. I want that question tabled with the Premier, because it's not the staff. They're doing all the paperwork. Of the 70 million pieces of paper or 700,000 that you saved, this is one that I want you to find: that piece of paper with who said what to whom. That's the thing we need to get here.

It's not you, Minister, clearly. I don't have a problem with that, because obviously you don't know what happened; that has been proven here. So that's the thrust of this point of the question, the Sapsford deal. We're not sure. The conclusion is that we don't know who approved the deal within your government, unless you could point to someone. Is there someone you'd prefer that I question in the Legislature? We've got to get this answered, because there's three quarters of a million dollars and you don't know where it went. This is like the eHealth deal all over again. Can you submit the documents or get them? Tell somebody in Management Board or something. Get the paper, put it to the committee and the deal will be over with—well, it will be over with as far as the questions go.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think my colleague clearly pointed out that eHealth, in fact, was started under you, and you guys just want to blame somebody else now.

Mr. John O'Toole: It seems like anybody who's around, you're going to deflect it to them. I think we may have to send these questions directly to the Premier so he'll see that you're dancing around here like a puppet.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: He's in the House every day.

Mr. John O'Toole: I see it happening here in living colour, three dimensions, high definition, and I'm really at a loss on what to go with. I've been sort of stonewalled.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You just told me that somebody gave you these questions.

Mr. John O'Toole: I just want somebody to give me the answers.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: So who's the puppet here?

Mr. John O'Toole: These are coming right out of the Hamilton Spectator. These are reporters.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You said that somebody just gave you this briefing.

Mr. John O'Toole: These people want to know, Minister. It's the people of Ontario that you're denying an answer. I can't believe it. In fact, a lot of what's going on here is typical and disappointing.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Is this coming from your leader, by the way?

Mr. John O'Toole: Pardon?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Are these questions coming from your leader?

Mr. John O'Toole: These questions are coming on behalf of the people of Ontario. Never, ever disrespect those people, because if you aren't respecting the people of Ontario, you've lost the right to govern.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. Next question.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would only say that this is a matter of the credibility of the minister. I know that's partially unparliamentary to say that—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Then don't say it.

Mr. John O'Toole: —but this deal is at the highest level, one particular instance where there has been a pay—we don't know whether it's a contract; we don't know who signed it; we don't know what the severance amount was—or was it included? Answer this: Is Ron Sapsford still on the payroll in any way?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I said to you that I don't have the details on the contract.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a yes-or-no kind of question.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think you should ask this question—

Mr. John O'Toole: Sounds like skating to me.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Nobody handed me these questions and answers, so I'm just—

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm asking a question: To your knowledge, is Ron Sapsford still on the payroll?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think the good answer is, you should ask the Minister of Health when she appears before the committee.

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Mr. John O'Toole: Do you know if the previous administrator, Sarah Kramer, is still on the list?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let the deputy answer this question.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: I know that Sarah Kramer is not on the payroll.

Mr. John O'Toole: That's for sure? She's not contracted back for consulting or—

Mr. Ron McKerlie: That's my understanding.

Mr. John O'Toole: We'd like that confirmed. We want to make sure you've turned the corner on this stuff. Ron Sapsford—I'm suspicious that he's either back at the Hamilton Health Sciences centre—I saw him here about a week ago. Yeah, I did. I'm not kidding. He's almost like that former deputy minister who became chair of Hydro One and sued the government.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: What was her name—Eleanor—

Mr. John O'Toole: Yeah, Eleanor Clitheroe.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, let's—

Mr. John O'Toole: My point here—you're trying to change the way government is done. It seems like you have failed, clearly.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We have to change the way the government is done, because you paid—

Mr. John O'Toole: Can you confirm that Ron Sapsford is still not on the payroll or somebody's payroll

within the government? Can you confirm that he is or isn't?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We will check that and confirm it for you.

Mr. John O'Toole: Will you table that information?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We will get back to you. We still have a few hours to go.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'll send that question to the media.

In fairness, there was one question made here, a statement made by your parliamentary assistant, who said that there was nobody left at the Oshawa Ministry of Revenue office still working for the government.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I don't think he said that.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm not sure, but he said that there was nobody left there. I know they're still there. That used to be part of my riding. They're still going to the same job and the same desk. The only thing that's changed is their business card. How much was the severance package for those people?

We need that information tabled. You don't need to take a lot of time answering it. They're still there doing the same job, under an agreement with the federal government. It's my understanding that—

Mr. Bill Mauro: Who signed their cheque?

Mr. John O'Toole: The people of Canada. You're paying for the service, no question about it, in the agreement.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Who signed those contracts with them?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think the severance pay for those people was \$21 million.

Mr. John O'Toole: Twenty-four million dollars?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Twenty-one million.

Mr. John O'Toole: And they're still doing the same job the next morning? That's a good deal. These deals that they're making there are—the trivial amount of \$21 million. How many people in long-term care could have been served with that \$21 million? The whole point is, this isn't about self-gratification or rewards for performance, or lack of it. The Ron Sapsford deal is the one that is most troubling. How many others are you willing to disclose today who are on a similar kind of arrangement—gone but not forgotten?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Interesting question. First, the OPS employees do incredible work. On a per capita basis, our cost is the lowest in the whole of Canada. When you enter into a contract, it is an obligation of any government that you honour those contracts, and this was part of the contract. We need to honour it. But going forward, we are making changes to these provisions, and you are even objecting to those.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think that what I'm objecting to—the question was, how many other agreements or secret deals are out there?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Ask Mr. Miller if he thinks we should have honoured those contracts.

Mr. John O'Toole: I get to ask the questions. He gets to answer them.

Do you suspect there are any other disbarred, disenfranchised employees who are still on a severance package—severed and still getting paid?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I answered the question. If you enter into an agreement with anyone and if their services are terminated and there is some provision in the agreement for them to get any severance pay—

Mr. John O'Toole: If they get fired, do they get severance?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We need to honour those contracts. Going forward, we are renegotiating all those contracts and trying to get these provisions out.

Mr. John O'Toole: I thought there was a freeze on all this stuff.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The issue is, you guys don't support even those provisions going forward.

Mr. Bill Mauro: A freeze on honouring contracts? Is that what you just said?

Mr. John O'Toole: There was a freeze on pay, I thought. Is there a freeze on pay or not?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Is this out of the question that you got?

Mr. John O'Toole: Is there a freeze on pay?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think we are—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Here's the deal. You're the integrity czar. That's what your nickname is. He has earned that. How do you punish the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance because they released information about Sapsford? There was information released by them that you refused to introduce. You said it wasn't supposed to be in the public domain. Or do you think it's okay to release all this information on these private contracts?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think it depends—

Mr. John O'Toole: Should it all be public?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Listen, it depends on what the agreements are. In our government, we have done everything possible to make sure that we are more accountable to the public. We have brought more organizations under freedom of information than what you ever had. Even on the freedom-of-information requests, you only answered about 57% of the requests. We are answering over 86% of the requests. We are doing it in a timely way. So I am not sure which government is more accountable. I think our government has been very accountable, very open and very transparent to the public, and we will always do that.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, I can't say that you're following your own rules of disclosure here, because we've asked you who approved, and why, the Ron Sapsford secret deal.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I said to ask the Minister of Health when she's here—

Mr. John O'Toole: Ask somebody else; blame somebody else. I should ask Stephen Harper.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Well, that would be a good idea.

Mr. John O'Toole: See, this is it: They want to deflect everything to the federal government—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You said you should ask. I said it's a good idea. Ask him.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, I'm left, when you're saying you're more open and transparent—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You may have a direct connection with them. We don't.

Mr. John O'Toole: There are just two simple cases. The Sarah Kramer deal is one; the Sapsford deal is another. There are probably others. Where there's one, there's more.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: And Eleanor—

Mr. John O'Toole: The OPSEU secret deal is another example that recently—most of these important decisions are being made behind closed doors.

I can't for a moment have any confidence in some of these estimates responses. I'm asking you again to table what your feeling is, or at least the information, about who—the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health or the Premier—agreed to or initiated the Sapsford special deal—firing, dismissal; whether he's still on secret contract, working for who knows who. Can you table that information for us, please?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: If I have any information in my ministry, we will table it, but I don't think we have any information. I think that discussion more appropriately should be addressed to the Minister of Health.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would hope you do that, and we can trust that you will, if that's the case.

But I'm saying that this exception—are there other exceptions in other ministries that you're aware of, that are being paid over the scale or over the guideline, 50% over the guideline, who might be being paid through other hospitals or other universities? This would be any civil servant who's on a special deal that you would have signed. These are all contracts.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Listen, there are other people paid over the ranges, even in the deputy ministers' ranks. There are five deputy ministers who are paid over the range. But then again, I think the ranges are the guidelines, and when you have a very sophisticated, complicated organization, you need to bring in the people who can actually do the job and do it effectively. That's why sometimes you have to enter into an exception beyond the ranges, to attract the top-calibre people. I mean, it is not only our government that has done it. The previous governments have done it. At various levels, it has been done because you need to bring in the people who can actually manage the organization in an effective manner.

Mr. John O'Toole: How are these people paid, though, Minister? Are they paid directly and it would be disclosed on the sunshine list, or do we have to go to some other source of how you circumvented the disclosure of what they're actually being paid?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think most of those people are hired directly by the government, but there are always exceptions. Sometimes you have to second

people. The Ministry of Education seconds people from the school boards. The Ministry of Health—

Mr. John O'Toole: Could you table some of that information you're just talking about now? Because if they're seconded, they could be paid to the ceiling on the grid they're in, brought in as assistant deputy or whatever it is, and they could also be receiving their pay from the school board, as you said, or the hospital. Is that right? Maybe that's—now we're getting to how Sapsford was paid.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No, no, you can't get two salaries. You can't—

Mr. John O'Toole: You can't?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You can't get two salaries. You can't get paid—I mean, it is the agreement that you reach with them. They can't be paid by the school board if they are not performing any function at the school board. They will only be paid or reimbursed for the services that they provide.

Mr. John O'Toole: In the last year, did Sapsford's salary come directly from Hamilton Health Sciences or did it come from the Ministry of Health?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I will ask the deputy if he has any information, because I don't have those details.

Mr. John O'Toole: Because you transfer to the hospitals their global budgets, and they can have discretion in how much they pay to different people. The question: Was Mr. Sapsford paid by the hospital through transfers or directly from the ministry or both?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Ron Sapsford was one of the last few senior-level secondees that we had left in government. Other ones: The secondments have ended in most cases. I think we only have one or two left. So the cost for his compensation would have come from the Ministry of Health's budget, but he was paid from Health Sciences as part of the secondee arrangement.

Mr. John O'Toole: So the others who remain: Could you disclose those for us, whatever level they're at? They could be, as was said, highly technical people that, arguably, you could justify you needed, that are secondees to whatever ministry—innovation; whatever—and are being paid—what they're being paid; how much and who's paying them?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Their salaries are disclosed through the sunshine list every year.

Mr. John O'Toole: They're all on the sunshine list?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Yes.

Mr. John O'Toole: They wouldn't be receiving extra bonusing or performance—

Mr. Ron McKerlie: As the minister said, you get one salary. You might get bonuses, performance bonuses and so on.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, no, there are bonuses too because, remember, there are a couple who didn't achieve their goals and got bonuses. We don't want to go down that road, because now, if you're saying there are bonuses—there are, for people that are over the salary because they're so good, and probably they are; and then they get a bonus, but they only get the bonus if they

achieve the goal or the target. Who are the people that are getting a bonus and not achieving the target?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Sounds like nirvana to me, but I don't think that exists.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, it does.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: I can't imagine we've got people who aren't hitting the targets—

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, yes, there are people who got bonuses—I think it's in your own ministry.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: In my ministry—

Mr. John O'Toole: Get bonuses and never got the targets.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We're down to 30 seconds here, folks.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The bonus structure was set up by your government. You know that.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a good idea; you're running with it.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: The minister's running with the idea—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Imitation is a form of flattery.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, guys, that wraps up this morning's session. We'll recess until—it looks like it'll be close to—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): It looks like it'll be close to 4 o'clock today, not 3:45, because of the number of things that are on the agenda.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): It'll be right about 4 o'clock, I think.

Mr. Paul Miller: I thought it was a quarter to. It says a quarter to.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): It is 3:45, but I can tell you by the number of things that are on the agenda today, it'll be close to 4. So we'll recess till that time. Thank you very much, Minister.

The committee recessed from 1013 to 1626.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, everyone, thank you very much for your patience. Sorry it took so long today for the standing orders to be complete.

When we recessed earlier today, the third party was just about to start a 20-minute rotation. So, Mr. Miller, you have 20 minutes. You can begin right now.

Mr. Paul Miller: Good afternoon. My first question would be in reference to the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which your ministry controls. Minister, as the minister responsible for freedom of information and privacy, I just want to ask you a question stemming from the 2010 annual report by the privacy commissioner. According to the commissioner, they have "urged the provincial government to bring in a regulation to prescribe specific fees that health information custodians may charge individuals to access copies of their own personal health information records. In the absence of a prescribed amount, PHIPA permits custodians to charge the amount of 'reasonable cost recovery.'"

I just wondered, Minister, why you haven't brought forward any regulations to set a prescribed amount for health information custodians to charge those who want access to their own personal health records. Why are there no regulations?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The report was released by the Information and Privacy Commissioner this morning. I actually have been in meetings all this morning—first in question period, then the caucus meeting and other meetings—so I didn't really have a chance to read the report yet. I welcome the commissioner's report. We also acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the commissioner in advocating on behalf of Ontarians' access to privacy rights. I need to read the report and see what is said in the report before I can comment on the report.

My understanding was that the draft regulations, at one point, were circulated to this effect—what the fees should be—but I need to check the status of those.

Mr. Paul Miller: I think the title of the report was Rolling Back the Cost of Obtaining Our Health Records. To give an example that's been going on for years, the commissioner cited a 2010 case.

"The Assistant Commissioner (Access) issued order HO-009 after a patient complained about the \$125 fee charged by her physician for access to 34 pages of her records. After reviewing a number of fee schemes, including the regulations made under the provincial and municipal freedom of information and protection of privacy acts, the Ontario Medical Association guide, and the discretionary flat fee recommended by the Ontario Hospital Association, Assistant Commissioner Beamish determined that the fee scheme set out in the proposed regulation published in 2006 provided the best framework for determining the amount of 'reasonable cost recovery.'

"The Assistant Commissioner found that the \$125 fee exceeded 'reasonable cost recovery' under PHIPA. Based on applicable calculations, the physician was ordered to reduce the fee to \$33.50."

Basically, Minister, what I'm saying is that this has been going on for years.

Regardless of the report that has been put out recently, what is your ministry doing to keep fees consistent and fair and not allow different governmental organizations to charge off-the-map fees? There's no consistency throughout the system, under your jurisdiction. They vary from 70% to 100%—difference in costs—depending on whether it's a doctor or a clinic or an agency. What is your ministry going to do to alleviate some of the costs to the public and rectify this situation—that's going to be for reasonable, consistent costs throughout the province?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Just glancing through this report, I think this issue mostly relates to getting health records from the hospitals. So the issue more or less falls under the Ministry of Health.

Our government has been very clear that this kind of information should be available to people, and that's why we have brought in legislation that will make more information from the hospitals available to people by January 1, 2012.

I think the deputy minister has—

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, but before you go on, Minister: Once again—it happened this morning—you're saying it's under the health ministry. It is not. It's a freedom-of-information request, and you have control over freedom of information. So it doesn't matter what ministry the request goes to. It comes under your direction, your ministry. It's starting to irritate me that you keep saying it's health when it's not. This falls under your ministry. We're not talking about the actual content of the record. We're talking about the ability to get access to the record, which falls under you, not under health. I'm not asking you to do a doctor's job; I'm asking you to release the information at a reasonable cost to the people who are requesting it. I don't understand why you keep saying it falls under health.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The Information and Privacy Commissioner reports to the Ministry of Government Services, but the hospitals report to the Ministry of Health. So it is not the issue that the information is not available; at what cost it's available, I think, is the issue that you have been raising.

The rules and regulations—actually, the draft was sent by the previous Minister of Health, so we need to check the status of that. But if the deputy minister has any more information, then he will be more than pleased to share it with you.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Thank you very much for the question. PHIPA does prescribe—and the rates were set back in 2006—that the rate to be charged is a reasonable-cost-recovery rate. I guess the challenge in the instance that the privacy commissioner has referred to in her report, which came out today, and which I also have not yet had a chance to read, is the interpretation of "reasonable cost recovery."

We can certainly, and at some point would likely want to, go back and look at the language in the 2006 regulation and perhaps also look at the rates at that time that were set and ensure that they're still appropriate.

I could probably respond better once we've had a chance to actually read the report and understand the particular situation that she's referred to.

Mr. Paul Miller: Frankly, it doesn't refer to the amount of money. Basically, it's the difference in charges that are made by individual doctors and clinics. There's no consistency to the amount.

This recommendation said that they ended up ordering \$35 from \$125 that the doctor charged. That's a huge difference to an individual who could be financially challenged or on a fixed income. What you have to do is get a handle on the costs and make them align with society at different levels of income. You've got to have some consistency. To a person who makes \$100,000 a year, \$125 is not a big deal, but 20% of the people in my riding live below the poverty level, and \$125 could be the difference between them staying in their apartment or not being able to pay their hydro bill.

How does it get so out of whack? When people make a freedom-of-information request and they get charged

these crazy different amounts, how does the ministry explain it to these individuals who are paying these exorbitant fees for information that's about them? You're going to study it—you're going to do this, you're going to do that. It's been going on for years, and you've done nothing to help these people who are struggling with these costs.

To tell me that you're going to do another review and you're going to start the old ball rolling again with the consultants and do all the things you do—it just doesn't cut it. I'm asking: What are you going to do to fix this ongoing problem that's been around for years? Even when they started the scheduling for doctors, as you know—you used to go to a doctor, and it was, like, \$10 for a note; then it went to \$25. Now some of them are \$75 or \$100. There's no control from this ministry about requesting information from your own physician or whatever. There should be guidelines and set fees that these guys can charge individuals, whether it be a doctor, a clinic or whatever. They're writing their own ticket. It's unacceptable, and your ministry is doing nothing about it.

You're talking about studying it again. I can tell you that, from the first time I went to a doctor and paid \$5 for a note for school or whatever the heck I had to pay for, it's now, like, \$75 or \$100. It depends on the doctor, and if it's a specialist, it's even more. It's out of whack. And who do you complain to? You guys and freedom of information. If I request medical files about myself and I've got to pay \$125 for records that are there that are mine, and when you transfer—when a doctor dies, he passes your—they even charge you to go to the new doctor to get your files sent to him. You have to tear out teeth to get the old files from the old doctor to send to the new doctor, so you can get your own files that are about your medical history. What is your ministry doing about things like that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me say that the fee structure for the FOI request was last updated in 1996 by the government that was in power at that point in time. The rates have not changed since then. So if they were affordable at that point in time, you will say that they will be affordable at this point in time. But I hear your point, and even if you look at that report—

Mr. Paul Miller: Minister, with all due respect to you, you can call it \$10 in 1996 and it can still be \$10 now in 2011, but if the individual who's charging you to get that information has quadrupled or tenfolded the cost of the original 1996 fees, who do people go to to say, "This guy's ripping me off"? It should have been \$10 or \$15 like it was in 1996 because they haven't changed. But if you go to any situation in this province, it's quadrupled. There's no connection between the 1996 fee and what actually is charged by all these people. They are actually not following the guidelines that you set forth from your ministry in 1996. So what do I tell people when they say, "Look, this guy wants \$150 to get my dental records," or whatever, and it's only supposed to be, as you pointed out, \$10? What are you doing to stop these people from ripping off the public?

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Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But if you read the report—and I just glanced through it—on page 8, it says: "In March 2006, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care published a draft regulation prescribing the fees that a health information custodian may charge for access."

What I said before was that we need to check out what the status of that is and where that is. If this has been finalized and needs to be implemented, then we'll work with the Minister of Health to do that. But that's what it says.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, it may say that, but you're not—once again, it's enforcement. Who do these people go to, other than the ministry, which is in charge of information and privacy, about these fees that are being charged to them? Who do these individuals go to to complain? Because, obviously, the doctors aren't listening, the hospitals aren't listening and they're not following your guidelines.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: They go to the Information and Privacy Commissioner—

Mr. Paul Miller: And then what do they do? They get charged to go there. And what do they do? Now they get charges on top of charges to get privacy information that belongs to them. You can smile, but I know people who are getting ripped off out there, Minister, for their own information about their own health. It's unbelievable, what's going on out there.

Anyway, you've answered the way you've answered. I'll move on. I'll let that one die; no pun intended.

Could you elaborate on the changes that were made to your legislation that allowed hospital committees to withhold—I repeat: to withhold—information on patients? Would you like me to repeat that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, can you repeat it?

Mr. Paul Miller: Could you elaborate on the changes that were made to your legislation that allowed hospital committees to withhold information on patients?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: This is the issue for the Ministry of Health, right? It's the Ministry of Health's legislation.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's freedom of information, which falls under your auspice. It has got nothing to do with the health.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It is the FIPPA legislation. It's all with the Ministry of Health. You're asking me for—

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, why don't you just give your ministry to the health ministry and then we won't have to worry about it?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But I already talked about that, right? This one here. The hospitals, effective January 1, 2012, which will give them a year to change—let me give it to the deputy minister.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Under the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, which extended FIPPA to hospitals, effective January 1, 2012, there was a specific set of new exemptions for some hospital records that were introduced.

Mr. Paul Miller: Why were there new exemptions sent forward? Who wanted that? Who ordered that?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: During consultations with hospital stakeholders, it became evident that a limited number of unique hospital records required protection. Because existing FIPPA provisions did not address some legitimate hospital interests, a limited number of amendments to the act were introduced. Most of the exemptions are consistent with those found in other provincial access and privacy statutes or those already existing to address similar concerns in educational institutions.

For example, a particular exemption put in place was to protect quality-of-health-care information introduced in the budget bill. To ensure adequate protection of quality-of-health-care information, Bill 173, the Better Tomorrow for Ontario Act, 2011, is amending FIPPA to create a new discretionary exemption related to this particular information. This was an exemption that was proposed by the Ministry of Health. It's designed to enable quality-of-care issues to be raised and discussed in hospitals.

Importantly, the exemption has been drafted so that the Information and Privacy Commissioner will be able to order disclosure of quality-of-care information where she finds that there's a compelling public interest to do the disclosure.

Mr. Paul Miller: So what you're saying is—let me get this right—it's in the hospitals' interest, not the patients', and it's discretionary upon the chair of the board of the hospital, or whatever, what information they're going to pick and choose to release regarding my health, or anyone else's who requests it. They're making the decision in the best interest of the hospital—for what reason? To protect the hospital and their employees, or to streamline policy, or to keep something quiet they don't want to get out? I always thought that the whole purpose of freedom of information was to be able to access information, for your own personal health, that may be required for further treatment, whether it be in Canada or out of the country. It shouldn't be up to the hospital to withhold information on you. It's not about the hospital's interests; it's about you, the patient. The patient comes first, not the hospital. That's why they're there; they're a service.

I'm very concerned with that answer. That's telling me that there are discretionary choices by the hospital board or administrators when it comes to my personal records. I really have a problem with that.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Just a minute to clean this up, okay?

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Thank you. You've got a minute left in this answer, and then we're going to go to the government.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think that, number one, we are now trying to debate legislation which has already passed. That's what we're trying to debate here. This issue should have come up at that time. The other is, these exemptions allow the boards to discuss quality-of-care issues out of the public view.

Mr. Paul Miller: Out of public view—in camera?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, but sometimes you have—you can't discuss somebody's private information in public.

Mr. Paul Miller: You can if I request it, and I'm the patient.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, but you still don't want to disclose it to the public; you want to disclose it to the person.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, what are they hiding?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: There's nothing to hide, but you don't want your information going all over.

Mr. Paul Miller: Why would it be going out when I'm requesting it personally, for me? I'm not going to put it in the Spectator, Minister.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But it depends on what the information is and what—the professionals should be able to decide what is important, right?

Mr. Paul Miller: Not when it comes to my health, they shouldn't.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But they are giving you most of the health information now. It's the quality-of-care issue.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. We'll have to continue this in the next round. We'll now go to the government members. You have 20 minutes. You can start right now, Mr. Mauro.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, I thought that this afternoon, it would probably be a good idea to give you and your staff an opportunity to talk a bit about business and Open for Business in Ontario. I think that it's extremely relevant that we spend a bit of time on that this afternoon in committee. I'm happy that it's televised. I think it's important that we have an opportunity to express some of the sentiment out of your ministry when it comes to Open for Business, but especially in the context of what has been stated publicly in terms of some of the policy positions that are coming forward from some of the opposition parties.

One of the ones that I'm referring to specifically and that I'd like to talk a little bit about is what the Conservative leader, Tim Hudak, said, I think it was last week for the first time. I would have to believe that his comments would have sent a major chill through the business investment community not only in Ontario, but any people considering foreign investment in Ontario as we come out of a recession, trying to get jobs back. In fact, I remember quite clearly the Minister of Economic Development and Trade speaking very clearly on how well Ontario was doing currently when it came to foreign direct investment. So we're actually making great strides.

I believe that when she was discussing this topic, she said that Ontario—and I'm not sure what the parameter was, whether it was the OECD or North America, in terms of national and subnational jurisdictions—was second only to California when it came to foreign direct investment in our jurisdiction, provincially. It was really quite a remarkable thing, when you think about it. I men-

tion that in the context of what was mentioned by the Conservative leader specifically on the Samsung deal.

There are others in the room who maybe know more about business investment than I do—I'm sure there are—but I can only imagine what the international and the internal investment community was thinking when they heard somebody take the position that they would cancel a \$7-billion deal, a contract that was already in place.

I think I know why he took that particular position. I think he's attempting to link \$7 billion in the minds of the public to what might show up as an expense on their hydro bills, when, in fact, of course, that's not the case at all; the \$7-billion Samsung deal represents \$7 billion of private investment in Ontario. It has very little, in fact, to do with their energy bills. But unfortunately, it's quite disingenuous. I think the Leader of the Opposition has intentionally made what he probably believes is a strategic decision to try to link in the minds of the public \$7 billion to an expense on their hydro bill. Of course, we know that's not the case. I think that's extremely unfortunate.

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Now, if that's a strategic decision he's made, I suppose he's made his choices and he's going to run forward with that. But it's important that people know that that \$7-billion number was private investment that would accrue into the province of Ontario over the course of the next number of years; I'm not sure how long. If there was ever a job-killing announcement that was made by anybody, that's the one that I think of.

It's unfortunate, and I know my friend from Durham across the way will have some opportunity to talk about this, perhaps, in his 20 minutes, but there are already cracks in the Conservative caucus showing up on this particular file. I know that Mr. Hardeman and Mr. Klees both find themselves a bit conflicted by that announcement by their leader. It's unfortunate.

There's a second piece to this that I want to talk about that has a local flavour for me. The Samsung deal is very much about renewable energy, and we've come to realize that it's not something that's supported by that particular party. I guess that's fine. They have their own suggestion and plan coming out when it comes to energy, I suppose.

I think it's important to remind my constituents in Thunder Bay–Atikokan that we also have a green energy project coming forward, and that's the conversion of the two coal plants in my riding. We're going off coal. I have two coal plants in my riding: one in Thunder Bay and one in Atikokan. All three parties, I should put on the record, committed to closing coal plants in 2003—Howard Hampton, when he was the leader of the NDP; Ernie; Eves when he was the leader of the Conservatives; and us; all three committed to closing the coal plants—but we're the only party that's committed to the conversion.

My concern is this: Given what the leader—

Mr. John O'Toole: That's not what he said.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Well, it is what he said.

Given what the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Hudak, said last week when it came to the Samsung deal, I've got a great concern that his position on renewable energy may affect these two projects in my riding. These two coal plants that we've committed to convert represent over 200 jobs, they represent \$300-million worth of construction activity for my building trade unions in my riding and they also represent a significant tax base to the city of Thunder Bay and to the town of Atikokan.

If he's going to be consistent in his policy, I think it's entirely possible that—a couple of things might happen: Either he'll just kill the conversion and leave the coal plants burning coal or he'll meet his commitment that was made by his party in 2003 and just close them down, affecting not only the construction jobs but also costing us 200 jobs that currently exist. I think it's—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Excuse me a second, Mr. Mauro.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Oh, sure.

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order, Mr. Chair: The arguments being raised here are part of an energy discussion. We're talking about government services here. These are all questions about his—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Mr. O'Toole, he has a right to make those comments, and the minister can respond to them; okay?

Mr. Mauro, go ahead.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In fact, it is about energy, but it's about jobs, and that's what the question is going to be to the minister. There are significant jobs affected by the positions that are being taken. I think that's important.

The last thing I want to get on the record before I pose my question to the minister is another policy that had a very adverse effect on my community in northwestern Ontario, and that's when the Conservatives went into power and left in place business education tax rates that were disproportionate across the province. In northwestern Ontario, they were very much higher than in the rest of the province. We've taken action to reverse that and, ultimately, when that's fully phased in, it's going to leave well over \$20 million back in the hands of local businesses in northwestern Ontario.

I raise that, Mr. Chair, because the Conservatives like to pretend they own the economy and they own business, but they left in place in northwestern Ontario business education tax rates much higher than anywhere else in the province, but there are a lot of things that have gone on that have killed jobs or that potentially might kill jobs, so it's important that the minister have an opportunity to have that context when he answers the question.

I'm interested in recognizing that our government has been very supportive and encouraging of Ontario businesses and companies to move forward during tough economic times, and we've got several policies that I'm sure we can talk about. We also know that we must continue to co-operate with the business community in Ontario to maintain job growth and a healthy economy,

while fostering a perfect balance between government support and private sector investments.

I think Ontarians would agree with me that the government is not only taking active measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of our economy but at the same time being very conscious of our responsibility to provide efficient and accessible government services, and that's something I'm sure we could all talk about. I'm not sure where we're going to be under a different party, should they have the responsibility of governing government services.

Constituents in my riding have contacted me about how our government is taking a leading role in encouraging Ontario companies to use the many services and tools available to help small business. The opposition leader has stated some policies that I have mentioned already that are of great concern to me; they are contrary to the comprehensive plans that our Premier and our government have put in place to take action and to create jobs.

With such a great emphasis on creating jobs and jobs measures, I'm interested, Minister, in how ServiceOntario is helping businesses in Ontario to ease the red tape burden.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Thanks very much for your question. I think—

Mr. Kim Craitor: I like his questions; they're good.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's not a question; that's a statement. That's a policy statement.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): It's consistent with what always happens at estimates. Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think that this question is almost the same as the other question. Let me just say that we're just getting out of the recession, and it is important for us to make it easier for businesses to invest in Ontario. That is why we are getting this investment of \$7 billion: because we have made it clear that Ontario is open for business. The Premier has gone around on trade delegations to encourage foreign direct investment into our province. As a result of this, all these investments are coming into Ontario, and I know that Indian companies alone have made over \$7 billion of investment in this province.

Let me just talk a little bit about how we can make it easier for businesses to deal with the government. We all know that the service expectations of our citizens continue to grow. More than ever before, Ontarians expect to receive high value for their government services and expect their services to be on par with, or even exceed, the private sector. Our service approach to Ontario businesses is about saving time but it's also about saving businesses money. We have taken a long look at how we expect businesses to interact with government and have streamlined inefficient processes to make it easier for businesses to manage multiple interactions with the government, often in the same visit or transaction.

ServiceOntario is playing a key role in delivering faster, smarter and streamlined government-to-business

services through the Open Ontario and Open for Business initiatives. I'm just going to talk briefly about the fact that we've introduced a 1-888 line. This is the only number that they have to remember in order to get government services. But I will ask the deputy to dwell on that a little bit so that he can tell you what this really does.

The other thing is, we also want to make it easier for businesses to have one business identifier when they're dealing with various ministries, so it's not that when they deal with the Ministry of Revenue they have a different number and then when they deal with the Ministry of Government Services they have a different number. They need to have one identifier so that it's easier for them to remember and it's easier for interaction as well. Even when they file their employer health tax, fuel tax, gas tax, they should be dealing with one number.

The third one is ONE-Source for Business. Recently, we launched the first release of ONE-Source for Business, ServiceOntario's new web portal for business. At completion and release of all the business functionality, it is expected that ONE-Source for Business will make it easier for businesses to actually search for the information they're looking for or the programs that the government is providing. They should be able to look at them in a way that is designed to provide them with the right information to make the right decisions.

This program, actually, has been very well accepted by our stakeholders. We received some comments at the consultations, and the people said something like, "I will certainly benefit from this," "I wish this was available when I was starting out," and, "It looks great." So I think ONE-Source is a source to print and mail forms, eliminating the need to re-enter the same information across many forms; enabling customer searches that gets them just what they need for their businesses; and enabling the saving of search results and forms so that they can actually look at them when they need them.

The next initiative that we have taken is the service location finder. This was launched in April 2009. The ServiceOntario service location finder is an online search tool which provides information about many government services and initiatives that are available based on the service delivery channels. Recently, in March 2011, we launched the mobile service location finder as well, which is a search tool designed for Ontarians to easily find government services and their locations using their smart phones. We are also helping businesses to provide the information that they need through our libraries program.

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But there's another program that we have: BizPaL. This is the program that we run with the federal government and municipal governments. If somebody wants to start a business in a certain location, they can actually get all the information that they need in order to start a business in certain municipalities, certain cities, and some of the rules and regulations that they need to comply with.

Then, we also have an electronic master business licence service. The service guarantee extends to busi-

nesses. Ontarians can register a new business online and receive a master business licence by mail in two business days or their money back.

These are some of the initiatives that we have done, and I'm going to ask the deputy minister maybe to talk a little bit more about that.

Mr. Bob Stark: Thank you, Minister. I'm Bob Stark, deputy minister and chief executive officer of ServiceOntario.

Maybe I can just add a little bit more detail to what the minister has shared with you, starting with the single 888 number that is a partnership between ServiceOntario and the federal government to provide a single telephone number that gives small businesses access to about a dozen key programs within the Ontario government, but also gives them access to about 80 other services that are provided. It consolidates in the order of 160 different telephone numbers across the federal and provincial levels of government into a single number that's easily remembered.

Just to give you a sense of the kinds of services that you can access through that 800 number, you can find out at the provincial level about business registration, business searches and incorporation, accessibility information and standards, Ontario tax programs, recruitment and training, workplace safety and insurance, employment standards, operational health and safety and so on, so quite a range of services that any business would need to operate.

At the federal level, we can provide information about the Business Development Bank of Canada, Canadian Border Services Agency, CRA and CRTC, as well as copyright patent information and importing and exporting information.

These are just some examples of the kind of information that you can get by calling this single telephone number.

We also help small businesses connect with local small business enterprise centres that can assist them in developing business plans and growth plans. As the minister said, there's a toll-free number and it substantially reduces the complexity of accessing government services in a convenient single number.

The minister also mentioned that we have incorporated the single business number as a sole identifier for business in interacting with government. This is a national business number that the federal government and all of the provinces and territories have agreed they will migrate to. What it means for business is that eventually a business will be able to go online and access any of their relationships with governments across Canada.

The minister spent a fair bit of time explaining the One-Source online portal for business. This is a significant step forward. As the minister said, we've had very positive reception from the business community around what we're doing here. The significance of it is that a business can go online, profile their business and then can do various searches that go after information that's located in a number of different websites within the prov-

ince and outside, and we'll assemble that information in a convenient way. For business, this saves them time and money.

The system will also allow them to take what has historically been printed forms and complete them electronically. Eventually, we will automate that process so that the information from their various applications to government programs will be delivered to the respective program areas.

The minister also mentioned our service location finder, and this is significant for business in that this connects businesses with information that will tell them about the 57 small business enterprise centres that are across the province. It will give information about the services that are provided and the hours the services are available. If they use a mobile smart phone to do this, the service is intelligent enough to understand where the business person is and give them the surrounding locations. So it uses the GPS capability of a smart phone.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): We have about a minute and a half left, Deputy.

Mr. Bob Stark: Thanks very much. The minister also touched upon the libraries program, ServiceOntario at libraries. This is in 440 libraries and First Nations band offices. It allows entrepreneurs to go online with the support of a librarian who has been trained in helping them access the various business services that are available online.

I'll skip over BizPaL, which the minister spoke to, and just speak to the electronic master business licence because, in many respects, this is a flagship for us. It's offered with a money-back guarantee, where new businesses can go online and request an electronic master business licence and we guarantee that it'll be delivered to them within two days. Our performance on that is 100% success to date, so we're quite proud of that. A master business licence allows an entrepreneur to start his business, to do things like opening bank accounts and basically establishing the business.

As you can see, we have a number of programs that are designed to make it easier for business in the province to access government services. We are recognized as a leader in service around the world, with a particular focus on being a reliable, cost-effective and cost-efficient provider of service.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Thank you. Well, that was close: six seconds. Thank you very much, Deputy. We'll now go to the official opposition; you have 20 minutes. We're on schedule now, folks, to have the official opposition for 20, the third party for 20 and 10 minutes at the end of the session today for the government. Thank you. Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. John O'Toole: My colleague the member from Sarnia-Lambton was quite upset when the member from Thunder Bay, I believe it is, Mr. Mauro, got into the energy discussion, which really isn't part of it, but it has to be cleared up.

Today, in the top business newspaper, the Financial Post, there are comments—here it is; you should read it.

Now, you aren't being shown what the public is thinking, and I'm going to tell you. The Green Energy Act is a failure. That's what they're saying. You can drink all the Kool-Aid they pour for you, but you're going to end up like other people who drank the Kool-Aid.

It says right at the end of the article—now, here's the real issue: They realized after their promise in 2003, and again in 2007, they were going to close the coal plants. They just kept time-stamping the date. They haven't closed any yet. They've actually just looked at it. Elizabeth Witmer closed the only one that was done here in Mississauga. That's the only one, and she announced it.

We committed to 2014, and we're still committed to 2014. They said they're going to close the coal plants. They didn't say they're going to retool them, or "convert" them is the term he used. It shows how little the caucus actually knows about the plan. They're actually going to be burning trees instead of coal. Trees are a carbon sink. They grow by sucking in carbon dioxide, and when they burn them, they release carbon dioxide.

I don't think they know the whole story, and I'm very concerned that they don't understand the file. I'm hearing this from people in my riding of Durham. The university is founded on the principle—the dean of sciences is an electrical engineer, a Ph.D. Bill Mauro I don't think will be listening any more than that.

But this article is mandatory reading. Kim, you should be reading it. Your seat's in trouble down there.

Anyway, I'm going to switch to the main theme, though, of your ministry and its lack of—you said a couple of things this morning. Once again, I want to separate the political from the staff side. The staff side, I think, is doing a fairly decent job—on their own, I might add. There seems like very little direction.

But you said this morning, Deputy, that there were two other public deputy ministers who were over and above the salary caps and all that stuff. I wonder if you could, please, take the time and have some of your staff—you seem to have a lot of them who aren't here today—dig that out for me. I'd like you to point that out. Just clarify that, and we'll have that on the record for going into the October time frame. We need to have that, because these are two more Ron Sapsfords. I can assure you that there are two more secret side deals that have been made.

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The minister can pop in on that if he wants to deny it, otherwise it's being confirmed here that it's the truth. There's two more that we haven't found out yet, unless he pops in and discloses it right now and we can dig into the numbers here, find out what's severance, what's bonuses, what they were being paid for from some university, whatever. Don't panic, children. It isn't over yet.

The—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Innuendo.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, yes, it is. It tends to be, because we're not getting anything to go on except glimpses of part-truths.

I became very troubled this morning—and a lot of people who I called, asking if my performance was in-

sensitive or wasn't very tasteful, said, "No, you've got to go after the truth. Always stay on the road to truth." That's what they said, so I'm going to pick that up again.

I think that what I've determined is that the Minister of Health tried to stick it on you; you ducked, so you tried to stick it on—it's like playing "Who's got the button?" or "Who's got the secret message?" So you're now in the hot seat—he's passing notes back and forth.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Keep going. I'm okay.

Mr. John O'Toole: Is the word "who" on there? Because I think we're looking for Dr. Who here, actually. I really do. It's that scary that we can't get to—I think it's at the highest level. First of all, it's the Premier. I'm convinced now that the buck stops at the Premier. One president said that one time. Wouldn't you agree, Bob?

Mr. Robert Bailey: What did he know and when did he know it?

Mr. John O'Toole: That's what I would like on the record. Hansard, you got the recording on that?

What did he know and when did he know it? Isn't that what was said during the presidential—

Interjection: A state senator.

Mr. John O'Toole: A state senator said that: What did you know and when did you know it, or did you know anything, respectfully? After this morning, what more do we know about Ron Sapsford except that he's still on the payroll, as far as we know? We have no commitment that he's still not on the sunshine list for next year.

Mr. Robert Bailey: He could be joined by others.

Mr. John O'Toole: He could be part of the Don Drummond review. I think he's probably on that committee.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Is that the question?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's forming up to a question.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I hope so.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, it's not. It's part of a wild, contrived strategy.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You got the notes?

Mr. John O'Toole: Pardon?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Somebody gave you the notes.

Mr. John O'Toole: They did. It's the people of Ontario who I represent; that's who I'm representing here at these hearings.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I thought that you—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Minister, can you answer? Was that a question?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: He said he's going to form the question, so I'm waiting.

Mr. John O'Toole: Who's to blame? What did you know and when did you know it, if you did know anything?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Mr. Chair, I know that this thing—

Mr. John O'Toole: A strategy.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —may be an issue that has been bugging him a little bit, but I just want to know,

back when your government was in power, there was somebody on the Hydro One board who was paid \$2.2 million in salary. Right? They were paid \$170,000 for a car. What kind of car did they drive for \$174,000? And \$172,000 in vacation pay—

Mr. John O'Toole: With all due respect, though, Minister, this isn't about me.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Hold on—

Mr. John O'Toole: With all due respect, this is not about me; this is about you.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Hold it. One at a time.

Mr. John O'Toole: You had the keys to the car for 10 years.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Please. This side, the government members—

Mr. John O'Toole: Wouldn't you agree that you've had the keys to the car and the executive washroom for eight years?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Mr. O'Toole, is that a question?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me answer it. I'm saying that maybe the issue you have with the severance or the salary that Ron Sapsford, the DM from health, got paid according to the contract that he signed—then I'm sure that it might have really bothered you—

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like that contract tabled. You've mentioned that Sapsford—I'd like that tabled.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I just want to know: Did it bother you when somebody retired with a \$1-million-a-year pension and a huge severance from Hydro One? That was Eleanor Clitheroe. Can you tell us a little bit about how you felt about it?

Mr. John O'Toole: You know that your deputy—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: And then there was the person who was the chief of staff of former Premier Harris—

Mr. John O'Toole: Let's wrap it around here.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —who actually then went on to get a job with Ontario Hydro at \$250,000, and then severance on top of that.

Mr. John O'Toole: That's not nearly as much as some of them are getting, even today.

Here's one thing—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay, can we get back to a question-answer here?

Mr. John O'Toole: We are kind of getting back to it, because this morning your deputy—and I do have a lot of time—he's quite genuine, and he has to play the hand he's been dealt. He said that some of these people, with the exceptional quality of staff, are paid over and above the grade. I understand that; it's bonusing. So the highly paid ones, if I go through the list here, there would be kind of an explanation, a little asterisk, beside them: "Shooter. Hits the ball out of the park regularly," that kind of comment.

Was Ron Sapsford on that list? Was he one of the shooters? He must have been, by your own definition. Was Ron Sapsford one of the special, skilful—this is the

guy who dismantled eHealth, spent a billion dollars on Lord knows what, and he was one of the shooters?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, it's true. Mr. McNeely says he doesn't believe that.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Government members, let the minister continue.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, eHealth started under you. You should realize that and accept that fact, and—

Mr. John O'Toole: No, that's—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Ron Sapsford was one of the deputy ministers who was responsible for managing over \$40-billion worth of a ministry. So what I will ask you is, if a \$2.2-million salary was acceptable in 2001—

Mr. John O'Toole: Who are you asking? You're the minister. I'll trade with you—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): He's asking you a question back, but if you want to get a response, what you need to do is ask another question now.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No. I'm just saying you paid \$2.2 million in 2001 to somebody who managed an even smaller organization than that.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. The next question goes to Mr. O'Toole. Mr. O'Toole, go ahead.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: And you paid \$174,000 for somebody to drive a car. I don't know. What kind of a car would you drive for \$174,000?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. Now the question goes to Mr. O'Toole. Mr. O'Toole, it's your turn.

Mr. John O'Toole: Because you're using the time here. Protecting the truth, really, is what we're trying to get to.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No, I'm just stating the facts.

Mr. John O'Toole: Did the Sapsford deal or any of the secret deals go through Management Board? The reason I'm asking that is because I think your deputy minister is secretary to Management Board of Cabinet; right?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Associate.

Mr. John O'Toole: So you can refer this to him. Is there any contract for Sapsford? Was it ever discussed at Management Board? Have you seen it?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I made it very clear in the morning that this is information that maybe the Minister of Health has, but I don't have that information. I can't disclose anybody's personal information and, more importantly, I don't have it.

Mr. John O'Toole: Dwight Duncan disclosed this right in question period.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Then you have it. Why are you asking again?

Mr. John O'Toole: Just a minute now. You're in charge. Let's be respectful. You do have a very large ministry, and you see every single contract, and every secret deal goes in front of you.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, exactly. Thank God for my—
Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Severance payments are not included in the sunshine list. Why did the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance say the deal with Ron Sapsford was severance? Was it?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I said whatever the terms of employment were. Under the terms of employment, if somebody's services are terminated, they have the option to get that in a lump sum or they can take it as a continuation of their salaries and benefits, whatever is under the terms of their contract.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, but I guess you'd have to say that there's supposed to be some punishment for releasing this type of information. Ministers aren't supposed to release this, and they're releasing it in question period. Do you think that's appropriate, that they release this stuff in question period?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think if you think it's not appropriate, then that question should not be asked.

Mr. John O'Toole: Wait a minute here. Are you following the dots here? I'm not getting this one here. It's more like deflection again, and I got a lot of that this morning. The four Ds, we call it: delay, diminish, dither, deflect, deny.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No. It's the quality of the questions.

Mr. John O'Toole: I guess the quality of the question is becoming weaker because there is no answer forthcoming. This is exactly the answer—I'm going to ask you one more time. Is there a contract with Ron Sapsford, even if it disclosed—I don't need the number right now; that will be part two. But is there a contract, and who signed it? If you didn't sign it, I would ask you and your ministry—as you're in charge of all this stuff with government services—to get it and table it with this committee. You can redact the amounts, although part of them are in the sunshine list. I hope that's all he got: three quarters of a million. Would you do that for me? That's an official question.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I answered that question several times before.

Mr. John O'Toole: You haven't answered it.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think the answer to that question is that I don't have any information on that, and that question would be best put to the Minister of Health when she appears before the committee.

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Mr. John O'Toole: Well, I guess we could be summoning other persons. We could summon Mr. Sapsford right here, couldn't we? Do we have that right?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): I don't think we do.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think we've got to get to the truth here. This is just one example. If you can't look after \$1 million, how can you look after \$1 billion? All we're trying to find out is this: This is a public record; Mr. Sapsford was paid \$500,000 in 2009, and his salary

jumped to \$762,000 after he allegedly quit in 2010. He wasn't working, and he made three quarters of a million dollars. There must have been some secret handshake or some kind of involvement there. That's what we're trying to get to. I won't cloud it up with more words. That's the truth. Do you know nothing about it?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: What I said is, this is not information that we have in our ministry. This will be a question that you should address to the Minister of Health. I don't have—I can't disclose anybody's personal information even if I have it—

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, Dwight Duncan and—they are doing it. They're doing it all the time. They're sticking this on you, and that's why I'm not giving up until you relent and say, "I'll go after that, member from Durham." Just say, "I'll get it for you."

The people of Ontario will respect you for it. The press release that I'm going to issue is going to say that you wouldn't give it to me. I'm about to change it. I think I'm crossing—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: If it looks to you like a very big amount, in 2010 I'm sure \$2.2 million in 2001 was a huge amount. It's about three times this one—

Mr. John O'Toole: Certainly was.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —and includes \$174,000 for the car, \$172,000 for vacation, and a \$1-million annual pension—

Mr. John O'Toole: These agreements—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: How did you—

Mr. John O'Toole: Those are agreements that you're reading from that are in the open. They're in the public. They've been talked about. Now all we're trying to do is get a couple of yours out in here in the open. We had what's-her-name—Sarah Kramer's out there a bit. We have a few others out there. We're looking for several others because we know there's plenty of them.

Plus we've got—this is a climate of a lot of secret deals. We've got the secret deal on Samsung. We've got the OPSEU secret deal. We haven't found out about the other secrets yet.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You know, Samsung is a \$7-billion investment. It's not a secret deal—a \$7-billion investment—

Mr. John O'Toole: Wait a minute here. You didn't read this article. You've got to read—don't read the Star all the time.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's a \$7-billion investment which is going to create thousands of jobs. I'm sure you need those jobs in your community as well. We also made investment in General Motors in your riding. You know that, right?

Mr. John O'Toole: Just a minute here. In my riding, name one. Name one. The reason I'm saying this: You delayed and dithered the refurbishment of the nuclear plant as well—that's an energy question, so I'll put it on the record there—and you kind of messed up the RFP for the new-build nuclear. You said you were going to do it, and then you backed off it. There's one more example of not getting it done, really. This is another case.

We know health care is falling off the cliff; every hospital is basically in a deficit—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Quite honestly, the member from Ottawa–Orléans knows quite well that the AECL is in trouble—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Tell me: These days the Conservative Party stands against foreign direct investment in the province and they want to kill jobs?

Mr. John O'Toole: The Conservative Party stands for Open Ontario and open for business and open information, accountability and transparency.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: So why do you want to kill so many jobs that are being created by this industry?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Three minutes.

Mr. John O'Toole: We would do it with contracts that the people of Ontario are aware of. Why is the Samsung deal secret?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But you're just saying it's secret. You have all the information that you need. You're still saying "secret" for everything.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, we don't.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: You're just using the term "secret."

Mr. John O'Toole: Okay, where's the contract? Table the contract. You said you know about it. Table the Samsung contract. There's another request on the record. I want this. Because all of this is—you see, you're really not transparent and accountable. You say you are.

You say you're going to close coal plants. You haven't closed one, really. They're retooling them; I understand that. But they didn't understand that, quite honestly, if you took about 40% of the generation capacity out of Nanticoke and Sarnia–Lambton and the other plants, the way the grid works, the grid would have failed. You'd have to redesign the whole system.

Now they're actually going to retool them so they can burn pulp, paper—anything. They were looking at peat. They were looking at surplus wood. That's what they're going to end up with, surplus wood—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Two minutes in this round, John.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But I'm sure you remember what happened in 2002, right? There were brownouts all over. There was no energy available to people. People didn't even have hydro to make their meals. I think we have forgotten about 2002. We have actually—

Mr. John O'Toole: There are reports—you're a cabinet minister—that explain that the northeast grid failed, and there was a transitional effect all the way through the grid. That system is still there today. In fact, in the last year, there was almost a failure. The society of professional engineers from Ontario energy were here last week and put that out—I can get the report for you.

Your system has come close to failure twice, so don't bring that up. The only reason you haven't had a failure yet—do you know why? Because there are 5,000 megawatts every day that aren't used. They're produced and not consumed—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Which means we've got endless capacity, right?

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no. In fact, you're paying Quebec and New York to take our surplus power. Did you know that?

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): One minute, guys.

Mr. John O'Toole: And the feed-in tariffs are so stupid that you put them on first dispatch. That renewable energy is all backed up, usually by gas plants. Those are not dispatchable loads of energy. You always have to have a gas plant running in case it's not sunny or windy. You have made such a mess, and even people in the OPA have called me and told me, and I know—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We cleaned up your mess. You had—

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, Minister. You're not responsible for that.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: People couldn't even cook their meals. That's what you had.

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to put you back on track. You are responsible for one thing at this meeting today: You have not told us one thing about Ron Sapsford. You've blamed the Minister of Health; you've blamed the Minister of Finance—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I didn't blame anybody.

Mr. John O'Toole: —and I'm putting on the record that you're really blaming the Premier and the cabinet. You're backing away from it all, and you're not telling us where \$1 million was wasted on a person who didn't even show up for work. That's what I want on the record, and I'm happy to say it.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Okay. That concludes this 20 minutes. We'll now go to the third party. You now have 20 minutes. You can begin.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to start by asking you: You do have boards and commissions under your jurisdiction, correct?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: How many boards and commissions under your ministry did you eliminate, if any, and for any cost savings?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I don't have a lot of boards and commissions—

Mr. Paul Miller: I've got a list of them right here.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I know, but I'm saying that there's not a board that we eliminated in our ministry.

Mr. Paul Miller: None?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: No.

Mr. Paul Miller: So you didn't eliminate any? Okay.

Interjections.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But you're talking about my ministry, right?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm talking about your ministry.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Not how many we eliminated from all the ministries?

Mr. Paul Miller: No; your ministry. You have the Advertising Review Board, Deputy Judges Remuneration

Commission, Justices of the Peace Remuneration Commission, Licence Appeal Tribunal, Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, Ontario Pension Board etc.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Paul Miller: How many have you eliminated? Minister Dwight Duncan stands up on a regular basis and is very proud of the fact that he's eliminated all these commissions, boards and tribunals, but you're telling me you've done zero.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: How are you going to eliminate the compensation for the justices of the peace or the judges or the pension review board? Are you going to eliminate those? All those are necessary.

Mr. Paul Miller: What is a provincial judges remuneration commission? What is that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Maybe the deputy can answer it. In my understanding, this is the commission that basically determines—

Mr. Paul Miller: How much judges should make?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Yes, that's exactly right. They meet on an irregular basis. They'll meet once every few years to recommend the compensation for either judges, deputy judges or justices of the peace for the coming three-year period of time. It's a commission; it's not an agency. They meet for a relatively short period of time, and they meet once every few years, when it's time to look ahead and look at compensation.

Mr. Paul Miller: So that's \$55,000 to meet this year—advisory committee.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: That would be for their time to meet this year to set the compensation for the next three years.

Mr. Paul Miller: How long did that entail? A day? Two days? Three? A week?

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Mr. Ron McKerlie: It would take a period of time, for sure, yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: A day? Three? A week?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: I don't know; I can find out.

Mr. Paul Miller: Would you find that out? I'm very curious. The money you spend on—this one really is fantastic here. You've got one here: Licence Appeal Tribunal, \$3 million this year.

Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner—well, I can understand that—over \$1 million.

Advertising Review Board: \$1,226,000. Wow. What are they reviewing? Commercials? What are they reviewing?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The Advertising Review Board actually has been very effective.

Mr. Paul Miller: It should be, for that price.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We have consolidated all government advertising. They review it to make sure the advertising is consistent, but more importantly, they actually get better deals for you.

Mr. Paul Miller: They get better deals for me?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Better deals for the taxpayers.

Mr. Paul Miller: How many times a year do they meet?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Part-time, it's—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, some of those employees are part-time employees.

Mr. Paul Miller: You guys are being very vague here. These are very costly items here in your chart, and you don't know how often they meet, when they meet, how much they spend? Look—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We are telling you that they meet—

Mr. Paul Miller: It's \$1,909,000 for the advertising people from 2010-11, and \$1,708,000 for the Licence Appeal Tribunal. This is unbelievable. I mean, how much do they have to do? I'm very curious to find out what they actually do. Are there any breakdowns that you can give me of what's in their mandate and what they do? Can I get some information on that?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Yes, absolutely. I can take you through whichever one of the agencies you want. We can start with the Advertising Review Board, if you'd like.

Mr. Paul Miller: Let's go with the Licence Appeal Tribunal; \$3,269,000 is the estimate for this year.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: The Licence Appeal Tribunal is a full-time tribunal. They would look at any individual or business that comes in and wants to appeal the fact that their licence—and it could be anything from their driver's licence to a liquor licence. Any time it was suspended, they come before the tribunal, which would review that, look at the facts, hear it and make a decision. It's there to serve the public, to give them access to a second-order view on losing their licence. They're full-time.

Mr. Paul Miller: Are these people elected or appointed?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: They are staff—

Mr. Paul Miller: They're bureaucrats?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: They are staff, yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: They're not politicians—

Mr. Ron McKerlie: No.

Mr. Paul Miller: —or appointees?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: They are people appointed—

Mr. Paul Miller: They're appointed? Ah.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: The head is appointed.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Staff and appointed people.

Mr. Paul Miller: And appointed people. Interesting. Is it a three-year deal or a four-year deal? How long are they on these tribunals and committees? And do they get reimbursement for gas and things like that? Do they get money for lunches? Does that happen?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: They would be covered under the same travel, meal and hospitality directive as OPS staff would be.

Mr. Paul Miller: Interesting. I see on, page 30, "Operating Summary by Vote." You've got down here—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Which one is this?

Mr. Paul Miller: Page 30. I just want you to explain this to me. You've got employee and pensioner benefits as 51% of that budget. That's huge. Can you explain that to me?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Sure, absolutely. I'd invite Karen Hughes, our chief administrative officer, to give you the details. But the line is for all of the OPS; it's not just for the Ministry of Government Services.

Karen?

Mr. Paul Miller: So 51% of the budget goes for employee benefits and pension?

Ms. Karen Hughes: That's correct.

Mr. Paul Miller: That is huge.

Ms. Karen Hughes: That's on behalf of the entire OPS, so it's all staff—

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, I understand, but that is huge. And on the next page, page 31, employee benefits are 70% of the budget?

Ms. Karen Hughes: Yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's unbelievable.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Seventy per cent of what budget?

Mr. Paul Miller: Of the "Operating Summary by Vote and Standard Account," table 6.

Ms. Karen Hughes: Yes.

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Because it's for the entire—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: —Ontario public service.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's huge.

Mr. Kim Craitor: It's unionized.

Mr. Paul Miller: Union or non-union, that's huge. How do you keep a handle on that through your ministry? How do you meet the requirements of your service-providing, as opposed to the cost of the employee benefits and the payouts for pension and other things? How do you keep a handle on the costs? That's huge.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: What is your question?

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is, how do you keep a handle, financially, on your regular service-providing when it takes up such a big chunk of your budget? The pensions and the employee benefits are huge: 70% for employee benefits—it's a very simple question, Minister. Employee benefits, 70%; and pensioner benefits—people that I assume are already are on pension. It's 70% and 51%. What impact does that have on your service-providing ability within your budget? Does it limit your ability to provide the services needed to the public? And how do you stop this from escalating to a point where it could get higher? What if it becomes 80%?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We have to curtail all the costs, including the salaries and the benefits going forward. That's why we are working closely with our unions. These are the contractual obligations, right? You can only decrease them by negotiating with employee groups.

Mr. Paul Miller: I was shocked at the amount of the—it looks like a hockey puck—that took a chunk of that.

Next question: In December 2010, the government launched a new information access and privacy website,

providing improved access to Ontario government information and better support for institutions covered by provincial and municipal freedom-of-information and protection-of-privacy legislation. That's interesting. How does this website fit in with the discussion we had earlier—I'll reiterate for you—about the hospital and being able to get into your files? Now they have a website that provides access and privacy. So if you're so concerned about hospital files and administration not giving out information, why would you have a website?

Laughter.

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't think it's funny. I'm just asking a question.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Do you want to get Don in here and have him talk about it?

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Maybe to clarify, because I think there's some misconception in terms of the hospital exemptions under FIPPA, I would ask Don Fawcett, who I believe is in the room and who has some expertise on FIPPA, to join me at the table here and help to clarify that which I think is a little confused right now.

Mr. Don Fawcett: Thank you. My name is Don Fawcett. I'm a lawyer in the Ministry of Government Services. Deputy, you'd like me to answer a question about the nature of the—

Mr. Ron McKerlie: Just explain the exemption under FIPPA for hospitals that has to do with quality-of-care discussions.

Mr. Don Fawcett: Sure. When the decision was made when we were looking at bringing hospitals in under FIPPA—and I'm talking from a policy standpoint—what we did was we went out and we talked to the stakeholders. That would include hospitals and other health care stakeholders—

Mr. Paul Miller: Excuse me, would that include patients?

Mr. Don Fawcett: I believe the Ministry of Health may have talked to some patients.

Mr. Paul Miller: "May have." Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Don Fawcett: One of the things that we heard when we were conducting the consultations, in this case, from the hospital community, is that they have a culture of candour in their organizations, which is that they're always into improving health care. In that culture, they want people to surface and talk about issues that arise in their hospital. Their concern was, when FIPPA applies to the organization, how it would impact on that culture of candour raising issues and committees within the hospital addressing those issues. As a consequence of that, we looked at that and said that it may be appropriate to look at giving a discretionary exemption in FIPPA to hospitals that allows them, in circumstances where they think that that culture may be impaired, to protect that information. So it's a discretionary exemption, which means that the head of the hospital, if they get an FOI request for the discussions of these committees that form in a hospital, can choose not to disclose that information. But that's a discretionary decision. That's a decision that a hospital can choose to make or not make.

Mr. Paul Miller: With all due respect, how do you determine where discretionary ends and control starts in not providing the patient with the information that they need through freedom of information? If you're allowing discretionary conduct, you're allowing them to take control of people's private information, and that's telling me that you're saying that Dr. Smith or the board or whoever is making decisions on whether to release information that I may have requested as an individual, or as a group, about my health situation, the way the committees are operating within the boundaries of the hospital or the administration—you're telling me that it's up to them to make decisions for me about what direction I may want to take with my health care, even though it may not even be within their facility; it may be somewhere else I might want to go, and they're blocking me. I may not be happy with the committee.

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It's my understanding that the LHINs were formed to deal with many, many agencies in the community. In my community, I think there's over 200 different agencies—VON, you name it—and freedom-of-information requests come in all the time. But in the LHIN process, there is no one to complain to. There's no complaint body within the LHIN. So if the hospitals decide to withhold my information, I complain to the LHIN that they're withholding my information, whether it be on my mother, my father who's in a home or whatever I want to do, it's up to the discretion of the hospital, the administrator and whoever—the board or committee that you're talking about—to decide whether I can get that information on my parent or myself. I may require a different type of care. I may even want to go out of province.

I'm really having a problem with that, because my only other avenue, then, is to go to the LHIN, and the LHIN has no grievance chair, no arbitrator—there's nobody on the LHIN. So what are they doing there as another bureaucratic level which may block my freedom-of-information request through the hospital, the board or the committee, as well as the LHIN? What alternative position do I have as the person requesting this? I can't go to the ministry because they're not doing anything about it. I can't go to the LHINs; they're not doing anything about it. I guess my next step is to go to your colleagues, the lawyers, which is going to cost me even more money to find out something about me. How do you answer that?

Mr. Don Fawcett: Well, it may be helpful to talk about how the Personal Health Information Protection Act—which governs hospitals and health care providers and management of personal health information—interacts with FIPPA. At the heart of your question, you're expressing a concern about how an individual gets access to their own personal health information. In this case, PHIPA, the Personal Health Information Protection Act, applies. If I want to access my personal health information from a hospital, I would make the request under PHIPA, and not FIPPA. When I was talking about that exemption for quality of care under FIPPA, that doesn't operate here.

Mr. Paul Miller: It doesn't apply to the other one?

Mr. Don Fawcett: No. No one can apply that exemption under FIPPA to prevent you from getting—

Mr. Paul Miller: Would the public know that?

Mr. Don Fawcett: Yes. I believe it's—

Mr. Paul Miller: You know it, but would they know it?

Mr. Don Fawcett: Well, I know it.

Mr. Paul Miller: Is it on the website?

Mr. Don Fawcett: We can take a look at that.

Mr. Paul Miller: I think it should be, because a lot of people I know are having trouble getting information. So maybe you will put that on the website, what this lawyer has just told us.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, we will look at that. I'm sure it's already on the website. If it's not, we will put it on.

Mr. Paul Miller: I doubt it.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let's look at it.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to see that. So you'll commit to that?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Yes, let's look at it.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay.

Mr. Don Fawcett: The other important thing is that FIPPA is a statute that's administered—

Mr. Paul Miller: I know what it is.

Mr. Don Fawcett: Okay.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm setting you up. Go ahead.

Mr. Don Fawcett: I'll try to help you out, then. PHIPA, of course, is—

Mr. Paul Miller: Help me set you up? That's good. I like that.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's like a prosecuting attorney—

Mr. Don Fawcett: Yes. We're not often in this position, right?

Mr. Paul Miller: I missed my calling. Go ahead.

Mr. Don Fawcett: And PHIPA, of course, is a health-administered statute, right?

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes.

Mr. Don Fawcett: The intersection is—the way the two acts relate is, personal health information is governed by PHIPA; the administrative records of hospitals are governed by FIPPA.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay. Do you think there's a bit of a conflict there, as a lawyer?

Mr. Don Fawcett: No. I think—

Mr. Paul Miller: One set of records—let me get this straight; sorry for interrupting. One group has control over one section of the FIO, and the other group has different connections, whether it be federally or whatever, for information under the privacy act—there is a federal Privacy Act too. So I'm saying that now we've got three bodies, and I only need one to say, "Mr. Miller, you can have this information," or, "You can't." So now we've got three.

How many people are involved in that? How much does it cost the ministry a year? I see here thousands and thousands of requests a year in this book that you've just given me. Where does all this come together to be

efficient? Where is the accountability, Minister? I don't see any here—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): There's two minutes left, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Paul Miller: —in reference to the individual making the request. It appears there are two roads to go. I'm sure the public doesn't know about the one. Well, I knew about it, but it's the first time I've heard it said publicly—you will supply me with that information on your website, if it's there—to allow them to appeal a decision made by a board in a hospital or the administration staff of the hospital which may contravene my needs as an individual in this province.

I really think there are too many hands in the pie, and I think that basically this could be done by one person, whether it's the Integrity Commissioner or, I don't know, whoever you want to appoint to do this. You want to save money? This sounds like a good way to save money, because it's pretty poor if I have to go to a solicitor to get information out of my own government about my own health through the bodies that you have named.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think you can get the information that you need about your health, and even the Premier has said—I think he said it today—that we want to make it even easier for people to get their own health information, because that will improve the health of the people.

But I think the issue here is the discussion regarding the quality of care that relates to you, how that happens in the hospital setting. I think that's where the information—you know, the changes that were made. It's not about getting the information—you can get your information—but regarding what kind of quality care should happen in the hospital. That's where the discussion is.

The other is that getting the information under freedom of information, ordinary information—not ordinary, but any information—is different from getting your health information.

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't think it is at all; I beg to differ.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: That's your opinion, but I'm saying—

Mr. Paul Miller: Frankly, I really don't care who's got the information; I just want it for my own personal—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: That's true, but you just make a request and you get that, right, whether it's under this legislation or under different legislation.

Mr. Paul Miller: You don't, but anyway—

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): That concludes the third party's time at this time.

We will now have about 13 or 14 minutes for the government members to finish up the proceedings today.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I'd just like to compare government services now with what they were when I was elected in 2003. I can remember the system then. Ontario families have a level of expectation of the services they receive from the government of Ontario. More than ever before, Ontarians

expect to receive high value for their government services, and they expect the service to be at a par with the private sector. That's where you come from and that's where I come from, the private sector.

I know that ServiceOntario has been addressing a number of issues, such as long lines and wait times for core services, as well as issues like having to visit multiple locations for driver licences and health cards, which was the scenario in 2003. Fixing it wasn't easy. It didn't happen overnight. It took hard work and some out-of-the-box thinking, and having been your parliamentary assistant in transportation, I knew that was one of your strengths.

It took a service revolution involving a number of initiatives to make it easier for individuals, families and businesses to access government information and services. I know that the changes that were made through these efforts have been well received by Ontarians. I know that the level of services in Orléans is well appreciated, and the number of complaints—I don't recall getting a complaint in the last three or four months about government services. I know everybody is waiting for that special driver's licence for non-drivers, and we had a good indication from Minister Wynne in the Legislature that that is coming up within this decade—“Early in this decade,” I think, was her answer.

So it took a service revolution involving a number of initiatives to make it easier for individuals, families and businesses to access government information services. I know that the changes that were made through these efforts have been well received. Constituents in my riding are very pleased with the level of service and the broader range of offerings of ServiceOntario. They have told me they didn't like having to travel to separate locations to get health cards, driver licences and services, so with the expansion from only 37 health-card-issuing offices under the previous government to almost 300 offices under the McGuinty government, we certainly have a good system.

Could you, the minister, please share some more details about how ServiceOntario delivers the valuable government services that millions of Ontario families rely on every day?

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I'd just like to add, as well, that we've heard a lot of discussions around the opposition Conservatives saying they would close the health integration networks, put a stop to full-day kindergarten, kill the Samsung investments in Ontario and end the FIT contracts. You know that our solar is predicted to supply only 1% to 1.5% in 2030. It's not as if we were going into it to supply 10% or 20%—1% of our needs in 2030 will be supplied by solar. We're leading North America in looking at these new green clean energies—

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order, Mr. Chair: I raise this issue because you're not talking about your government policy; you're reading a speech—

Mr. Phil McNeely: I lost a lot of my time last time—

Mr. John O'Toole: No, I have to interfere here. These aren't questions. They're accusing the opposition, of

which they know nothing about—nothing has been announced. So you have to retract, Mr. McNeely.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Mr. O'Toole, he can use his time that way. Okay?

Go ahead, Mr. McNeely.

Mr. Phil McNeely: You had your time.

So the Conservative opposition have already killed jobs through their lack-of-plan approach. They've created insecurity in the markets. I'd like to hear from you, as a former businessman, what you think the erratic messaging from the Conservative Party is doing to business in Ontario.

Mr. John O'Toole: Who wrote this for you, Phil?

Mr. Phil McNeely: It's my handwriting, John. It's my handwriting. Do you want me to write some stuff for you? It might be better.

I was in this room with the Minister of Revenue, and even though the whole world knows that we're creating jobs through the harmonization of our taxes and that whole tax reform package—everybody supports us, including Harper, Flaherty and John Tory. Everybody can see that we're going in the right direction. I'd just like your comments on that, as well as the service improvements you've made, Minister.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Please, guys. Let the government members work with the minister, okay?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think the service expectations today from the public are much different than what they used to be. The public expects us to provide services efficiently and in a cost-effective manner to the people of Ontario. That's what we need to do.

We all know that when we took power in this province, health cards were delivered by the Ministry of Health; driver's licences, vehicle stickers and all that were delivered by the Ministry of Transportation. And you remember, in those days, we used to have those PIN offices which used to deliver those services. We had issues with the PIN offices, as well, and their compensation. We needed to come up with a different structure so that people could see that they can go to one office and they can get all their services. In 2006, the mandate was given to ServiceOntario that they should become the delivery arm of the government, from the service point of view.

What we have done is we have taken our private issuing network that we used to have and we have taken our government offices that used to provide services and we basically completely overhauled them. Now we have about 300 offices that not only provide driver's licences and vehicle stickers but also provide health cards. In addition to that, they provide all other services—like if you want a fishing licence; even the land registry offices are in these offices. These offices are across the province. Two thirds of these offices are, in fact, private and one third are owned by the government.

This service delivery model has actually worked quite well and is being watched quite keenly by other levels of government as well. It's not only that we have provided

these services now, but you can actually have routine health card services in 300 offices, rather than the very limited offices where we used to provide services before.

We are moving a little bit further than that. We are providing service guarantees on the services we provide. For example, birth certificates: You used to have at least a six-month wait to get a birth certificate before. We are now providing guarantees for birth certificates. You can get a birth certificate in less than 15 working days. We have extended these service guarantees. This is one of the only governments that provides a refund of the fees if we don't meet those service guarantees. These service guarantees are now also extended to death certificates and marriage certificates. Also, if they want to get some information or literature from the government, we can provide them that information.

In addition to that, what we are now doing is basically modernizing how we deliver services to Ontarians. We are extending the hours of service as well. Now the offices are open in the evenings; they're also open on Saturdays, depending upon the need and where the office is located. Those are some of the things that we are doing, but we need to continuously improve the way we deliver these services. That's why we need to re-look at the whole ServiceOntario model and see where we go with it.

But these are the kinds of services that, when people want to invest in Ontario, they actually look at to see how these services are being provided. If the ServiceOntario model works for people, then the government works for people, right? When people look at these services, they say, "Hey, Ontario's open for businesses," and they'll want to make more foreign direct investment in Ontario. When they make foreign direct investment, it creates jobs. That's where I think all these deals that you're talking about also fall in.

From my point of view as a former businessman, I will say that we need to create the right environment for businesses to succeed. If we don't create the right environment for businesses to succeed, businesses or the investors have options on where they need to make investment. It doesn't have to be Ontario, it can be anywhere. We need to attract those investments to Ontario. That's why we're taking this very seriously and that's why we're looking at options, how we can work with other levels of government, like the municipal governments and the federal government, and the private sector as well, and see how we can even improve the service model that we are working on.

I'm going to ask the deputy minister and maybe he can talk a little bit in detail about the kinds of services that we are providing and how they are making a difference in the lives of Ontarians and helping us attract investment in this province.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): You've got about three minutes this time and then we'll be finishing up for the day, Deputy.

Mr. Bob Stark: Okay, I'll be quick.

Let me just elaborate a little bit on the convenience of one-stop shopping, if you will, for government services,

which is a significant initiative that we undertook this past year. As you identified, we've moved from 27 permanent health offices to almost 300 locations where you can get routine services. What that means for rural communities is that we've expanded from two locations in the rural communities to 163 where you can get routine health services, and in the north from six locations to 67. Our access has dramatically improved this past year, and we've done that by consolidating specialized networks into one integrated network, which, by the way, has also saved us operating costs going forward. It's not only improved service but it has positioned us more effectively going forward.

I'd also just like to highlight one of the services that is extremely popular with our customers and that's the new-born registration service, which is a partnership between the federal level of government and the province that allows new parents to go online, register the birth of their child, request a birth certificate and request a SIN card. We respond to that within a couple of weeks, both at the federal and provincial level.

This past year, we added the capability, with the help of CRA, to also apply for child tax benefits. It's now quite a comprehensive service, and I can tell you that new parents absolutely love it. The feedback is extremely positive.

The minister mentioned our service guarantees. Outside of our service guarantees, we are also looking at ways to allow citizens to use online services and for us to fulfill them in a traditional way. You can now renew your vehicle registration online and we will send you the validation sticker which goes on your licence plates, and typically that's in your hands within five days—another great example of a service improvement.

I should also tell you that, overall, our service guarantees are performing at well over 99.5% of the time. In fact, our record to date is that 99.8% of the time we meet those money-back service guarantees.

Let me just finish up; I suspect my time is short here.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): You've got another—go ahead.

Mr. Bob Stark: We regularly survey our customers quarterly. We do this in an appropriate way, independent of ServiceOntario, and we ask them to give us feedback on the service experience they've had with us. We do that shortly after they have interacted with us. I'm delighted to share with you that between 2008 and today, our overall satisfaction levels have improved from 75% of our customers satisfied, which is pretty good, to 93%. In fact, with our new, integrated, one-stop delivery network, 97% of customers who interact with us face to face in those locations are satisfied with their interaction with us; 89% are very satisfied with the interaction.

It seems that the operating model that we've adopted is meeting the needs of citizens across the province. As the minister said, this is an ongoing challenge; you never get finished in the service business. We use this survey information to feed back to ourselves ways to improve the service, and hopefully we'll close those gaps.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you very much for that. It is reflected in our riding offices that you are doing a very good job.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: We are also starting to measure the wait times as well.

The Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Thank you very much. That will conclude today's proceedings. We'll come back tomorrow. The government members will have about six minutes remaining, and that will put us down to about two hours and 49 minutes remaining in estimates altogether, starting tomorrow at 3:45.

I apologize today, ladies and gentlemen. So many things were going on in the House and we got a late start. We might have gotten caught up on this.

Anyhow, thank you very much to the minister and to all the ministry staff.

With that, we'll adjourn until tomorrow afternoon after routine proceedings.

The committee adjourned at 1801.

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