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of Ontario
Second Session, 39th Parliament

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**Official Report
of Debates
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**Journal
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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 10 May 2011

Mardi 10 mai 2011

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 10 May 2011

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER TOMORROW
FOR ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2011
LOI DE 2011 SUR DES LENDEMAINS
MEILLEURS POUR L'ONTARIO
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Phillips, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act respecting 2011 Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 173, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires de 2011, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I will be relatively brief, in that my colleague the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Finance will want to speak more fully on this. Briefly, the budget, and then the budget bill which implements the portions of the budget that need legislation, are designed to accomplish, really, among other things, five key things.

To continue to see job creation: I think members on all sides were very happy last Friday with the job creation numbers that we saw in the province of Ontario. Ontario now has recovered all the jobs lost in the recession, which is, by the way, not the case in other jurisdictions—in the US, in the UK and elsewhere. That was good news on Friday, and I think it indicates that the economy has turned the corner. We look forward to a continuation of job creation.

The budget bill also protects many of the important things that we want to see in education: the addition of, I think, 60,000 additional college and university spaces—very much an investment for Ontario's future—and the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

We're also continuing to make progress in the health care area, with 90,000 more breast cancer screening exams and something that the committee on mental health, the all-party committee, strongly recommended,

and that is significant advances in children's mental health. It's certainly something all of us heard in the pre-budget consultations.

Also, the budget bill helps to continue with the plan to eliminate our deficit. The 2010-11 deficit is now \$3 billion lower than we forecast a year ago, which is good news. We have a plan in the budget and the budget bill to eliminate the deficit. We have a very well-regarded Ontario individual, called Don Drummond, who has terrific background experience and who will be looking at something called the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. We look forward to his work.

Finally, the budget bill and the budget have a solid plan for eliminating the deficit but, at the same time, protecting what we regard as essential public services: the education area, health care, infrastructure, our relationship with our municipalities, the environment and elsewhere.

With those brief remarks, the debate will continue. As I say, I look forward to our parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Finance speaking further on this this morning.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to be able to join in the debate today on Bill 173, the budget bill. I should note right off the top that it's a big bill—I've got the binder on it right here—with some 41 different schedules. Of course, it's been time-allocated, so for third reading we have all of an hour to debate it. It means, with sharing my time with my other committee member, the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, I get all of 10 minutes to discuss this bill.

There was all of one day of public hearings, with very little notice, so as a member of the public or someone interested in the budget process you had to be on your toes to even know that it was happening and be quick enough to be able to make a submission. Despite that, we did have one full day of public hearings, but certainly the new theme for the government these days seems to be secrecy, and I'll discuss that as it relates to this bill.

We just learned this week, with regard to the wage freeze announced in last year's budget, that the McGuinty government actually had signed a deal with OPSEU, affecting some 38,000 people, that gives them a secret pay increase of 1% in 2012—conveniently beyond the next election.

We look at the track record of this government: They passed the G20 law in secrecy, and the general public was in the dark about that particular law. As the oppos-

ition, we continue to ask questions about the secret Samsung deal, the \$7-billion deal that is sure to drive electricity bills that families and seniors are paying even higher. We've been asking questions after the sunshine list came out and Ron Sapsford, who hasn't worked for the Ministry of Health for a couple of years, appeared on it. I believe he received \$762,000 last year, but it seems to be a secret why he received this money. We've been asking questions about that. It goes on and on: the details of the government's change of mind on the Oakville generation plant. There are many, many more examples.

But as it pertains to this bill, in the short time I have available to speak: Of the 41 schedules, schedule 15 garnered the most interest at the public hearings stage. That has to do with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act; an exemption under FIPPA for health care professionals on hospital committees to ensure medical concerns are encouraged; to enable evaluation of quality of health care programs and services provided by a hospital. There was a tremendous volume of feedback to the inclusion of this schedule from individuals and families.

It is increasingly clear that the health care community is divided on the topic of FIPPA exemptions provided in schedule 15. Registered nurses, the Ontario Nurses' Association, are against exempting hospital committees from freedom-of-information requests. I received more than 500 emails from nurses absolutely opposed to this secrecy provision in schedule 15. One of those reads:

"I write to record my belief that the hospital secrecy amendment is harmful to public trust in the health care system. It undermines transparency and accountability. The process by which this amendment is now buried in budget Bill 173 is anti-democratic. If this amendment passes, I believe that the information which will be off limits may put lives at risk." That's from one of the 500 nurses that I received emails from.

0910

I was also copied on another letter from the Service Employees International Union, one of the top health care unions in Canada. They represent more than 50,000 health care and community service workers across the country. You'd think the people working the system might be opposed to this transparency that would come about, but they're very much against this hospital secrecy provision. Here is some of what they had to say to the head of the Ontario Hospital Association:

"We welcome your effort at open dialogue, and always appreciate the opportunity for constructive engagement with fellow health care stakeholders. Indeed, we encourage the CEOs of Ontario hospitals to extend this same spirit of openness to the public when information about quality of care is being requested. We [the SEIU] are committed to improving value and quality for Ontarians through evidence-based health care.

"Giving CEOs back the power to exempt information on quality from public disclosure would seriously undermine this progress, weakening accountability and undermining the drive for quality. That is why we are encour-

aging hospitals CEOs to embrace change and accept that the culture of entitlement and secrecy must end. Indeed, as an organization that receives public funding and plays such a key role in our public hospital system, we would encourage the OHA itself to meet the same standards of transparency expected of its members and voluntarily submit itself to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

"Evidence-based research on quality of care improvement efforts directs us to the fact that it is in the interest of Ontarians that hospitals disclose all quality data—excluding identifying information—so the public knows what publicly funded hospitals are doing to improve quality of care in their facilities. Current legislation ensures the protection of hospital medical staff and the support of a safe environment to discuss quality of care improvement efforts.

"Schedule 15 will hinder quality improvement efforts in hospitals. Simply put, there is abundant evidence that opening hospital performance data will improve quality of care."

That's signed by Eoin Callan, SEIU health care.

As I mentioned earlier, families are writing to express concern. I've received this email from a parent:

"I have been made aware of Bill 173 s15 that you are trying to pass. As a mother of an autistic child I am horrified at the implication of secrecy.

"My career is in the health care field and I am so against the legislation taking effect....

"Nurses and doctors should not be allowed to hide any information of patients suffering or dying from their errors, lack of judgment or negligence. Health care professionals should not be excused from this.

"This is so terrifying and has to be stopped. It affects all of our lives."

I think the lack of transparency that hundreds are writing to us about is a very real concern. It's a point that was underscored again last week, as I mentioned previously, with the news about Mr. McGuinty's secret wage deal for Ontario public service employees: an adjustment of 1% on top of a scheduled wage increase of 2% for 2012. That's in contrast to Mr. McGuinty's statement on the need to rein in spending.

The document came to light because the chairwoman of the Ontario Labour Relations Board rejected the government's request to permanently seal records of an adjustment that is over and above a four-year collective agreement struck between OPSEU and the government back in 2008. It has many employers wondering out loud about the other side deals that the McGuinty government has made. We asked a question yesterday in the Legislature about the many groups supporting the Working Families Coalition; if they're getting special deals on the side from the McGuinty government that are, once again, secret.

The chair of the Toronto Police Services Board said, "It doesn't help anybody when there has been a secret arrangement that has to come out in this way."

The CEO of Windsor Regional Hospital commented that the deal makes it difficult for him to continue

preaching restraint at his hospital, where non-unionized workers' pay has been frozen for five years. This back-room deal is just another example of the secretive nature of the McGuinty government.

Madam Speaker, I can see I'm just about out of time, so I'm not even going to be able to get through my prepared notes. I would just like to talk about some other schedules briefly in the minute and a half I have left.

Schedule 17 is the Gaming Control Act. It sets gaming standards and requires the OLC to follow registrar standards for rules of play and regulation. It incorporates gaming-related offences.

We heard from Dave Bryans, president of the Ontario Convenience Stores Association. He commented that this schedule appears to be quietly opening the floodgates for Internet gaming without the announced consultation process with all stakeholders. They want to know if the consultation promised by the government in the area of Internet gaming will proceed. That's certainly a valid concern, whether it's just going to be another secret process.

Just like the last finance bill, this has many, many different schedules; there are 41 in total. Schedule 14 makes changes to the Estate Administration Tax Act. That's another one that looks like it's a vehicle to collect more tax. Schedule 33 authorizes new borrowing of \$28.3 billion to feed the McGuinty government's tax-and-spend ways.

I've mentioned that they've failed at restraint so that they're again going to have a double-digit deficit this year of some \$16 billion. They borrowed \$39 billion last year. They're on track to double the debt of the province, spending \$10.2 billion on interest this year to service the debt they've built up. That's more than they spend on the whole post-secondary education sector. This bill allows them to borrow another \$28.3 billion to continue with their tax-and-spend ways.

Madam Speaker, so that I allow time for the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, I will conclude that the PC Party will not be supporting this McGuinty government budget bill that facilitates their overspending tax-and-spend ways and allows them to continue with their hospital secrecy provisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? We're going in rotation. Are you going to go?

Mr. Toby Barrett: We're sharing time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay. The member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Norm Miller: We're supposed to go in rotation.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Whatever you'd like.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

My point in this debate, to borrow from the title of the bill, is that transparency is key to a healthy tomorrow for Ontario. Sunshine is the best disinfectant, and while most budget deliberations obviously focus on spending plans, our finance committee proceedings were sidetracked recently by a two-line amendment this government hoped to bury. I'm referring to the hospital secrecy law that was snuck in by this McGuinty government. Schedule 15 of Bill 173, the Better Tomorrow for Ontario Act, changes the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy

Act and does threaten to derail transparency and accountability measures that were gained just a few months ago, just before Christmas.

As far as schedule 15 goes, it's an amendment to FIPPA, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It's a small, fairly discreet line in the overall budget bill, but it's one that has garnered considerable attention, as we just heard from the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. For example, I'd suggest people Twitter Cybele Sack at Right2SafeCare.

Originally, Bill 122 was brought in to clean house after the eHealth scandal, put hospitals under FIPPA and ban the use of taxpayer-funded lobbyists. Here we are today with a hospital secrecy bill buried in a budget. It's clearly not a budgetary item—and this is alarming; it's not a budgetary item at all. Schedule 15 has no business being in this legislation. That's why we voted against it. We truly question the placement of this line in the budget bill.

We understand that there are groups that lobbied for this in the legislation. They did so without any public consultation. None of them testified before the finance committee. We only had one day of hearings, on short notice. People had very little time to prepare.

As I've indicated, this amendment takes aim at hospital transparency measures—as were called for just last December in the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act—to enable hospitals to shield from public scrutiny any information about quality of care produced for or by a hospital committee. Some may recall that the 2010 accountability act was a response, again, to that series of revelations that offended taxpayers: the lavish spending by consultants and executives and, of course, the eHealth scandal.

0920

Now we have this amendment, introduced March 29. It was introduced due to what the Minister of Health publicly acknowledged was a campaign of persuasion on the part of hospital CEOs. We heard in committee that CEOs took in 10% to 14% pay increases at a time when hospital budgets were increasing by about 1.5%. At the time, the Minister of Health described the accountability act as a process of pulling out the fridge to see what's behind: "It's not something you want to do, there might be a mess back there, but at the end of the day, it has to be done." And again, as I heard on committee, "You have to bring sunlight and you have to be ready to expose and to clean up misuse of public funds that would otherwise erode public confidence." Again, I'll quote Louis Brandeis: "Sunshine is the best disinfectant."

But now, five months forward, on the finance committee, both PC colleague Norm Miller, NDP Peter Tabuns and myself were outvoted in our attempt to delete schedule 15, clearly a government move to block that sunshine I was talking about and reverse themselves as far as cleaning up the mess behind the refrigerator.

A number of witnesses came forward, a number from my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk. Dunnville's Ed Vander Vegte pointed out to members of the committee that

“access to all medical records is necessary to determine if negligence has indeed occurred. Access to medical information is also necessary to determine if the negligence is ongoing and how many patients have been affected.”

Another constituent, Kim Hessels from Dunnville, testified that schedule 15 appears to “discriminate against the vulnerable as they prioritize resources above patient safety....

“It seems clear to me that schedule 15 will prevent me and others from gaining access to documents to better understand how our hospitals are run regarding who gets care and who does not.”

Adding to the secrecy concerns was the recent report from a large law firm advising hospitals to avoid any eHealth-type scandals by “cleansing” files before they become publicly available. There was a four-page memo that said hospitals face “significant reputational risks” from freedom of information legislation and they advised hospitals to consider “cleansing existing files on or before December 31, 2011.”

It is worth noting that a year ago, we in opposition introduced the Truth in Government Act, proposing measures to create more openness and more accountability across all of government, including hospitals. Regrettably, at the time, government members voted against taxpayer protection and the greater accountability measures that were found in that particular piece of legislation.

As Kim Hessels concluded in her deputation before the finance committee, “I believe it is time for Ontario citizens to have full transparency and accountability in all matters related to the health care they receive....

“We may not have all the answers or the right answers, but as parents and as citizens, we’d like to be involved.”

Here is another opinion. This is from Ken Anderson. He’s from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario. I’ll quote Ken Anderson: “I would like to emphasize that designating hospitals as institutions under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act would not interfere with the effective and efficient delivery of health care.”

As we were told during hearings, if you want to ensure open, accountable and transparent hospitals and to embrace the spirit of freedom of information legislation, you’ll stop Bill 173.

This from Justice La Forest of the Supreme Court of Canada: “The overarching purpose of access-to-information legislation is to facilitate democracy.” It helps “to ensure that citizens have the information required to participate meaningfully in the democratic process and that politicians and bureaucrats remain accountable to the citizenry.”

Just to wrap up, our system of democracy and our access to information are being subverted by an amendment like this hospital secrecy law. The public needs access to hospital quality information so they can shed light on the problems and work with government and with all concerned to fix them. No more hiding—not by

cleansing records and not by bringing in this hospital secrecy law.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It’s my pleasure to rise today, and I want to note that Madame Gélinas will be speaking as well to this bill. We will be sharing our time.

Mr. Phillips, the minister without portfolio, started off his speech by talking about what are seen by the Liberals as their accomplishments in government. He talked about the recovery of jobs lost in the recession. I want to note that prior to the recession, it was widely recognized and documented statistically that we had lost 200,000 good-paying jobs in Ontario. Those jobs have not been recovered.

If in fact you look at job creation in this province over the last few years, a very large percentage of the jobs that have been created are part-time, insecure, low-paying jobs. What we have seen with this government in its term in office is an ongoing decline of some of the basic economic components of Ontario’s prosperity. What we have seen is a reduction in the standard of living and in the well-being of families across this province, most sharply expressed in areas like northern Ontario, Windsor and the Niagara region. That is not a record to be proud of.

The government spoke about the number of spaces that have been created in colleges and universities. This morning I was listening to Metro Morning: a labour market specialist talking about how many of those people who graduated are now serving coffee or working at the sock counter in Walmart. People who have spent a lot of money and invested a lot of time to get an education are now carrying this huge debt burden and are not able to get the kind of work that reflects their skills, their commitment and what they could actually give to this society. That reduction in opportunities, that burden of debt put on the next generation, is a huge waste of the talent of the people of this province and an injustice to young people in Ontario who have been stuck with a debt that they will have a great deal of difficulty paying off in the years to come. In some quarters, some authors and some social commentators are starting to refer to this generation as the lost generation: people whose skills and talents are not being employed.

I want to say that this government as well speaks to the whole question of all-day kindergarten, talks to the implementation—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It seems that some on the other side are a bit thin-skinned when we talk about their real record. They get a bit thin-skinned.

When we talk about all-day kindergarten—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

When we talk about all-day kindergarten and the implementation of Dr. Charles Pascal’s vision, what we have in fact from this government is a cherry-picking of some elements that need to be there. I think it makes

sense to expand all-day learning so that more children are allowed to attend, but there is an important part that was forgotten when that program was put in place.

0930

That important part is the existence of the current regime, the current network of daycare centres. I talked to those parents. I've gone and talked to the administrators. Time after time after time, I'm told that those daycare centres are imperilled by rising costs because the four-year-olds and five-year-olds who move out of those centres into all-day kindergarten are going to have to be replaced by younger children, whose care is more expensive. Parents who are already facing substantial burdens with the cost of child care are facing even higher costs.

This government has not addressed their plight. Many of them, even if they could have their parents afford to pay the higher fees, find themselves in a situation where they don't have the capital dollars to rebuild their centres so they can accommodate the younger children. They need more nap rooms, they need more washroom and cleaning facilities, and they need more natural light—all of which are reasonable but none of which have been provided for. In fact, we may see a greater lack of availability of child care spaces for many people in this society than we had in the past. That is rolling backwards.

This budget bill is meant to implement a budget that has been debated earlier in this Legislature, a budget that brings into place corporate tax cuts that continue a process that has gone on throughout this decade of reducing the share the corporations pay to make sure that our health care system is in place, that we have law enforcement and that we have the social services necessary to deal with those in our society who are vulnerable. Those corporate tax cuts have been matched at the same time, according to Statistics Canada, with an ongoing decline in investment in Ontario and across this country. We have seen a decline in investment in plants and machinery.

There is not a benefit that comes in economic investment from those corporate tax cuts, and yet this government continues in that race to the bottom, undermining our economic well-being, undermining the formation of capital needed to actually make ours a successful economy. This government has decided to buy into a particular ideology that doesn't reflect the reality of how companies invest and why they invest in jurisdictions. They invest in places that are well run and that have predictable returns on investment. They invest in places where people are well trained. They don't invest in places where things start coming apart because there isn't enough money in the public sector, in the larger infrastructure, to actually allow them to function well.

The bill that we have here has a section, 14, addressing all-day kindergarten. There is a great problem in that the funds weren't provided to schools to provide after-school care, before-school care and summer care for children.

This bill allows third party operators into the schools to provide that care. What this bill also provides is that

those operators can be for-profit child care. This is a major break with the history of this province. This is a major break in our commitment to our children.

You can have the legislative library do the research for you. You can go to social commentators. You can go to universities and to academics who specialize in early childhood education. Study after study after study shows that non-profit and publicly-run daycare is of higher quality and has better outcomes for children.

But that isn't assured in this bill. In fact, what happens in this bill is that the door is thrown open to for-profit child educators. The Walmarts of child care now have no legal impediment to going in and setting up in schools. When you talk to people in the child care sector, what that says to them is that there will be an incredible push-down in qualifications, in quality and in wages.

This is a major mistake on the part of this government—a major mistake. This should not have been in this bill. The amendment that I put forward saying that the daycare providers had to be non-profit or municipal was rejected by this government. That is a mistake and a turning of the back on the children and families of this province.

Schedule 32 of this bill, the bringing together of Infrastructure Ontario, Ontario lands and a number of other subsidiary corporations: We see this as the opening of the door to P3s, public-private partnerships, on a far broader scale than we've seen in the past. Infrastructure Ontario has become anonymous—synonymous, sorry; anonymous only in some circles—synonymous with public-private partnerships. Again, the reality, shown by organizations like the Ontario Health Coalition, is that what you get out of those—and we've seen this in the hospital sector—is less hospital care and higher costs. This model, which allows governments to move costs off their balance sheet, puts the burden back on patients and puts the burden back on society. This move by the government will make this society more expensive and will ensure that it has fewer services in health care and in other fields. That was a major mistake in this bill.

Schedule 15, which my colleague Madame Gélinas will speak to, about freedom of information in hospitals—she will talk about the hospitals. I will just note that yesterday we raised this whole question of the politicization of the freedom-of-information process. That whole covering-up of information seems to be a central part of this government's operational strategy. No one should be surprised—no one should be happy, but no one should be surprised—that this was appended to a budget bill. It's pretty standard operating procedure that we've seen over the last number of years.

The whole question of the commission on the reform of public services: There are a number of ways one can look at this. I think that what we should expect from it is a commission that will propose a further hollowing-out of public services in Ontario.

I note that it reports after the October 6 election, so in pamphlets, in flyers and in television ads the government can say, "We have a plan. We're working on it. Some-

thing good will happen.” But I think the simple reality is that this is another step forward in making Ontario less effective in the provision of public services, a jurisdiction that will not have the depth in its public service to carry out the functions—protection of the environment, promotion of good health, protection of public health—that it actually needs. That is a huge problem with this bill.

I want to say that this government, when it was elected, was given an electricity system that was partially privatized, on its way to full privatization; an electricity system in which energy traders started calling the shots; an electricity system in which private power operators could make money by turning their plants on and off, driving up the price of electricity. I’m saying that because the Ontario Energy Board recently noted that there were private power operators in Ontario who were turning off their plants and turning them on again to get bonuses, to get extra money. They estimated the loss of revenue to the people of Ontario in the tens of millions.

0940

A study earlier this year, reported in the *Toronto Star*, noted that Ontarians were subsidizing private power traders to the tune of \$200 million a year over a five-year period—a billion dollars. That is the kind of economic gains that this government has been engaged in: a bleeding of cash out of the pockets of ordinary Ontarians, an undermining of our economic prosperity to help those who they deem to be closer to them politically and closer to them economically, but certainly not those who are building this province and who need to have the health care, the social services, the education and the social supports to engage in society-building.

I urge everyone in this Legislature to vote against this budget bill. It’s a bill that promotes secrecy, that undermines public child care, that undermines public ownership and financing of hospitals, and that advances an agenda that is making Ontario, or will make Ontario, a less prosperous place, a less promising place. This budget is not one that anyone can be proud of.

Thank you, and I will turn my time over to my colleague.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to take people back to the fall of 2010—actually, before this—when we were reading the headlines as to people finding out about hospitals using lobbyists and consultants. I asked the Auditor General to do a study and to look at how much money our hospitals and other health care agencies were spending on lobbyists and on consultants, and he did. He did a good job. He looked at what was happening and he tabled his report in this House last fall.

The findings were rather disappointing, to say the least. It is one of those that we can call a scathing report, where we saw that millions of dollars handled by our health care system that we thought had been invested into care were really going to well-connected consultants, were going to lobbyists who had nothing to do with care at all.

The government reacted, and they reacted quickly. They brought forward a new bill where they banned that kind of behaviour and where they promised, after years of lobbying, that hospitals would finally be brought under freedom of access of information. You see, people have been waiting for a long time to find out what is going on in our hospitals. Life and death happen in our hospitals every day. It’s happening right now. It is happening under the care of human beings who, like every other human being on earth, make mistakes. Yet people who need closure, people who have gone through an event, who have put in a complaint and had the hospitals look after this complaint, could not get closure. They could never get the full information of what is going on in our hospitals. They can turn to the Ombudsman all they want; the Ombudsman doesn’t have jurisdiction over our hospitals.

But finally, with this bill, freedom of access of information was to come. Hospitals were to be covered as of 2012—after the election, I know, but at least it was coming. There was hope at the end of the tunnel. And then, while we were talking on the bill, they tried to backtrack. Good for us: They needed unanimous consent. I was there and I did not give unanimous consent. This idea of backtracking on something that we had been waiting such a long time for—there was no way I was having any part of this. Hospitals were to come under freedom of access of information, and this is the way it should be.

Then came the budget. I read the French part; it’s 300 pages. Buried in there, in one little wee paragraph that has nothing to do with budgeting, they were taking a big part of hospital information away from freedom of access of information. What we have been waiting for so many years to get, what all of those families out there who need closure because of an adverse effect—they were not going to get closure anymore. They were not going to, and it was in a budget, of all places.

Then the budget bill comes out, Bill 173, and here it is on page 31 in black and white for all to see: What we had waited such a long time for is going to be taken away. It’s going to be taken away because now we are giving the hospitals an out—and this out can be as huge as a Mack truck, if you want it to be. They say that if it has to do with quality improvement, you don’t have to share it with the people. Well, let me tell you what that turns out to be.

Many hospitals in Ontario practise what we call continuous quality improvement—we call it CQI—which basically means that everything we do, every step we take, every movement we make, every act we do in the hospitals is made to improve quality. This is a very good concept: It drives quality; it improves the care that people in hospitals give to people. But what does that mean? That means that everything they do and everything they say can be labelled as “improving quality,” and with schedule 15 it won’t be accessible to freedom of information anymore. That means that everything a hospital does is not covered by FOI, and we’re back to square one.

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

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure this morning, on behalf of my colleague the Honourable Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance, to rise to speak on Bill 173, the Better Tomorrow for Ontario Act, 2011.

In the 2011 Ontario budget, the McGuinty government is building on the progress that we've already made. Since our government took office in 2003, we've remained firm in our commitment to improve the provincial economy and to protect the public services that the people of Ontario have come to rely upon.

Our government's record speaks for itself. To make Ontario's economy more competitive for current and future generations, we've modernized Ontario's tax system. We've rebuilt the electricity system into one that is clean, modern and reliable. Our government has repaired and rebuilt the province's schools, colleges and universities; our hospitals; and our roads and bridges after years of neglect. We've partnered with private sector businesses to help create and protect job growth, as well as to ensure a strong climate for investment in Ontario. Our government has also increased the number of students in our world-class post-secondary institutions. We have enhanced skills training to help our unemployed workers find new careers.

The Better Tomorrow for Ontario Act includes measures to build on the progress that we've already made in these areas. The McGuinty government has a realistic and responsible plan to eliminate the deficit while protecting our schools and hospitals and also promoting economic growth. Ontario's success depends on it. Our government is tackling the deficit with determination but not putting our vital public services at risk or resorting to any arbitrary or across-the-board cuts.

We just don't believe that we can cut our way to a better tomorrow. You just can't take billions of dollars out of government revenue streams and not compromise vital front-line services that our Ontario families rely upon.

We have a plan, and that plan is realistic, it's responsible and it's focused on people. The McGuinty government's plan is all about ensuring that we invest in Ontarians by giving them the best education, the best health care, the best infrastructure, the best electricity supply and the best tax advantages that we can. Throughout the global economic recession, we never lost focus on what's important: That's Ontario families, businesses, jobs and our economic growth.

The recent job numbers from Statistics Canada show that our plan is working. In April alone, Ontario's employment jumped by almost 55,000 new jobs. We've now regained 114% of the jobs that were lost during the recession. Our government is also accelerating its plan to enhance public sector efficiency and improve productivity by streamlining programs and identifying new models of service delivery. We will continue to explore new ways to export, to create value from Ontario's excellence in delivering those public services that are recognized as being the best in the world.

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From Glengarry–Prescott–Russell to Kenora to Chatham–Kent–Essex to Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and even Kitchener–Conestoga, we have listened to Ontarians and put together a responsible plan. With this in mind, we're building on our plan to return Ontario's finances to balance while, at the same time, protecting the gains that we have made since coming into office. Our government is committed to improving Ontario's economy to make it more competitive, both currently and for future generations. We will assure ourselves of a good quality of life and build a brighter future for our children and for our grandchildren.

Full-day kindergarten is a particularly noteworthy measure contained in this bill. We've known for a long time that a strong start in school makes for a strong finish. A child's early formative years are the cornerstone for their future, and that is why the McGuinty government chose to introduce full-day kindergarten. It's a key part of the government's plan to help Ontario's children get the best possible start and, of course, to help busy parents save time and money. This school year, full-day kindergarten is available in about 600 schools, for up to 35,000 Ontario children. In September 2011, it will be available in an additional 200 schools, benefiting up to 50,000 children. The program will be fully in place by September 2014, benefiting about 247,000 children in the province of Ontario. It's the first program of its kind in North America and we're very proud of that achievement.

Our education system is consistently ranked best in the world. This new program will further enhance our reputation as a global leader. From kindergarten to graduate school, our government has chosen to protect and strengthen publicly funded education because we believe that education is essential economic policy. Better education for Ontario children today will mean a more productive and globally competitive workforce for tomorrow.

Our government is committed to openness, fairness and transparency. The new Broader Public Sector Accountability Act introduces tough expense and procurement rules for designated broader public sector organizations. The act ensures fair, open and competitive procurement processes when purchasing goods and services with public funds. The act bans the practice of hiring external lobbyists using public funds, establishes new procurement and expense claim rules for designated broader public sector organizations, and adds accountability measures related to compliance. The broader public sector procurement directive includes a code of ethics and 25 mandatory requirements. The directive is based on the principles of accountability, transparency, value for money, quality service delivery, and process standardization. Our government is committed to establishing clear and consistent rules for procurement in the broader public sector. The broader public sector expense directive also improves accountability and transparency by requiring designated broader public sector organizations to establish expense rules where expenses are

reimbursed from public funds and setting out requirements for what needs to be included in each organization's expense rules.

The directive serves as a guideline to all other publicly funded organizations as defined under the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act. Through this bill, our government is also introducing amendments to eliminate what are commonly known as perks in the broader public sector. These amendments, if enacted, would authorize the Management Board of Cabinet to issue directives on perks. For example, these could include club memberships or seasons' tickets.

Since taking office in 2003, we've brought efficiency and accountability to government and the broader public sector. We remain committed to finding greater efficiencies in the way that government operates in Ontario, and that's why we're seeking to transform the way that government delivers services to people.

The McGuinty government is moving forward with its plan to reduce the number of classified government agencies by 5%. In total, 14 agencies are expected to be closed or merged this year. Some agencies have functions that could be performed within government or cease to exist, and some have overlapping responsibilities or could be amalgamated. These measures include combining the Stadium Corp. of Ontario into the proposed Infrastructure Ontario and Ontario Realty Corp. merger. The new merged entity would be responsible for disposing of the real estate assets currently owned by the Stadium Corp., which will maximize the return to taxpayers. Furthermore, we're merging the Ontario Mortgage Corp. and the Ontario Mortgage Housing Corp.

The province has also accepted the recommendations made by Rita Burak in her December 2010 Report of the Special Advisor on Agencies. Greater efficiencies, service levels and accountability will result from the implementation of her report's recommendations. Indeed, these measures are all part of the government's Open Ontario plan, which will improve accountability, eliminate waste and find savings across government.

These actions build on the steps the Ontario government has already taken, requiring agencies to be more accountable and more transparent and to follow strong governance and expense rules. We will continue to meet and exceed targets to get value out of every dollar and focus funds on the priorities of Ontario families.

As we turn the corner following the economic downturn, our government will continue to invest in people and invest in job creation. Just as we modernized Ontario's tax system to help our businesses compete in the global economy, we cut personal income taxes and we introduced a wide range of tax credits and benefits that give money back to the people.

With the changes that we've made, households with income under \$90,000, representing over two thirds of the households, will, on average, have more money in their pockets. It's just one example of how we're helping people. As part of Ontario's tax plan for jobs and growth, the government is providing about \$1.4 billion annually

in additional assistance to low- to moderate-income people through the Ontario sales tax credit, the Ontario energy and property tax credit and the northern Ontario energy credit.

In order to help low- to moderate-income families and single people better manage their household budgets, our government is proposing to combine the payment of these three refundable credits by creating the Ontario Trillium benefit. Starting in July 2012, we plan on delivering the combined payments monthly, instead of quarterly. The Ontario Trillium benefit would make it easier for low- to moderate-income Ontario families to make ends meet. We're also proposing to make technical amendments to other tax credits or benefits to make it easier for people to get money back into their pockets.

Through all of these measures, our government is making life just a little bit easier for the people of Ontario. Our plan for the economy is all about giving Ontario families and businesses what they need to succeed. In order to turn the corner to a better tomorrow, we must continue to invest in each other, in people and in partnerships.

Our government is also introducing a new section to the Pension Benefits Act. Pensioners affected by the bankruptcy of Nortel and the termination of the Nortel plans have asked the government to provide them with additional choice for receiving their benefits. Nortel pensioners have clearly indicated that they want a choice, and we've listened to them attentively and acknowledged their request. As a result, we propose to provide Nortel pensioners with the choice of an annuity purchase or a transfer to a life income fund account.

Amendments to the Pension Benefits Act that are proposed would allow Nortel pensioners to opt out of the current windup process and transfer to the lump-sum value of their pensions to a life income fund where they can manage their own account. Pensioners who choose to transfer their pensions to a life income fund would be able to select their own investment strategy, which would be subject to the limits on eligible investments under the federal Income Tax Act.

Our government has remained consistent in our view. The security of retirees' pensions is paramount. The McGuinty government is moving forward with a solution that respects pensioners' choice, coupled with appropriate information and disclosure. Once again, we're focused on ensuring a brighter future for the proud people of this province.

Ontario is turning a corner to a better tomorrow. The economy is improving and jobs are coming back. Furthermore, strategic investments in front-line services have laid the foundation for a future with increased productivity and a better quality of life for the people of Ontario.

Over the past seven years our government has made significant progress. We've improved the fundamentals: education, health care, infrastructure, electricity and the tax system—the foundation upon which the highly skilled, highly educated workforce in this province has

been called upon to compete. Beyond the fundamentals we are introducing exciting new programs, projects and initiatives to ensure Ontario's lasting prosperity.

The measures I've described today represent only a part of the proposed budget measures being introduced through this bill. They are inherently reflective of our government's realistic and achievable plan to secure the province's long-term financial sustainability as well as our determination to protect the public services upon which the people of Ontario rely.

I strongly urge everyone in this House to vote for and support the Better Tomorrow for Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2011. Not only will these budget measures make Ontario stronger and make Ontario more competitive, but they will ensure our ongoing success. This province's great strength is its people. It's their talent, it's their drive, it's their relentless determination to succeed that makes Ontario so strong. Together we will overcome the mutual challenges that we face and move on to a better tomorrow.

For all of these reasons, I'm proud to support this bill, the Better Tomorrow for Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2011. I ask all members of the House to support the act and to vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 13, 2011, I am now required to put the question. Mr. Phillips has moved third reading of Bill 173, An Act respecting 2011 Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until after question period today.

Third reading vote deferred.

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 18, 2011, on the motion by Ms. Broten to locate the new common securities regulator in Toronto.

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

Seeing none, Ms. Broten has moved government notice of motion number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The vote will be deferred to the deferred votes after question period.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Orders of the day?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This House stands recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1004 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce some people from the Niagara region. This is Niagara Week, so I invite all my colleagues to make sure you attend tonight's event. There will be some great liquid refreshments and some great Ontario-grown foods here from Niagara.

I'm pleased to introduce Dr. Valerie Jaeger and, as well, Cathy Cousins; Councillor Brian Baty, regional councillor; the chair of the Niagara region and former lord mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Gary Burroughs; the mayor from my riding of Fort Erie, Mayor Doug Martin; and Patrick Robson. As well, I'd like to introduce a former member—I keep telling him he's going to be a member again—and that's my good friend Bart Maves. Bart, it's nice to have you back here.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Visiting us from Ottawa in the west members' gallery is Jay Shaw. Jay used to work for Minister Jim Watson and Minister Peter Fonseca. Welcome back, Jay.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'm delighted today to welcome to the House representatives of the Organization of Book Publishers of Ontario, the OBPO. They will be holding a reception tonight at 4:30. I understand that there may be books for folks who attend. Today from the OBPO we have David Caron; Matt Williams; Kirk Howard, who is the president of the OBPO; Marg Anne Morrison; and Susan Renouf. They're all here in the gallery today. They'll be meeting with many of you. Thank you for welcoming them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of page Jonah Villanueva Merali and the member for Trinity-Spadina, to welcome mother Isfahan Merali and father Sergio Villanueva Vivancos to the Legislature today. Enjoy your visit to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today the minority leader of the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guest, as well as the Consul General of Ghana, Mr. Kodjo Mawutor. Gentlemen, welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, life has become much more unaffordable under Premier McGuinty, and hydro bills are going through the roof. Quite frankly, you're pursuing hydro policies that flunk economic sense.

Your recent Samsung deal gives massive subsidies to a foreign multinational corporation and you stick struggling families with the bill. Premier, I announced today that a PC government will end your sweetheart deal with Samsung to bring relief to Ontario families. Why won't you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague had the opportunity to give some remarks this morning, I understand. There's no secret that he does not support clean energy in the province of Ontario. That's not news.

But given that, to date, Samsung is opening up three manufacturing plants with 700 jobs in Windsor, 900 jobs in Tillsonburg and 200 jobs in Don Mills, and with one more manufacturing plant to come, I would have thought that would have given my colleague some pause before eliminating all those jobs which are so important to those communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Ontario PCs support renewable energy, but we won't support the rip-off deals that you have signed that are driving up prices for ordinary, hard-working families.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Economic Development.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, your deal with Samsung is odious. It was born in suspicious circumstances, and it is a rip-off to seniors and families who are getting stuck with the bill. The Ontario PCs will bring to an end your sweetheart deal with Samsung. We will ensure a transparent and competitive process to get the best price for families that have to pay the bill and the communities where it's welcome. Why won't you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague is not only opposed to clean energy and the exciting opportunities that represents for Ontario, but he is also opposed to jobs that are already in place. I think that is reprehensible. What is he going to say to all those families that have found secure employment in the exciting new Ontario-based clean energy industry? I don't know what he intends to say to them.

I want to remind you that the Conservatives, when in power—at that time, the use of dirty coal grew by 127%, with 19 coal units and five coal plants polluting our air. So far we have shut down eight coal plants in the province of Ontario.

My real concern is that my honourable colleague has every intention of reopening those same coal plants at the same time as he shuts down those new jobs. Again, I say to my honourable colleague: That is unacceptable. In fact, it's reprehensible.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, your secret deal with Samsung is a shady deal and it is a rip-off for Ontario families that are getting stuck with the bills. Premier, you negotiated behind closed doors with a foreign-based multinational corporation and gave them billions and billions of dollars in subsidies. You passed over Ontario

industry, which could have built these projects and which could have brought it in for a better price.

Let me be clear: An Ontario PC government will end his shady Samsung deal. We'll have competition, a transparent process and will ensure that families can pay the bill. Will you do the right thing, Premier? Will you end your Samsung deal before you drive prices for families through the roof?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague says he's concerned about electricity prices, but when we gave him the opportunity to vote in favour of a clean energy benefit which reduces all our electricity bills by 10% on every bill over the course of the next five years, he refused to support that.

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But also, we hear again from a philosophical approach which is opposed to foreign investment in the province of Ontario. My honourable colleague can't make reference to Samsung without saying that they are foreigners, that they are a foreign investment. We're proud of the fact that in the last year alone, Ontario came second only to California in attracting the most foreign direct investment in all of North America.

That's how you compete and succeed in the global economy. It's not the 1960s; it's not the 1970s; it's the 21st century. We know how to compete and win.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm sure the Minister of Health Promotion is very pleased at the wonderful workouts that members are getting today.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: It's a shame that the Liberal members didn't stand up for Ontario companies who could have done the job, and they gave a shady deal to a foreign multinational corporation.

Premier, you just don't get it. Life has become increasingly unaffordable for average families who are struggling to make ends meet. You've engaged in some very expensive energy experiments that simply flunk economic sense. You signed a sweetheart deal with Samsung, with billions of dollars in subsidies. You brought forward a feed-in tariff program that is paying 80 cents for power that could be purchased in the marketplace for five cents. Your FIT program is expensive and it has created a gold rush across the province, and families are stuck paying the bills.

Premier, a PC government would end your massive FIT subsidies and pass on savings to families who pay the bills. Why won't you do the right thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's true that there has been a gold rush in Ontario, but it has been a gold rush in new and exciting jobs, and I'll talk a little bit about that gold rush.

I mentioned the 700 jobs in Windsor, the 900 in Tillsonburg and the 200 in Don Mills. But what about the 60 in Welland, 150 in Burlington, 225 in Fort Erie, 500 in Guelph, 150 in Cambridge, 100 in Mississauga, another

150 in Windsor, 50 in Woodbridge, 500 in London, 60 in Sault Ste. Marie, 200 in Oakville, 300 in Hamilton, 15 in Peterborough and 100 in Newmarket? I could go on and on, and I look forward to doing so in a supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, your expensive subsidies through your feed-in tariff program, according to London Economics International, will put \$38 billion of pressure on hydro bills. Hydro bills are already going up and up, and you're going to put them through the roof.

Premier, any kid who runs a lemonade stand knows that you can't pay 80 cents for the lemons and try to sell lemonade for a nickel, but that's exactly what you're doing with your feed-in tariff program.

The PC government would take a different approach. We'd have a competitive and transparent approach and let competition get us the best price for the ratepayer and the most modern technology. Premier, we would end your FIT program, bring in some competition and pass on the savings to Ontario families who can't afford your skyrocketing hydro bills.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just want to remind my honourable colleague of a few things said by those communities that are benefiting from all these new jobs. Here's what Eddie Francis, mayor of Windsor, had to say: "Ontario's clean economy is playing a very big part in helping us move successfully into the future and to become a city of choice in which to invest and create jobs."

Here's what the mayor of Tillsonburg said: "Tillsonburg is excited and delighted to welcome Siemens as an important new employer and member of our community. This new ... manufacturing facility will bring great new jobs and help us to establish a foothold in Ontario's growing clean energy economy."

These are municipal leaders who understand the difference between going back and moving forward and between being afraid of foreign direct investment and embracing new and exciting opportunities in the global economy.

I think I know where Ontarians want to go. They want to go forward, they want to embrace opportunities, they want to compete and they want to keep winning.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: This is what the Premier simply does not understand: Your skyrocketing hydro bills mean that seniors and families have fewer dollars in their pockets to spend in the economy. Your skyrocketing hydro bills mean losses of jobs in other industries: 300,000 jobs lost in the manufacturing sector alone. For every job that you claim you've created, you've probably cost us three or four jobs elsewhere in the economy.

We will take a different approach. We will put consumers, the people who pay the bills, at the centre of our decisions. We will end your sweetheart Samsung deal, we will eliminate the FIT program, and we will pass on the savings to Ontario hydro ratepayers, who are saying, "Enough is enough. It's time for change in our province." The Ontario PCs will deliver that change.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

It's quiet now, and the moment I sit down, it will change.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague makes it clear that he stands against foreign investment. I wonder if at some point in time he's going to be moving against Toyota and Honda, because they are from foreign jurisdictions as well.

He stands against clean air. He would reopen our shut-down coal-fired plants, and he stands against the new jobs.

I think he also stands against some of his colleagues in his own caucus, because we were pleased to be joined by, at separate announcements, the MPP for Haldimand-Norfolk; we were pleased to be joined by the MPP for Cambridge; we were pleased to be joined by the MPP for Leeds-Grenville, the MPP for Oxford, the MPP for Burlington and the MPP for Sarnia-Lambton. In each and every one of those instances, in those Conservative ridings, we announced clean energy projects, and we were joined in every instance by his colleagues who support our clean energy plan.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance insisted that this government was proud of its record on sharing information with the people who elected them. Does the Premier share that view?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I believe that we have established a new record as a government in terms of compliance within the recommended 30-day period. I think the NDP stood at 50% compliance; if my memory serves me right, the Conservatives were 57% or something; and I believe we're around 84%. So I think we have established a new record as a government in terms of complying with the freedom-of-information imperative.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In November 2009, a media outlet made a request for the final audit of the Niagara Parks Commission. The people of Ontario paid for that audit report. The Niagara Parks Commission, of course, is an agency of the people of Ontario. Does the Premier think the public has a right to see that report?

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes, indeed, as long as it meets the requirements, and the system has worked in all cases that I'm aware of. I look forward to further responding in the final supplementary.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When the request came for the audit, civil servants wanted to transfer the file to the Ministry of Tourism, who would have been more likely to have the records. But a political staffer in the Minister of Finance's office said, "No. Please just say no records exist." Does the Premier stand by this type of action?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The leader of the third party has really taken that out of context. I will table the official request to transfer to the Ministry of Tourism, which was dated November 13, 2009. It was transferred to tourism and the documents were released. Shame on you for trying to put a false spin on your question.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question goes back to the Premier.

Interjections.

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

Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question goes back to the Premier. Premier, this just stinks and it stinks very badly. A member of the public asked for an audit report that they helped pay for of an institution that is supposed to be publicly owned and publicly controlled. The McGuinty Liberals want to pretend that it doesn't exist.

Is this Liberal arrogance at work or is this the government that is just so out of touch that they don't know the difference between serving the interests of the people and serving the interests of their own party?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: By a letter dated November 13, 2009, with regard to the specific file, the transfer-of-access request was sent from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Tourism because the Ministry of Finance did not have the records. They were properly with the Ministry of Tourism. I am further informed, in this specific example, that the FOI was in fact abandoned by the requester themselves and not filled. What the leader has said is false and inaccurate. I will table—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need assistance from the members. But I would ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker, out of respect to you.

I would then say that the information presented in the House was inaccurate. In fact, a transfer dated November 13, 2009, from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Tourism—I will table this with the House, as well as additional background information, to show that in fact this was transferred from finance to tourism because finance wasn't in possession—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I quote again, directly from the Minister of Finance's staff from his office, an email that says, "No. Please just say no records exist." There's no context around that. It's pretty cut and dried.

This government was elected on a promise to be open and to be transparent, but after eight years it's very clear that they're part of the problem with politics today. It's a government more worried about the next day's headlines than about the families' bottom line. Does this Premier think it's appropriate and acceptable to claim that records don't exist when clearly they do?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The records did not exist in finance and we moved expeditiously to ask that they be made public.

I would like to read something into the record that was stated yesterday by the assistant privacy commissioner, Brian Beamish. These are quotes from yesterday: "Over the past decade, government compliance rates have risen from 42% to more than 80%, according to Beamish ... he has not seen evidence the meddling is changing the nature of the responses.

"I can't say we have seen any particular pattern in Ontario," he said."

We have raised the level of compliance. This particular case—the leader just has her facts wrong. We've got the information, which I'll table with the House, to show what the facts are, as opposed to reckless charges not based on any kind of actual evidence.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This government was elected because it claimed to care about people. But instead of devoting staff time to making life easier and making life more affordable for Ontario families, political staffers are doing their best to suppress information. It's clear that they're willing to go to great lengths to get that job done, even saying records don't exist when they actually do.

My question is a simple one: Does this Premier think that this is acceptable? Or is he willing to admit that after eight long years, his government has grown way too arrogant and way too unaccountable?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Premier of Ontario has the best record of expanding access to information of any Premier in recent memory, including expanding it to cover OPG, Hydro One, universities and hospitals.

What that leader ought to do is acknowledge that her question was wrong, was not based on fact, was in fact shown—and I will table the documents with the table. It was transferred according to the rules under section 2 of the act. It was done in a timely fashion and continues to build on our government's track record of openness, transparency and accessibility. That's what this government and this Premier are all about.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Premier, Ontario families cannot afford to pay billions for a secret Samsung deal that George Smitherman cooked up on his way out the door. Members of your own cabinet reportedly "gang-tackled" him. They knew that this deal smelled bad. He corrupted the procurement process by handing out a \$7-billion sweetheart deal,

without competitive bidding, to a foreign corporation. Ontario's homegrown talent was shut out.

Why should Ontario families pay a premium for your secret Samsung deal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We now know that the Leader of the Opposition stands steadfastly against the creation of 16,000 jobs in this province and a \$7-billion foreign investment.

That's consistent for them. They're against foreign companies. They're against foreign investment. They stood against foreign students. The only thing foreign that the Tories support is foreign importation of power from the United States, which cost us almost \$1 billion in their last two empty years in office.

We don't fear the future; we welcome it. We don't fear opening up Ontario to the world because we can compete. We'll compete with any jurisdiction in the clean energy economy. We're building a clean energy powerhouse in this province. We're creating thousands of clean energy jobs that you and your leader want to kill.

I look forward to going from community to community across this province and talking to residents in your ridings and telling them that—

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

I just remind the member from Renfrew that he did ask the question, and I don't know how he could listen to the answer because he kept interjecting. I just ask you to be more respectful.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was just trying to help him, Speaker.

Ontario families cannot afford to pay a premium for George Smitherman's legacy of corrupt competitive bidding. Ontario families paid more for eHealth because you followed Smitherman's sole-sourced practices, and they're paying more for energy because of his handiwork in the secret sweetheart deal with Samsung.

We will take a different approach. Ontario families use competitive bidding to build hospitals and schools at prices that are fair to Ontario families. An Ontario PC government will use competitive bidding to build new renewable energy projects at prices that Ontario families can afford.

Why won't you?

Applause.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm surprised you didn't stand, Sandra.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Renfrew.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Now, I'm happy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Renfrew.

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We already knew that the PC Party did not support our efforts to modernize our energy system. We already

knew that they don't support our efforts to replace dirty coal with cleaner sources of power, creating cleaner air and building a healthier future for our kids.

Today, we now know that the Leader of the Opposition stands steadfastly against the creation of thousands of jobs across this province and billions of dollars of investment. So I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to join us in Windsor, look those 700 workers in the eye and tell them you want to put them out of work. I challenge you to go to Tillsonburg, bring your member for Oxford with you, go to those workers, go eyeball to eyeball with those workers and tell them you want to kill their jobs. I challenge you to go to Don Mills. Go to Celestica where 200 new jobs are being created. Tell those workers that you want to put them out of work. I challenge you to join me across this province—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Another outburst from the member from Renfrew will cause a warning.

New question.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. This morning, drivers in cities across Ontario woke up to see gasoline prices had spiked overnight by six cents a litre. It reminded me of something an opposition leader once said to the Premier: "I suggest that one of these days you physically remove yourself from your chauffeur-driven car ... and find out how much Ontario motorists are getting hosed." "When are you going to stand up and take some leadership and defend the interests of Ontario motorists?" That was the MPP for Ottawa South, now the Premier.

My question today is, when are you going to stand up, Premier, and take some leadership and defend the interests of Ontario's motorists?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think all of us share the concern of motorists about the price of gasoline and what's been going on around the world, both in the Middle East and other parts where supply is important. None of us are happy about that. When I drove back to Toronto on Sunday night, I paid, I think, \$1.249 in Windsor. It spiked last night here in Toronto to \$1.399. I didn't fill up last night, but I will have to on my way back to Windsor later this week.

I should point out that this is a global phenomenon and a Canadian phenomenon. What I'll say is this: Between July 2010 and March this year, prices in Toronto are up 17.1% versus 24.1% in Montreal, 21.7% in Edmonton, 21.3% in Calgary and over 30.5% in the United States.

We share the concerns of Ontario motorists and we'll continue to work with all Ontarians as we work through these issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has scrapped plans to look at any form of price regulation. He's refused to consider any of the proposals that he used to

champion, but that's not all. The Premier isn't just sticking with the status quo that's not working. His unfair HST is adding 10 cents a litre to the price at the pumps. Families in Ontario are actually nostalgic for the days when the Premier used to ignore their problems. Today, Dalton McGuinty is committed to making things even worse.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member of the use of names.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker.

Today, the Premier is committed to making things even worse. Why is the Premier rejecting the proposals he used to champion, like making life more affordable? Instead, he continues to make life more expensive.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think Ontario consumers recognize the global nature of this phenomenon, that prices are going up everywhere. I think they also recognize that where prices have a regulatory regime, they actually have gone up more and they come down more slowly.

Laughter.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They laugh, and we've yet to see a positive response in terms of what they would do. I think there's a number of things that—

Hon. James J. Bradley: They did nothing in power.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes, exactly. In fact, as I've indicated, the prices in Ontario have gone up, absolutely, and those of us who fill our tank every week know that. But what we do know is this: They haven't risen as fast as in other jurisdictions.

This is an ongoing phenomenon. There is no quick fix to this; the member knows that. Cheap political grandstanding won't fix it, and I think that Ontario's voters understand that as well.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question this morning is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, farmers and farm organizations in my riding of Peterborough have shared with me, as I know they've shared with you, that the current risk management programs were not meeting their needs. They've been telling our government that Ontario farming is in crisis and at a crossroads.

The budget announcement that the province was creating a permanent risk management program was overwhelmingly welcomed. Farmers in my riding were pleased that this government has taken leadership in working with Ontario's farm leaders to implement these important programs.

Since the announcement, I've begun to receive questions from my constituents as to why the province is moving ahead with a risk management program and why the federal government is not. Can the minister please share with this House how this program is different from the programs currently offered and supported by the government of Canada?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you very much for the question. Let's begin with what the farmers are saying:

The current suite of business risk management programs does not meet the needs of Ontario farmers. They need predictability, they need bankability and they need stability for a prosperous future.

An RMP will complement rather than replace the existing suite of BRM programs by providing additional protection for farmers against rising input costs and market price volatility. With the leadership of the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition, commodity organizations developed their own programs—programs by farmers, for farmers. This is the most significant made-in-Ontario agriculture program in 25 years.

It's important to hear what the farmers are saying. Bette Jean Crews, president of the OFA, said, "Ontario announced full support for permanent risk management programs.... But that will only cover 40% of the costs for adequate programs"—

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: Minister, I appreciate your informing this House and my constituents that our government is making yet another investment in Ontario's hard-working families.

Ontario farmers have expressed that the current programs are not meeting their needs, and the federal government acknowledged this position. Our farmers want and need risk management programs shared between producers and both levels of government. Yet the federal government still refuses to participate in the program.

The agriculture critic, the MPP from Oxford, pointed out in the Meaford Independent that the federal government has concerns over implementing the program and that an Ontario problem needs an Ontario solution. It's a shame that the opposition has given up on the federal government supporting this program, given up on supporting Ontario's farmers and given up on RMP, which they claim is a priority.

Minister, are you going to bring up risk management with the federal government at the next federal-provincial-territorial meeting this summer?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased—and this is a critical piece that I want to get Bette Jean's words out on today: "Ontario announced full support for permanent risk management programs.... But that will only cover 40% of the cost for adequate programs, and without support at the federal level, the remaining burden is left for farmers. That is not acceptable." That is what we will be bringing to the table. That is what they have written to Prime Minister Harper.

But we need support from all parties. Our government has a plan that will give our farmers predictability, bankability and stability, but, quite frankly, the opposition has no plan. They want to show their support for risk management; they've got their chance today. They can vote on the budget that will support it.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Oxford will please come to order.

Minister, please continue.

Hon. Carol Mitchell: The farmers want to know: Are you with them or are you against them? They want to know. They want a clear message from the opposition. They want to know: Do you stand with the farmers or do you stand with your federal cousins? The programs work with everyone at the table.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Premier. The backroom sweetheart deal you've cut with your foreign partner is an experiment that's gone badly off the rails. Six Nations walked away from a deal with Samsung to locate windmills and solar panels on their reserves. Chief Bill Montour said, "What caused the failure is that the company was very closed about the information we needed.... Samsung was basically saying, 'Sign the deal and trust us.'"

1110

What makes you think Ontario families should have more trust in a deal with a foreign conglomerate than with their own partners?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: There's no question that, for some reason, that party lives in fear of foreign investment. For some reason that party lives in fear of reaching out to the rest of the world and building a strong clean energy economy here in Ontario. I'm going to share with you what—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Simcoe-Grey, member from Durham, please come to order.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Let's see what others around the world are saying about Ontario. The executive director of the United Nations Environment Program was in Toronto yesterday. He applauded our government's efforts to build a world-leading clean energy economy in Ontario. This is what he said about the position of the Leader of the Opposition: He called it simplistic and said that it threatens to undermine a crucial policy in boosting Ontario's economy.

We will not let the simplistic position of the members opposite take down our clean energy economy and lose those thousands of jobs. Those jobs mean a lot to Ontario families, and we're going to fight for—

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: We don't fear foreign investment; we fear the mess that that minister has made of it. Your expensive secret sweetheart deal with Samsung is not producing jobs or power. Samsung has not produced a single watt of power. First Nations walked away from dealing with Samsung.

It is a \$7-billion deal that you're adding to the hydro bills of Ontario families, who are feeling squeezed enough already. They cannot afford to pay more, and job announcements do not mean that any jobs exist. They don't.

On October 7, our leader and an Ontario PC government will end the deal. We will restore competition. We will procure renewable energy at prices Ontario families can afford to pay.

How did you get to be so out of touch that you continue to pursue energy at prices Ontario families cannot afford?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The agreement that that member opposite is so keen to end will also bring a death to 700 jobs in Windsor, 900 jobs in Tillsonburg and 200 jobs in Don Mills—16,000 jobs over the life of agreement and \$7 billion in investment in our economy. Our clean energy economy here today has become the global leading clean energy economy in the world.

It's not always easy. It does take effort. It takes political courage. It takes fortitude. That's something that the party opposite obviously does not possess. But with the vision of this Premier, with the fortitude and courage of this party here in office today, we will build those clean energy projects. We will create those clean energy jobs. We will make Ontario the clean energy powerhouse of the world. We will fight for those jobs, and we will—

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

JOB CREATION

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. A recent report by the well-regarded TD Economics department shows that Ontario is running a poor sixth amongst provinces when it comes to regaining jobs lost in the recent recession.

My question is this: When will the Premier admit that his policy mix of the unfair HST, escalating hydro rates and more corporate tax giveaways is bad economics and just isn't working?

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm delighted to answer this question. Last week, Stats Canada came out with an unbelievable number of 114% of jobs recovered since the recession in Ontario. What's important is that we look relatively at other jurisdictions and how they've been doing in responding post-recession. In the UK, it's around 50%. In the US, it's now around 20%. But in Ontario, our economy is starting to run again, and you, sir, should be proud of this. Instead, you are busy trying to tear us down at every step.

The people in Niagara who are so well represented in the House, especially today with the lord mayor from Niagara-on-the-Lake—we're busy talking to these folks about a renewable energy industry, one that simply didn't exist a mere three years ago. These are the kinds of gains that Ontario is having today that they didn't—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister raves about a StatsCan report that shows that most of those jobs are part-time jobs. The fact is that Ontario lags behind a majority of provinces—

Interjections.

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

Please continue.

Mr. Howard Hampton: And the fact is, Ontario lags behind the majority of provinces when it comes to recovering jobs lost during the recession. The minister ought to know. In her own hometown of Windsor, the unemployment rate is more than 10.3%, and that leaves out all the people who have stopped looking for jobs. In contrast, provinces such as Manitoba and Quebec have used a combination of reasonable hydro rates, targeted financial incentives and public sector procurement to secure good jobs.

When will the McGuinty government catch on and admit that the HST isn't doing it and your corporate tax giveaways aren't doing it and escalating hydro—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Here are the facts: 95% of the jobs recovered in Ontario were full-time. That's Stats Canada telling us this; those are not our numbers.

But what's really important is that on any measure, when they start to score Ontario against the world, Ontario keeps punching above its weight. Our foreign direct investment is second only to California, and they are three times our size by population, 10 times by size of economy, and yet we created more jobs by foreign direct investment than California did, even with fewer numbers of investments. That speaks to the kinds of tools we've made available for investment: a great corporate tax rate, yes; great post-secondary education achievement in our province; all of these things. And to all of those who are seeing those new jobs, we want you to beware of those opposition parties that want to tear us down, because we—

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

JOB CREATION

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and let's take a minute and reinforce this point. I continue to hear the members opposite state that Ontario has become a have-not province, and their negativity is unfortunate.

In fact, I understand that Ontario has regained more than 100% of the jobs since the recession. I'm proud to represent the riding of Sault Ste. Marie in this great province, and I can attest to the positive economic influence that our government has had in our community and throughout Ontario. We have companies like California-based Rentech, which has recently chosen to build a \$500-million biomass plant in White River, Ontario, creating 400 new jobs. The plant will convert timber into renewable, clean jet fuel. This plant is the first plant of its kind in the world—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Timmins will please come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Mr. David Oraziotti: Thanks, Speaker. You know, the NDP just can't handle good news; it's not a surprise.

The plant will convert timber into clean, renewable jet fuel. This is the first plant—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As I reminded the member from Renfrew earlier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Do you have a guilty conscience? I wasn't even talking about you.

I just want to remind the member from Timmins—James Bay that he's getting very close to a line.

Just 10 seconds to wrap up the question, please.

Mr. David Oraziotti: That's 400 new jobs in White River, Ontario.

Can the minister tell us how Ontario can be considered a have-not province when we are seeing so much—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think it's clear that Ontario punches above its weight, and we're proud of that fact. We are seeing, time and time again, people from around the world who are turning to Ontario to make those investments. We see great news out of Sudbury last week when Total from the US lands in Sudbury with 400 new jobs. The Sault Ste. Marie announcement last week was tremendous news.

And we appreciate that it's tough for the opposition, whose job it is to be negative, when they see things turning around for Ontario after the rough ride that we had in the recession. It's about time that we get to celebrate how well our recovery has gone in this province, and we're delighted to see that communities, working together with our government, are making it happen where it counts, and that is for jobs.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Oraziotti: Minister, I appreciate the information. To the minister's last point, it's interesting that lately there seem to be more and more international companies deciding on Ontario as the place where they want to do business and invest. In fact, the latest Financial Times foreign direct investment report stated that for the second consecutive year, Ontario has been named one of the top two destinations for foreign direct investment in North America. In 2010, the report stated that funding for projects into Ontario consisted of an estimated US\$6.1 billion in capital investment, creating an estimated 11,200 jobs in the province. That's phenomenal and definitely something that every member of this Legislature should be proud of.

Minister, can you explain why Ontario is continuing to become more attractive to foreign investors?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do believe that these international companies look at Ontario and look at the

stability that our government can have for these companies to make decisions on investments of this size. In the last budget tabled in this House, 10,000 jobs related to some 30 announcements that have happened since that budget was tabled, every one of them meaning jobs for Ontarians. That's important.

We are going to have a vote in the House this afternoon. It's going to be on this very same budget. We want to see where the opposition members are on a budget that delivers jobs for families right here in our province. Will the NDP support jobs in Ontario? Will the Conservatives support jobs in Ontario? One thing is clear: The Liberal Party of Ontario supports jobs in Ontario, and we may be the only party that will be doing this. We'll get to see that this afternoon in the House.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, a few weeks ago I had a message from Harold Marshall waiting for me at my Collingwood office. He's a farmer in Singhampton who called to let me know that Hydro One had just told him that they were turning on his time-of-use smart meter. Mr. Marshall had a simple request: "Would you ask McGuinty how I'm going to get the cows to read time?" So, Premier, I ask you on behalf of Mr. Marshall, how is he going to get his cows to read time?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I hear the question from the member opposite, but I think what that member would want his constituent to know is that we now have in place in this province a clean energy benefit that's taking 10% off rates right across the province. Indeed, that clean energy benefit has helped keep rates flat from year to year.

I think he should also let his constituent know—because maybe he hasn't—that indeed we've increased 10 extra hours a week of discount time for Ontario families. We've listened very carefully to what Ontario families have told us: They want the hours between 7 and 9 to be discount time, and we've delivered that as well.

But what is critical is that we continue to modernize our energy system. This is about modernization of an energy system that the members opposite, their party, had allowed to become completely outdated—

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Marshall's phone call shows just how out of touch this government is with farmers and families who rely on affordable electricity. Premier McGuinty came to office on a promise to freeze hydro rates at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. Instead, he has raised rates eight times in seven years, from 4.3 cents to over 10 cents, because this government doesn't respect the consumers' ability to pay. It's the McGuinty government that has caused rates to rise by 150%. They are ripping off consumers by bolting smart meter tax machines to their houses. They're extending the debt retirement charge and

paying rates as high as 80 cents per kilowatt hour for power that they are turning around and selling to the United States for three cents.

It's time for change in Ontario. When will this hydro nightmare end?

Hon. Brad Duguid: There's a reason the Ontario Federation of Agriculture is very supportive of our energy policy, very supportive of moving to smart technology. Another reason why they're very supportive—and certainly I think you'd want to make those farmers aware of the fact that you want to kill their opportunities in our clean energy economy, in those microFIT programs, and that indeed the very member opposite speculated about ripping up contracts. Those farmers deserve those contracts. That's about \$10,000 extra a year that goes into the pockets of Ontario farmers. You want to take those opportunities away from them.

Indeed, later on today we're going to be voting for risk management for farmers. Are you for that or are you against it?

We stand behind Ontario farmers on this side of the House. They want to take away opportunities for Ontario farmers on the other side.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday in Dryden, residents gathered to protest skyrocketing hydro bills. Here's how one of the organizers, Kelly Getson, described the rally: "People are not going to take it anymore ... they have to make a choice between putting food on the table or paying the hydro bill."

It's clear that Ontarians simply cannot afford rising hydro rates, and this rally really showed that they will not keep quiet about it anymore. When will the Premier listen to people like Kelly Getson and other northerners, and provide real, permanent hydro bill relief for Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We've listened very closely to Ontario families. What was announced a couple of weeks ago was very good news for Ontario families, that indeed bills are remaining absolutely flat across this province from one year to the next. I know why that's bad news to the leader of the opposition: because she can no longer continue to make it up as she goes along in this Legislature when she brings up these questions. You can torque it, you can twist it, you can make things up all you want; you're entitled to your own opinion, but you're not entitled to your own facts.

The fact of the matter is, rates are flat year to year, from May of last year to May of this year. Our clean energy benefit is having the desired effect; it stabilized energy rates. All the while, we'll continue to invest in building a clean, modern and reliable energy system that those very same families can count on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier may want to ignore people in communities like Dryden, but it's clear

that Ontarians will keep telling this government that they reject his hydro policies. Not only is the Premier creating an expensive hydro system that grants exorbitant salaries to CEOs in agencies, like the OPG, and drives industries and manufacturing plants to neighbouring provinces, like Manitoba, in search of lower energy prices, he's gouging Ontario families who now struggle every day just to make ends meet.

Why won't the Premier provide real relief to Ontarians and remove the HST from hydro and from home heating bills?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We understand the challenges Ontario families face dealing with their day-to-day budgets, and that's why we brought in a clean energy benefit that does more than what you want to do; it takes 10% off the bills of Ontario families. What it's done—and the Ontario Energy Board has been very clear—is it has created a situation where bills are flat. That's the Ontario Energy Board's analysis, not ours.

I think now that the leader of the third party has been leader for over 793 days, it's time for her to come forward with what she wants to do with energy policy in this province. We have a clean energy benefit that's stabilizing bills. Are you for it or against it? We're making improvements to improve our transmission system. Mr. Speaker, she's opposed that every step of the way. We're replacing dirty coal with cleaner sources of power. Where do you stand—

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

SOCIAL SERVICES

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In Willowdale, there's a lot of discussion about the province's continued commitment to upload the cost of social services dumped on the municipalities by the Conservatives.

The leader of the official opposition has said that if elected he will cut the size of government and reduce taxes. The problem is, we've heard that before, only to see municipal property taxes skyrocket across Ontario as the Harris-Eves government downloaded services to municipal taxpayers.

Minister, what is our government doing to help municipalities across Ontario maintain their services? What are we doing about uploading services?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for the question. We've entered into a landmark agreement with municipalities across Ontario. We are now uploading the cost of a variety of social services, which, when done, will provide local taxpayers and municipalities with a \$1.5-billion net benefit per year.

This year alone, our municipal partners—and we call them partners—will see a net benefit of \$945 million. That agreement was reached in consultation with our municipalities across Ontario. You see, we treat our municipalities as equal partners. We treat them with respect. We treat them with the understanding they

deserve, and their unique problems can only be addressed by a provincial government that cares.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Folks in Willowdale and, indeed, Ontarians are going to be very happy about this government's commitment to continue uploading the costs of these services.

Minister, you referred to the downloading of these costs by the Conservative government of Harris and Eves, and I remember those days well. That's when the Tories claimed the exercise would be "revenue-neutral." Minister, what happened during those Harris-Eves years and what has the government done to fix the problem created by that downloading?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That's a very, very important question, especially with the municipalities of Niagara here. The present leader of the PC Party uttered the identical words to the former Premier of the province of Ontario, Mike Harris, and this is what happened.

First of all, that government cut the number of municipalities. Then they cut the funding to municipalities. Then they downloaded social services to the municipalities. Then they downloaded secondary highways to the municipalities. But they forgot to do one thing: They forgot to give the municipalities of the Niagara region money to do this. They forgot to give them the respect they deserve. That's why we entered into a partnership that's based on mutual respect and consultation with each other, to ensure that—

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

SMART METERS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Culligan water is a major employer in the city of Brockville, and what has happened to them shows just how much the McGuinty government's failed energy experiments have hurt Ontario families and businesses. Culligan revamped its entire production schedule to overnight hours to try to soften the blow when you installed one of your so-called smart meters at the company. After they installed it they were told, "Oops, sorry, we made a mistake. You don't qualify for time-of-use. Pay up."

Minister, why do you continue to defend your billion-dollar smart meter boondoggle when it has become such a mess that you don't even know who's in and who's out?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The PC Party continues to oppose our efforts to modernize our energy system. I can understand that because, during all their years in office, they failed to make the decisions and investments needed to do that.

It's not easy to modernize an entire energy system. It's not easy to put Ontario out ahead of the world, and that's exactly where we are when it comes to modernizing our energy system. But if we want to be ready for the future

of energy needs of Ontario, for things like the advent of electric cars, we need to get on with modernizing our energy system. That's exactly what we're doing.

They're tough decisions. It's difficult to do, but we're not going to let Ontario families down. We're going to give them an energy system that they can count on today and well into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Come on, Minister. We all know your smart meters are just tax machines for the McGuinty government.

This embarrassing situation in my riding just shows how out of touch this government has become. You've penalized families by making them do their laundry at midnight. Now you've pulled the plug on Culligan water's efforts to avoid being zapped by your higher energy prices by suddenly changing the rules of the game.

Minister, when will you stop conducting energy experiments and start implementing policies that give businesses the break they need to keep the lights on?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Modernizing our energy system is also an important effort that's going to help us move away from dirty coal and get into cleaner sources of power. We're going to need to do that if we're going to ensure that we have cleaner air and a healthier future for our kids.

Why do the members opposite continue to stand in the way of our efforts to build a healthier future for our kids and grandkids? Why do they continue to stand in the way of our efforts to modernize our energy system to ensure that Ontario's power system can meet the needs of the future? Why do they continue to stand in the way of our efforts to build a clean energy economy that's leading the world, creating thousands of jobs? Thirteen thousand jobs were created last year in our clean energy economy. Fifty thousand jobs will be created by the year 2012.

We're moving forward and—

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

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Six months ago, in reaction to the hospital lobbyists and consultants scandal, the government promised to make hospital information available through freedom-of-access-to-information legislation. But now, schedule 15 in the budget bill allows for any document linked to quality improvement to never be released. This opens up a loophole that a truck could fit through, allowing hospitals to hide all information by simply saying the information is linked to quality improvement. Why is the Premier backtracking on hospital freedom-of-information requests?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There are amendments, as the member knows, contained in the budget that do, in fact, allow freedom of information for hospitals. We're proud

to be doing that. There are some necessary limitations on that that protect a variety of interests and also serve, I believe, to ensure that we have an adequate, open and transparent hospital system and that, at the same time, we don't expose it to unnecessary legal actions and lawsuits. We think it's the appropriate balance.

I look forward to voting in favour of that in a few minutes, just as I look forward to voting in favour of considerable new resources for children's mental health and addictions. I hope the member opposite will vote in favour of those things as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: He just said that they made the changes to respond to some interests. The bill was brought forward because of lobbyists. The bill was brought forward because of what was going on. We don't want backroom deals anymore. People have waited a long time for transparency in our hospitals. There are so many Ontarians out there who need closure. That closure will come through access to information.

Six months ago the government seemed to support more transparency, but now, in one clean sweep, in schedule 15 of the budget, the minister's doing away with hospital transparency.

What would keep a hospital practising continuous quality improvement from hiding everything from freedom-of-information requests?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The amendments are appropriate and proper in the context of an open and accountable health care system for all Ontarians.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: And confidential.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm proud that this government is the government that has moved to provide that freedom of information, striking the balance, as my colleague indicates, of confidentiality for individual patients and medical practitioners along with the public's absolute right to know and understand.

It is part of a larger budget that will fund children's mental health and addictions services; create a risk management program; 15 new breast screening enhancements. I look forward to the NDP caucus voting for all of those important things in the next few minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. I just want to—

Interjection: Time to vote.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity: A number of guests will be here at the Legislature this evening, and I would like to welcome them back. These are former Speakers, who will be joining me this evening: Hugh Edghoffer, David Warner, Al McLean, Ed Doyle, Chris Stockwell, Gary Carr and Alvin Curling. I'm very much looking forward to welcoming these esteemed individuals back to the House tonight.

Applause.

DEFERRED VOTES

BETTER TOMORROW FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2011

LOI DE 2011 SUR DES LENDEMAINS MEILLEURS POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 173, An Act respecting 2011 Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 173, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires de 2011, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1143.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Phillips has moved third reading of Bill 173, An Act respecting 2011 Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters. All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duncan, Dwight	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Murray, Glen R.
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoskins, Eric	Oraziotti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Pendergast, Leeanna
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Phillips, Gerry
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Broten, Laurel C.	Johnson, Rick	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Carroll, Aileen	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Chan, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Chiarelli, Bob	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill
Bailey, Robert	Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bisson, Gilles	Jones, Sylvia	Prue, Michael
Chudleigh, Ted	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Clark, Steve	Kormos, Peter	Shurman, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hampton, Howard	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 66; the nays are 33.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the motion by Ms. Broten to locate the new common securities regulator in Toronto.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

Interjections: Same vote.

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 66; the nays are 33.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1148 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm pleased to recognize, in the members' gallery, a number of firefighters, including Carmen Santoro and some other firefighters from the Mississauga area, and also recognize in the gallery above us Mr. Fred LeBlanc, president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. I welcome them to the assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today to recognize the 63rd anniversary of the state of Israel's independence. Israel, much like our country Canada, is a diverse and culturally rich environment. However, it has had to assert itself and protect its citizens after onslaughts from aggressors that seek to destroy the state of Israel and the very fabric on which it was founded.

Israel's 63rd anniversary marks a time when we can look towards this tiny sliver of a country as a beacon of democracy and religious diversity in a region that is often ripe with conflict and turbulence. Many in Thornhill have a strong bond with Israel, and its security and safety are paramount to them. Others view Israel as their religious home, as three major religions that are represented in Thornhill call Jerusalem their Holy City.

Since the independence of the state of Israel, countless people have travelled to Israel to see the Holy Land for themselves. Before our time, thousands of people fought for centuries for control over this piece of land, which is barely 8,000 square miles, yet throughout the centuries this land has seen Christians, Muslims and Jews all call

Israel home. Today, these religions live in relative harmony with each other and have added to the rich diversity that we can see when walking the streets of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

I am honoured to stand today in recognition of the 63rd anniversary of the independence of the state of Israel. Am Yisroel Chai.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jeff Leal: On Tuesday, April 5, 2011, a headline appeared in the Peterborough Examiner newspaper that read, "On Top of the World After Mt. Kilimanjaro Climb." The article associated with this headline described a local fundraising initiative that raised money for the Peterborough Regional Health Care Centre's new cancer bunker.

Scott Stewart, Matt Rutherford and Drew Merrett raised \$65,000 by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, standing 5,882 metres tall. They battled many obstacles, such as oxygen deprivation and extreme physical and mental exhaustion, as they climbed to the summit of this famous peak.

"Hitting the peak was probably the most emotional thing I've ever experienced ... crying like a baby," 46-year-old Scott Stewart said."

His fellow climbers experienced the same sensation of euphoria when they grasped the reality of their accomplishment.

The funds raised will be matched by the PRHC Foundation, making the final total \$100,000.

These three courageous individuals were not experienced mountain climbers but felt motivated to raise funds to help those battling cancer in our area. Everyone in Peterborough riding is proud and amazed at this fundraising project and the commitment of these three fine individuals.

BRENT ROBILLARD

Mr. Steve Clark: Every day in classrooms around Ontario, dedicated teachers are making life-changing impressions on our children. I'm sure everyone in this House can, in some way, trace their life's path to that one teacher who suddenly opened up the world and made us feel like anything was possible.

Today, I rise to celebrate one of those special teachers from my riding of Leeds–Grenville. I'm honoured that Brent Robillard, a teacher at Thousand Islands Secondary School in Brockville, is one of five Teacher of the Year Award recipients announced by the Ministry of Education.

It's recognition that's long overdue for Brent, whose time with students leaves them with lessons that go far beyond the walls of a classroom. The passion he instills in those teenagers has helped them to make an impact beyond Canada's borders.

Brent is co-founder of the Thousand Islands international studies program, which culminates in a 15-day

visit to Nicaragua, where months of study about complex issues like poverty and human rights suddenly become tangible. Students return from this experience with more than an education; it makes them better citizens.

A published author, Brent has also founded the writer's craft program at Thousand Islands. The courses challenge students to use the power of words and language to unlock the potential of their imagination so that they can write and publish their own novels.

On behalf of everyone in Leeds–Grenville, especially those parents lucky enough to have a child in one of his classes, I'd like to congratulate Brent Robillard on this well-deserved award.

PAUL PRIMEAU

M^{me} France Gélinas: I rise today to salute my constituent Sergeant Major Paul Primeau, who served his country in the Canadian military. Nickel Belt has a proud tradition of producing young men and women who have volunteered to serve their country. We must recognize the sacrifices our veterans have made.

I'm proud that the people of Nickel Belt stepped up to the plate for Corporal Bill Kerr and built his family a new, accessible house after a roadside bomb in Afghanistan left him disabled.

Now, the 400 proud residents of Gogama will join in a community celebration for Sergeant Major Paul Primeau, who has volunteered for two deployments to Afghanistan. They will recognize the selfless acts he has made on behalf of his community and his country.

The people of Gogama are proud to know Paul. They know him as a volunteer with the fire department. They know him as a good neighbour, a good father to Aaron, a good husband to Sue and a friend to all. I hope everyone in this Legislature congratulates Sergeant Major Paul Primeau on selflessly putting himself in harm's way and returning home safely to his family.

I also invite everybody to visit Gogama and witness its beauty, unspoiled lakes and wonderful people. The Ojibwa call it "jumping fish" for good reason. If you're interested in pickerel fishing, Lake Minisinakwa in Gogama is the place to go.

RYAN ELLIS

MARK VISENTIN

Mr. Ted McMeekin: As Ontarians have their eyes on the NHL playoff season, even more exciting news has once again come out of my riding of Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale. For the second time, the talented Ryan Ellis of Freelton has won the Ontario Hockey League's Max Kaminsky Trophy for the top defenceman in the league, and he has been named OHL player of the year. And Mark Visentin of Waterdown, my hometown, has been named the Ontario Hockey League's goaltender of the year.

Ryan netted over 100 points this season, the first time an OHL defenceman has done that in nearly a decade.

Mark posted the second-best goals against average and save percentage in the league en route to a 30-9-2-4 record. After the 2009-10 season, Visentin was ranked fourth amongst North American goalies by the NHL Central Scouting Bureau. Mark and Ryan were also teammates in this year's World Junior Hockey Championship.

The Windsor Spitfires and the Niagara Ice Dogs are blessed to have these exceptional young men on their teams. They have both been drafted to the NHL, and we are looking forward to the great hockey futures that Mark and Ryan undoubtedly have. Well done, guys.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. John O'Toole: The residents in my riding have recently learned that their properties may be designated as provincially significant wetlands. As I indicated in my statement on April 13, this would severely limit their ability to use and enjoy their private property. To date, no residents were even aware that the ministry was conducting studies on their private property. Over 200 residents in the Darlington area and a further 150 in the Clarke area will be affected by this designation.

Taxpayers deserve respect, and they deserve to be listened to. Taxpayers deserve to be kept informed when the provincial government is studying their land and looking into placing new restrictions on the use of their land. The requests from citizens are reasonable, and the discussion should be reasonable.

I want to thank Karen Tremblay, Ted and Beth Meszaros, Libby Recansky, Heather Whalen, William Wallace, Walter Pringle, Rolland, Bert and Glenn Wiegel, Brian Catherwood, Martin Gerkes, Kerry Meydam, Vicky MacBeth, Kurt Gelder and other very concerned citizens.

I call on the Minister of Natural Resources to ask the property owners be advised before imposing new wetland regulations from Queen's Park.

1510

I ask Clarington Mayor Adrian Foster and his council and staff to work co-operatively and to listen to our common constituents. I am confident that the Minister of Natural Resources will listen respectfully to their concern.

YOUTH SERVICES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to rise today to speak about the recent youth fair which I had the pleasure of organizing in partnership with community agencies based in the Jane Street community hub, to showcase the various youth programs available in York South-Weston, including youth mentorship, after-school and youth outreach worker programs, as well as the Ontario summer jobs program.

This was an excellent opportunity to share important information with youth in York South-Weston as they firm up their plans for the summer and look for jobs over the coming months.

Providing opportunities to build job skills and experience is vital to getting our young people off to the best start possible as they consider their future career paths. The success of our government's summer jobs strategy has been incredible. As part of the 2011 provincial budget, our government announced an additional \$22.5 million in 2011-12 to help over 100,000 students access jobs and services this summer, including targeted resources for youth in high-needs neighbourhoods.

The fair received a tremendous response from the community and participating agencies: Yorktown Family Services, COSTI, Midaynta, the Learning Enrichment Foundation, Macaulay Child Development Centre, 12 division of the Toronto police. I look forward to working with them again on similar community initiatives.

HINDU HERITAGE CENTRE

Mr. Bob Delaney: Last week, I joined Premier Dalton McGuinty and my colleagues Eric Hoskins, Charles Sousa and Kuldip Kular to open the newly completed Hindu Heritage Centre in the village of Streetsville.

We were warmly welcomed with a flower garland by spiritual leader Acharya Surender Sharma, or Shastri Ji, as he's known, and by hundreds of members of the Mississauga Hindu community.

We participated in aarti and puja, traditional Hindu practices. We met with the community leaders, toured the beautiful facility and shared traditional Indian vegetarian foods with Hindu community members.

After four years of construction, this visually stunning new Streetsville landmark now serves some of the 250,000 Hindus throughout the greater Toronto area, and particularly in our western Mississauga neighbourhoods of Lisgar, Streetsville and Meadowvale.

The celebration of Hindu culture and tradition helps sustain the harmony of Mississauga's rich multicultural diversity. Through community language, arts and performance programs, and classes offered at the Hindu Heritage Centre, Hindu and Indian culture and heritage are preserved, shared and integrated with the broader western Mississauga community.

The new Hindu Heritage Centre on Mississauga Road is already a Streetsville landmark. It will serve and benefit many generations of western Mississauga residents.

Thank you. Dhanyavaad.

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: On behalf of Premier McGuinty and my colleagues, I rise for the purpose of recognizing an historic event that took place 63 years ago: the establishment of the state of Israel. It is the fulfillment of prophecies, prayers and dreams. On this festive occasion, all of us join in the hopes and prayers of Jewish people here and in Israel that the day may not be far off when the people of Israel and the nations of the world lay down their arms, turn their swords into plowshares and realize the beautiful word of peace, "shalom."

Israel may be a small dot on the map of the world, but it is a significant model of democracy. In spite of economic hardships, wars and threats of war, Israel has not lost its sense of purpose: to shine as a beacon of freedom, democracy and fulfillment of the promise of the ancient Hebrew prophets.

Today at 12 noon, we hoisted the Star of David outside of this chamber, but our historic relationship goes back to 1986, when, as minister responsible for multiculturalism, I had the pleasure of proclaiming Israel Independence Day on behalf of our government for the first time.

I wish to say this to the Jewish community: Shalom and congratulations on behalf of all of us.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated May 10, 2011, from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

917866 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2011

Mrs. Elliott moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr48, An Act to revive 917866 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 193, An Act to amend the French Language Services Act with respect to the French Language Services Commissioner's reporting requirements / Projet de loi 193, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services en français en ce qui concerne les rapports exigés du commissaire aux services en français.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Présentement, selon la Loi sur les services en français, le commissaire aux services en français soumet son rapport annuel et ses rapports spéciaux à la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Le projet de loi modifie la Loi sur les services en français et exige que ces rapports—les rapports du commissaire aux services en français—soient soumis au Président de l'Assemblée législative.

Currently, the French Language Services Act requires the French Language Services Commissioner to submit annual and special reports to the minister responsible for francophone affairs. The bill amends the act to require that these reports be submitted to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NURSING WEEK

SEMAINE DES SOINS INFIRMIERS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This is Nursing Week in Ontario, and May 12 is International Nurses Day. It's a wonderful opportunity to recognize nurses for their commitment, knowledge and compassion, and to thank them for their relentless determination to improve our health care system and, more importantly, the health of Ontarians.

Nursing Week really is something to celebrate, and there's no better place to celebrate it than in Ontario. If you understand health care and are committed to building the best possible health care system, you know that you simply cannot do that without nurses. Nurses are the backbone of our health care system. The McGuinty government has understood that basic fact from the outset of our mandate.

It was not always so in Ontario. Since our election in 2003, this government has firmly committed to funding more nursing positions and creating more career opportunities and better working conditions for our nurses, so we began reversing the tide of years of cutbacks and layoffs. Since then we've created more than 11,000 nursing positions, with more to come, and we're getting close to 70% full-time employment for nurses.

We're also making this province the best place anywhere to practise nursing. We're doing a better job of leveraging the extraordinary knowledge and skills that nurses possess.

One of the best examples of that is nurse-practitioner-led clinics. We're building on the success of the Sudbury pilot. In fact, we're creating 25 more of them where, under the leadership of a nurse practitioner, RNs, RPNs

and other health care professionals work collaboratively to provide top-notch patient-driven care. All 25 of the NP-led clinics have been announced and are in various stages of becoming operational, with eight already up and running. In fact, just last week I attended the opening of the newest nurse practitioner-led clinic in Essex with the member Bruce Crozier.

1520

We have proposed that nurse practitioners be allowed to admit and discharge patients from hospitals. That's making great use of the skills and expertise of Ontario's highly educated nurses. Our government has also recently amended the Public Hospitals Act so that chief nursing executives must sit on hospital boards. That means that nurses' input is heard as decisions are being made. I want to acknowledge the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the RNAO, for advising us on this initiative.

This Thursday, I'll announce funding that will ensure that each public health unit across the province has a chief nursing officer to provide leadership and accountability.

As for making Ontario the best place to practise nursing, yesterday I was very pleased to announce that our government's nursing graduate guarantee has connected more than 10,000 nursing graduates with full-time nursing jobs. The NGG—nursing graduate guarantee program—pays for six months of employment, complete with salaries and benefits. It's a way of connecting employers with early-career nurses so that those nurses experience full-time employment. In 2009-10, more than 2,600 nursing graduates participated in the program.

At the other end of the experience spectrum, we've created the late-career nurse initiative, based on research completed by our brand new provincial chief nursing officer, Debra Bourne, in her role as director of nursing, new knowledge and innovation at the University Health Network. Since 2004, the late-career nurse initiative has been providing late-career nurses with the opportunity to spend a portion of their work time in less physically demanding nursing roles and, at the same time, put their experience to work improving patient care. The purpose is to retain the skills and knowledge of this important group of nurses and create an improved work environment for them. Last year, the program supported more than 2,500 late-career nurses in 90 hospitals and 142 long-term-care homes.

Yesterday, I was very pleased to announce that our government is providing \$8 million in annual base funding for the late-career initiative program, which will support late-career nurse participants, this year and every year.

When I looked at the RNAO best practice guidelines, which have been adopted not only elsewhere in Canada but across the world, I realized that nurses do instinctively what I aspire to do across the health care system: build a system that is of the highest quality, that is evidence-based, that is cost-effective and that puts the patient at the centre. As we celebrate Nursing Week, my message to nurses is this: Ontario needs you, and this

government is committed to supporting you at every age of your career, no matter the setting in which you work.

I know from my own personal experience with the health care system, as a daughter, as a mother and as a grandmother, that nurses are vital to Ontario's health care system. I also know that other Ontario families can count on nurses' expertise, caring and diligence. For all that they do on behalf of Ontarians, I cannot thank nurses enough.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to rise in the House today to join in the celebration of Nursing Week. This week offers the opportunity to showcase nurses' knowledge, skills and compassion as well as the demands of their daily work. On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I would like to offer my congratulations to all of Ontario's nurses for the hard work that they do and to express appreciation for the dedication, caring, compassion and professionalism that they show to their patients each and every day. Nurses are the backbone of our health care system, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to celebrate the nursing profession, here with my colleagues today and for the remainder of the week through community events.

This year's theme is "Nursing—The Health of Our Nation." Nurses are often the first line of patient contact in our health care system. Today's nurses must embrace many roles in their practices, from first contact to patient assessment, performing tests, administering treatment, monitoring patients, patient advocacy and sometimes just to be a caring face, a hand to hold, or a shoulder to cry on—nurses are always there.

Aside from the incredibly skilled work our nurses do every day, they are also the human side of our health care system and make our hospitals, clinics, community health and long-term-care centres more pleasant places for patients, visitors, families and friends.

The McGuinty government has paid lip service to these hard-working men and women, but unfortunately it stops there. This government promised in 2003 to ensure that 8,000 nurses were hired during their first mandate. The McGuinty government did not achieve this goal.

In the 2007 election campaign, they committed to adding 9,000 nurses to our workforce by 2011. In October 2008, just one year after the promise was made, the McGuinty government announced that the province was facing a huge deficit and would be delaying the 9,000-nurse hire.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario has said, "in the name of quality patient care—that balancing budgets on the backs of nurses and health care is wrong." Instead of increasing the excellent front-line patient care offered by nurses, the McGuinty government has instead invested in more red tape and bureaucracy.

This week, many of us will be visiting and witnessing first-hand the role of nurses in our riding and the excellent care that they provide. On Thursday, I will be attending a home-care visit for Saint Elizabeth Health Care in Toronto with RNAO representative Nancy Lefebvre, and on Friday I will have the pleasure of

participating in the annual Take Your MPP to Work Day, where I will be joining my fellow Durham region MPPs at Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences. There, we will have the opportunity to have breakfast with some of our local nurses, and later we will have the chance to see them in action, doing what they do best—putting patients first.

Thank you again to all of Ontario's nurses for the excellent work they do on our behalf each and every day.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am so pleased to rise today to recognize the great work that nurses do. I would like to pay tribute to some of the nurses from my riding and from northern Ontario. Some of you may not know, but Ontario is home to about 40 nursing stations. A nursing station is exactly what the name calls it: It is a primary care agency, where the people in charge are nurses who service small, rural communities in northern Ontario.

Nurses working in nursing stations are most of the time the only health professional in their community. They are it, they do it all and they see it all. Although some rotate in and out of their communities, most of them live in their community, so they are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 12 months out of the year, every single day of their lives, because people know where they live.

I used to oversee two nursing stations before I became a politician. Now, whenever I go to northern Ontario, I always stop by and visit the local nursing station. For those of you who've never been to a nursing station, the first thing you usually see as you come in is a large wall board with all kinds of fish hooks and lures. Remember, I told you that they've seen it all? Well, every single nurse in a nursing station knows how to take out a black and silver Shad Rap with two sets of treble hooks—that's a fishing lure—out of pretty well any body part that comes through the door, and they do this without leaving a scar. They're good.

Then, you would see the baby pictures. Nurses in nursing stations offer prenatal and postpartum care, and they do the odd unplanned delivery because the ambulance was grounded or did not make it in time.

Every fall, they deal with hunting accidents, either the accidental discharge of firearms or the misfortune of bowhunters. Did you know that most inexperienced bowhunters shoot themselves in the left foot? Every nurse in a nursing station knows that—ask my husband about that too. As well, there are the many cuts and slashes with hunting knives and filleting knives.

They also look after wounds from axes, handsaws and—the most common one—chainsaws from forestry workers. The chainsaws do leave a mark—a big mark. They just tear through the skin, the muscle, the tissue; they make a big mess.

1530

They also look after diabetes epidemics, as the rate of diabetes in our First Nations is so high. They look after women and children who have been victims of abuse, as well as mental health and addiction issues. They do home visits for palliative care people who want to stay in their own homes in their own communities.

I want to congratulate all of the nurses who have chosen to work in a nursing station. The work can be overwhelming, the demands are non-stop, and the recognition not that frequent. I want to say to Sylvia Primeau Beasley, infirmière praticienne; Christine Mathieu; Angèle Secord; and Francine Mathieu, who work at the Gogama nursing station: Merci. Thank you for what you do for your community.

I want to say to Michel and Lise Raymond, who spent years on the James Bay coast before working for 10 years at the Sudbury East Nursing Station: Merci. You've made Noëlville and St.-Charles healthier communities by your hard work.

I want to say to Lorraine Brabant in Folyet, Darleen Kidd in Killarney, Ester Sogarty and Renée Leblanc in Port Loring: Thank you. The people in these communities are lucky to have you.

To the nurses in Angling Lake, Armstrong, Beardmore, Bearskin Lake, Big Trout Lake, Britt, Caramat, Cat Lake, Deer Lake, Dubreuilville, Elk Lake, Fauquier, Fort Hope, Fort Severn, Kasabonika Lake, Kashechewan, Killarney, Kingfisher Lake, Lansdowne House, Mactier, Matachewan, Mattice, Minaki, Missanabie, Nakina, Mishkeegogamang, Pikangikum, Pointe au Baril, Round Lake, Sandy Lake, Sioux Narrows, Summer Beaver, Thorne, Upsala, Webequie and Wunnumin Lake: Thank you.

I salute you for the great work that you do across northern Ontario. You are the health of our region. Merci. Thank you. Meegwetch.

J'aimerais féliciter tous les infirmiers et infirmières de l'Ontario et souligner le travail exceptionnel qui est fait par les infirmiers et infirmières dans les centres de soins infirmiers du nord de l'Ontario.

Je vous souhaite une bonne semaine des infirmiers.

PETITIONS

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition for saving our jails. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario provincial government has unilaterally ordered the closing of the Owen Sound and Walkerton provincial jails with no public input; and

“Whereas staff of both facilities will be forced to relocate from their home communities and the two rural municipalities will lose up to \$3 million each in wages spent; and

“Whereas the local aboriginal offenders will be forced away from their communities and local native resources. All offenders will be moved out of their localities, rehabilitative resources and family visitation. Intermittent sentenced offenders would have jobs placed in jeopardy as the travel to Penetanguishene would be great; and.

“Whereas rural communities hard hit by recession and manufacturing job loss need these well-paying jobs in their community;

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

"That Premier McGuinty supports the Owen Sound and Walkerton jails remaining open until such time as a new regional corrections facility can be opened."

I've signed this and I will give it to Caleb from Meaford.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: 97% of collective agreements are settled without a strike or lockout; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and successive governments in those two provinces have never repealed those laws; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

"Whereas the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and the long term as well as the well-being of its residents";

They ask "the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Viktor to bring it to the Clerk.

HOME CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have received this petition from a Mr. Diaz, with a Z. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and the minister responsible for seniors. It reads as follows:

"Whereas seniors who are disabled and/or ill are presently suffering at home; and

"Whereas the cost of a caregiver on a monthly basis who looks after a senior in their own home is around \$1,200, including room and board; and

"Whereas the cost of taking care of someone at home is at least 10 times less than the cost of a hospital bed; and

"Whereas most seniors with disabilities and/or illness are crowding an already overburdened health care system;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly request that a basic government subsidy be established (based on a doctor's evaluation) which will pay at least a minimum allowance for a caregiver.

"Seniors deserve to live at home as long and as independently as possible."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it as well.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition in support of Bill 100, paved shoulders on provincial highways. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I shall sign this.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I've got a petition with thousands of names here, and it reads:

"Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints in the areas of hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies and retirement homes; and

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

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

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

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

I agree with it completely. I will sign it.

PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, for which I would like to thank Lou Pinarello of Amity Road in Streetsville for having sent it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas many seniors, visually impaired persons and other non-drivers do not need or are not eligible for a driver's licence; and

"Whereas many day-to-day transactions such as cashing of cheques; opening a new bank account at a financial institution; returning merchandise to a retail store;

boarding a domestic flight; gaining admittance to bars, clubs and casinos; checking in at a hotel; obtaining a credit card, and even renting a video require government-issued photo identification; and

“Whereas Ontario’s Photo Card Act, 2008, sets the legislative framework required to deliver a non-licence photo identification;

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

“That the province of Ontario develop a government-issued photo identification card and deliver, in 2011, an Ontario photo card identification for residents of the province over the age of 16 who cannot or choose not to drive.”

It’s a very reasonable request. I’m pleased to sign and support it and to ask page John to carry it for me.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS TREATMENT

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding the denial of venous angioplasty and subsequent follow-up treatment of MS, multiple sclerosis.

“Whereas it is estimated that 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians suffer from MS, many are in Ontario;

“Whereas chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, has been found in a high percentage of MS sufferers (>90%) and is considered a congenital vascular condition by the International Union of Phlebology (vein experts), of which Canada is a member;

“Whereas the preferred treatment for CCSVI is venous angioplasty;

“Whereas, in Canada, venous angioplasty is an effective, low-risk procedure that has been used safely for many years as a treatment for various medical conditions involving veins, such as May-Thurner syndrome, caval interruption, and Budd-Chiari syndrome;

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“Whereas over 12,500 CCVSI treatments have been carried out globally with reports of improvement in mental functioning, circulation mobility and, over time, marked improvement in quality of life;

“Whereas any medical procedure incurs risk and has varying degrees of success, CCSVI venous angioplasty risk is low;

“Whereas residents of Ontario with MS are denied access to testing and to this simple treatment and are forced to leave the country at great personal expense to seek improvement in the quality of their lives and are denied proper access to follow-up care after treatment;

“Whereas progressive MS sufferers, beyond pharmaceutical intervention, have an increased risk of morbidity and mortality when a simple, safe and effective treatment is not available to them;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario allows people with multiple sclerosis to obtain venous angioplasty in Ontario;

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ensures payment for such treatment;

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario allows pre-and post-procedural testing and follow-up consistent with any other disease and ensures payment for the testing and follow-up.”

I’d like to thank my constituents for providing it. It’s been certified by the table. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Caleb.

HOME WARRANTY PROGRAM

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This petition is to support extending the Ombudsman of Ontario’s jurisdiction to include the Tarion Warranty Corp.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act to provide that the Ombudsman’s powers under the Ombudsman Act in respect of any governmental organization apply to the corporation established under the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, and to provide for necessary modifications in the application of the Ombudsman Act.”

Of course, I agree with this. I’m going to give it to Viktor to be delivered to the table.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I’m pleased to introduce the petition called “Grandparents’ Rights” to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the people of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents as requested in Bill 22 put forward by MPP Kim Craitor; and

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

I’m proud to sign my signature in support of this bill.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Toby Barrett: “Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over environmental impacts as well as health, safety and property values; and

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

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

“Revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments and that a moratorium on wind development be declared until an independent, epidemiological study is completed into the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

I affix my signature to these other signatures.

FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition that reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the fire protection adviser for the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry and the united counties of Prescott-Russell retired in 2008; and

“Whereas the position has not been filled as several attempts by management were denied; and

“Whereas, during this same period, positions were filled in other areas of the province of Ontario, leaving the above-mentioned united counties the only region without a fire protection adviser; and

“Whereas fire departments in these united counties currently have to wait four hours or longer before a fire protection adviser can arrive from another region to assist them;

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

“That the fire departments of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry and Prescott-Russell ask the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to allow the Office of the Fire Marshal to fill the position of fire protection adviser immediately.”

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

DOG OWNERSHIP

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

“Breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

“Problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

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

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005)” and any related acts, and instead “implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types.”

As I’m in agreement, I sign my name.

PARAMEDICS

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from Joy Reycraft from Strathroy, Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Orders of the day?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think we were remiss this morning in not wishing the Minister of Agriculture a happy birthday today. So I want to correct that mistake of this morning and wish her a very happy birthday today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FIRE PROTECTION AND PREVENTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2011

LOI DE 2011 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PRÉVENTION ET LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'INCENDIE

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2011, on the motion for second reading of Bill 181, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la prévention et la protection contre l'incendie.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's indeed an honour to rise to speak to this bill—in support of this bill—on behalf of Andrea Horwath, our leader, and everyone else in our caucus. There is unqualified support for this bill. In fact, the only thing I could say apart from our unqualified support is, isn't it a shame it's taken the government so long to get around to it? Hopefully we can get this through before the House disbands for the summer.

I'm going to cut my remarks short. I know that will cause a lot of grief for my friends opposite, a lot of gnashing of teeth, because I know they love my oratorical skills. Having said that, I will be cutting them short because I think that really, we need to move this bill along. Of course it goes against the grain, because much as I love to speak about the valour of firefighters and the shortcomings of the McGuinty government, I'm going to take a little less time to do it, Madam Speaker. Nice to see you in the chair, by the way.

First and foremost, thank you to the firefighters' association of Ontario. Thank you for being here. Thank you for pushing the government on this issue. It really corrected a mistake the government made when they, of course, in 2005 did away with the mandatory retirement age, but neglected to consult with front-line workers, one of them being the firefighters' association, about how this would impact their profession. We are now, today and I hope very, very soon after it has been given due process, going to correct that mistake.

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Let's talk about the valour of firefighters for a minute. Let's talk about it because certainly every life, I would warrant in this House, has been impacted by the valour of firefighters. I know certainly mine has. I remember very clearly when a carbon monoxide detector went off in our house, and I didn't even know we had a carbon monoxide detector. This was way back. Thank goodness we had one. We thought, well, we had better do something about

it. The firefighters were there within minutes. The street was cordoned off around our house. We easily could have died. This happened early in the morning. It's an odourless—it has no smell—tasteless gas. Firefighters were there, knew what to do, and saved our lives.

I can think of another instance where the firefighters were responsible for saving a life in my immediate family, and that was my husband many, many years ago. He was way too young for this event to have occurred. He was in his 30s at the time, went out to play tennis, a very hot day, came back, felt sick, had to stop the car on his drive back, and felt he had pains. I looked in my little emergency handbook and I said, "You know, you're way too young to have this happen, but it sounds like you're having a heart attack," and called 911. Guess who arrived first, as they usually do? The firefighters. Guess what it was? Yes, it was a heart attack—saved his life in another instance.

Then, in my role as United Church clergy, we routinely ran a real open house, a free meal, a drop-in service for people who had mental health and addictions issues. Sometimes we would get 200, 250 people for a dinner run by a handful of volunteers. If we ever had a problem, we could bet on a 911 call, and firefighters would be there first. That's all we needed. Whether it was a fire issue or not, they were there first, resolved the problem and we kept going, doing the good work that that church did.

So thank you. Thank you on behalf of all Ontarians. Thank you for lobbying the government for this bill.

Let me just tell, for those who are watching at home and wondering, what this bill is about. Bill 181 would allow a mandatory retirement age for front-line firefighters, provided it's not lower than the age of 60 and is negotiated in the collective agreement. If a collective agreement does not contain a mandatory retirement age provision, it would be deemed to contain a mandatory retirement provision at age 60, and under the provision front-line firefighters would not be required to retire if the employer can accommodate them in non-front-line positions without due hardship to the municipality.

This is important because this addresses a concern municipalities raised and also addresses a concern that actually came to me over Facebook from one of my constituents who is married to a firefighter and was concerned about that. That's for you.

This is a more minor point, but it's an important one. The bill establishes a statutory duty of fair representation for firefighter bargaining agents and allows firefighters access to the Ontario Labour Relations Board for duty of fair representation complaints. That's complaints against the union. Before this bill came to the House, firefighters, unlike other union members, would have to go the civil court system route, so that corrects an inadequacy also in the law.

It was interesting, in 2005, when the government did away with mandatory retirement, some of the language that was used around that. I remember, in particular, Ontarians could now choose when to retire. I know that it wasn't meant this way by my friends across the aisle, but

certainly the ring of Ontarians choosing when to retire has gained some darker meaning over the last few years. I don't know one senior in my riding, unless they were on a defined benefit pension plan, which only a third of Ontarians have—and interestingly enough, for those watching, not one member here has a defined benefit pension plan either. They can't afford to retire.

We see the fact that Ontarians can't afford to retire everywhere in our riding right now as those mall jobs, those minimum wage jobs that students used to do, get filled by the seniors who have to do them. That's the reality of retirement in Ontario. That is the reality. This is the problem that we face over and over and over again. I know we hear about it in all of our constituencies. Certainly we saw it in the federal election, where the New Democratic Party ran, in part, on doing something about the Canada Pension Plan.

We need decent pensions. It's absolutely unacceptable that our grandmothers and grandfathers, who worked so hard, who don't have the benefit of defined pension plans, should be forced to work in their retirement or live in poverty. And that is really what we're asking them to do.

You know, I remember years ago, with my daughter down in Florida, getting a cab ride from our vacation destination to the airport on the way back. The gentleman who drove the cab looked like he was 92 years old. It turned out that he was 89. We said to him, "Why aren't you lying on the beach? Why are you driving a cab? Surely you've earned the right?" And he said, "Well, I used to be a small business owner. My business failed. No pension. I don't work, I don't eat." Is that really, I would ask, what we Canadians want as our reality? I would venture that it's not.

That puts a great onus on this government, who has had a majority now for eight years, to have done something about it, which they have not. We in the New Democratic Party have proposed some changes that would assist people in actually having a retirement income.

I know that there will be those across the aisle and those at home who say, "Well, why didn't they invest when they should have in their registered retirement savings plans?" Well, anybody who's lived through the recession, anybody who's followed the stories of the collapse of the markets, anybody who's heard of people like Bernie Madoff—made off with a lot of money, is what he did—will know that those plans are not airtight; that those plans, depending on what vehicle you invest in, go up and down. I know many in my riding, many I hear from across Ontario, who invested routinely, did all the right things and, bang, lost most of it.

Again, is this what we want? A casino system, in a sense? Maybe you're lucky, maybe you have a good financial advisor; maybe you're not. Maybe you get to retire; maybe you don't. Certainly, that's not what people in Europe think is the appropriate reaction to seniors in our midst.

To get back to this bill, here we are correcting a problem. It's a problem that the government clearly

didn't see in relation to firefighters. But also, when they moved in 2005 to do away with the mandatory retirement age, they didn't foresee some of the consequences in other industries as well. So I would ask my friends across the aisle that they look at the reality of retiring, or not being able to retire, in the province of Ontario and start to do something about it.

Certainly, the pension benefits guarantee fund—this is a fund that, if your company goes under and you've invested, you still get something—is still stuck at \$1,000 a month. I don't know anybody who can live on \$1,000 a month. We ask our people on Ontario disability, those people who are disabled and can't work, to live on that, but that's another story for another day. That's also egregious. That's also appalling. People who can't work shouldn't be forced to live in poverty either. But certainly people who've invested, who expected some pension return, should be guaranteed that. Why is it that when a company goes under, the banks come first and the employees come last? That's the situation in the province of Ontario.

Two thirds of Ontarians don't have pension plans. I pointed out that we here don't have a pension plan—that's sad too—unlike our federal counterparts. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm on the Freedom 95 plan, so I will be standing here—with any luck at all, if my voters vote me in—until I'm 95, because I certainly cannot afford to retire.

But again, we see this as the government of the mall. It's not the government of Main Street. It's not the government of small business. It's not the government of the senior coming up to retirement. It's not the government of that person who happens to be unlucky enough to be in a profession where they don't have a defined benefit plan. This is a government that's steering us towards the American reality, and I quite frankly speak on behalf of most Ontarians and say we don't want that reality. We would like some security in our old age.

What does this plan do? I mean, these are front-line workers: people who are going in for fire suppression, people who are going into dangerous places. Do we really want a 75- or an 80-year-old to be rushing into a burning building? I mean, it's an obvious oversight that the government didn't see in 2005. I guess our question as New Democrats is, here we are in 2011, six years later, with about 10 days left of the House sitting, so why is it coming forward now? The gentlemen who are sitting in the members' gallery—certainly, their association has been lobbying for this for many years. Why, finally, in the setting days of this government, are we bringing it forward? This is absurd. This is a no-brainer. I know we're all going to support it. I know my Progressive Conservative colleagues are going to support this—I know across the aisle. This could have been done years ago. It should have been done years ago. It should have been done at the same time, in 2005, when they were looking at this issue in the first place. It's sad.

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To say that Ontarians can choose to retire is really like saying that one out of six children who live in poverty in

Ontario can choose to eat or not, because that's the reality of our people coming up to retirement.

I put this out there because it's such a glaring reality that we all face, and I can't believe that in eight years of McGuinty government so little has been done to help them. Not only has so little been done to help them, but we've added to their grief by, of course, raising the hydro rates unnecessarily, putting in the so-called smart meters that attack people coming up to retirement and in retirement because they're at home all day. When the highest rates are on, they're at home—not to mention small business.

This is a government that also, of course, has brought in the HST, which is a flat tax that necessarily, as all flat taxes do, attacks those who can afford it least. So this is a government, clearly, that has no thought when it comes to policy or programs for seniors.

I have a little motion on the order paper that was asked of me by—

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Minister of Energy seems to disagree with me, but he's young. What does he know about what it must be like to be 70 years old—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to withdraw that comment.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I will withdraw that.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: He's maybe not quite so young.

There was a very simple little motion I had on the order paper; it's still there. It was put forward, through me, by the West Toronto Support Services. God bless their cotton socks for all the good work that they do with seniors. They said, "It used to be the case in Ontario that seniors could get into museums and galleries for free. Could we not at least have that?" We've got the HST, we've got hydro rates, we've got stupid meters; we've got all of this happening. Can we not at least have something, some sign from this government that they think about seniors? But even that has sat on the order paper for years without being acknowledged.

To get back to Bill 181, what else can we do for firefighters? Well, there is still more we could do for firefighters. In fact, there is still more we could do for all of our front-line workers. We had the OPP in here the other day, and they were asking of all of our parties that we do something about the fact that they are so lightly staffed, that their staffing has not kept up with the general population. We talk about enforcement, but if you don't have enforcers, laws do not get enforced. They talked about the situation, particularly in northern Ontario, where officers could be an hour apart from each other. It's extremely dangerous, not to mention dangerous for the constituents in those ridings who aren't getting the police service that they need. They were here asking for something again—again, again.

Another bill that's on the order paper—this is a good place to mention it—that should have been given some notice by this government is my post-traumatic stress

disorder bill for front-line workers. This would be not only for the firefighters but also for the police, also for paramedics who inspired the bill. What we ask of front-line workers, in many instances, is to go into phenomenally dangerous situations. No matter how you screen, when somebody comes into the profession, just like no matter how well you screen their health, firefighters, as we know, with a presumed diagnosis bill, which we were also extremely supportive of—I know that our leader, Andrea Horwath, brought in an earlier version of that bill: presumed diagnosis for certain cancers of firefighters—we should also have presumed diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder.

A number of people I've talked to who have tried to get claims through WSIB had to try to prove that their post-traumatic stress disorder came from their job and not any other factor in their life. This is wrong; this is simply wrong. This is something that we do for those who serve for us in Afghanistan and other places; why can't we do it for our front-line workers here? It's just a very simple thing, inspired, again, by paramedics but supported by firefighters and police.

Again, it sat on the order paper for several years. I've reintroduced it, and trust me, I will reintroduce it again after October 6, no matter who's sitting across the aisle. Even if it's us who are sitting across the aisle. There's a promise.

Do we New Democrats support this? Absolutely, we support this. Have we supported it for years? Absolutely, we've supported it for years: from 2005, when the government changed mandatory retirement, thinking and saying, "Ontarians can now choose when to retire rather than having to retire," when the reality, as I've gone into in some detail, is that most Ontarians cannot afford to retire at any age. That's the reality, and to say that this gives them the choice of when to retire is really an insult, a slap in the face, when there's only a third that have defined benefit pension plans.

Despite that and despite not consulting, clearly, quite well enough with groups like the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association as to how that move would impact their membership, here we are: the dying days of the McGuinty government, the McGuinty regime, hoping—we, on this side of the floor—that we can get this through quickly enough that this could actually begin to impact some lives, as requested by firefighters.

Thank you, firefighters. On a fun note, I always enjoy going out with my Lansdowne station. Every Christmas we go to St. Joe's and deliver presents to the children who are in the hospital that year. It's great fun. There's nothing like a decorated fire truck and a fire chief playing Santa Claus—lots of fun. But more importantly, thank you for all the good work you do for all Ontarians in keeping us safe. Thank you, personally, for the work you've done for my family at various instances in my life.

I hope that this bill will pass extremely quickly, that it will get committee time and that it will get back here and be passed before this House rises. To that end, I will now relinquish the rest of my time. I know that my colleagues

in the Progressive Conservative Party are also not taking a great deal of time. We're not putting up other speakers ourselves. The onus is really on this government to get cracking to do it and to do it now.

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

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I listened to the presentation from the member from Parkdale–High Park, and I appreciate her comments regarding firefighters and trying to get this through as quickly as possible.

It was on March 10 of this year that a resolution or a motion was introduced by the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin, Michael Brown, calling on the government to introduce legislation allowing for the mandatory retirement of firefighters at age 60. The resolution was passed unanimously in the Legislature last March, so I think we are trying to move collectively as soon as possible.

We had an experience recently with Christopher's Law, which came before this Legislature and which passed fairly quickly. At committee, we had an all-party agreement to, in the morning part, do the presentations and, in the afternoon, do clause-by-clause. It was done and brought back in a pretty expeditious fashion to this Legislature, where it was voted on and passed. It got third reading, and I think last week it received royal assent.

So let's hope we can move as quickly on this bill. I think we all agree. We know what the bill is about, as was mentioned by the member from Parkdale–High Park. I think the key is having all three parties agree at committee to not spend too much time. I think we agree.

I had the opportunity last Friday to attend a retirement party for firefighters. It was held just outside of my riding; outside of Scarborough Southwest. I had a chance to attend with my wife, and I did speak to a number of the firefighters. They're happy to see this bill in front of them and to see it moving at a fairly rapid rate. There are many here today, as was mentioned earlier—many of them were introduced earlier—to see this bill go through.

Hopefully we can end the debate today and move it to committee as soon as possible.

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

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Mr. Toby Barrett: I want to follow up on the comments from the member from Parkdale–High Park.

Last year, my wife and I visited the site of 9/11 in lower Manhattan. There's lots to do in Manhattan, and I wasn't that interested in going down, necessarily; my wife had been spending time at Macy's and in Times Square, but we ended up down there and we went into a fire station memorial for those who lost their lives at 9/11.

There, we met a retired firefighter from Brooklyn, an Italian fellow. He had two sons. He lost one son in the collapse of the twin towers. He told us his story. He spent nine months looking for his son in the rubble, and I can only imagine what he saw in that rubble. He felt he was fortunate; they did find a piece of equipment from his

son. Of the thousands who died, you found nothing identifiable.

He has spent the last nine years—and we're coming up to the 10-year anniversary—in this little museum down at the site of 9/11 explaining to people like me and my wife what it's like to be a firefighter and why, whether they're professional or volunteers, no matter what their age, we consider firefighters heroes.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Indeed, it is a pleasure to spend a couple of minutes talking about Bill 181. Although this time will be allotted for comments on the presentation from the member from Parkdale–High Park, I'm not sure she spoke much about the bill.

I just want to take the opportunity to say that this is a good move forward. I'm trying to recollect here. Two or three, maybe four years ago—time flies—I was able to take part in an exercise at the fire college or fire school here in Toronto; I'm not sure what the terminology is. They outfitted me with all the gear—

Mr. Jim Brownell: They had one in your size, Lou?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They did. I happened to keep the—

Mr. Steve Clark: How far can you drag the hose, Lou?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Well, you know, I managed. But I was just going to say—

Interjection: I thought you had to be a certain size to be a firefighter?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: No, there's no discrimination here.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is, with all the gear and trying to follow through on some of the exercises they perform, I cannot imagine what it would be like in real life when they encounter those challenges, whether it's a smokey house, whether it's crawling under some space. So I said to myself, "I'm a little bit over 60, but I'm not sure I could have done that when I was 40." Not to say that I wasn't in good shape. I was in good shape, at least I say so myself.

I think what we're doing here today is really recognizing the safety of our citizens, whom we're trying to protect in the best possible way we can. The human part of that protection, obviously, requires some agility, some strength and some capability to be able to perform that duty.

I think we all agree this is a good move in the right direction, and I look forward to supporting this bill.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to comment on the speech from the member from Parkdale–High Park on Bill 181, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act.

I would like to get on the record that I have received, from one of my municipalities in Parry Sound, concerns with the bill. It's from Seguin township.

They wrote to me that "Council of the township of Seguin does not believe that this proposed legislation is in the best interests of this municipality and requests that the government of Ontario conduct further research to

identify potential problems and consequences associated with this proposed legislation.”

They go on to say in their actual resolution, “Whereas the impact of such legislation will have an immediate and significant impact on the ability of Seguin Fire Services to maintain and supervise their municipal fire force; ...

“Therefore be it resolved that the council of the Corporation of the Township of Seguin believes that the legislation as it currently exists is not in the best interest of the municipality and recommends that the government of Ontario needs to identify the impacts, consequences and costs of this proposed legislative change. We ask the government of Ontario to conduct the appropriate analysis and to consult with the municipal employers and the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs prior to taking any legislative action.”

I would like to get that on the record so that the government will do its due diligence and that this will go to committee and give a chance for Seguin township to enunciate what their concerns are. It’s a municipal volunteer force. The legislation doesn’t affect volunteer forces, but I suspect it must be to do with somehow some supervisors who are full time. Their concerns, whether they’re legitimate or not, I would like to be heard by the government. I hope they will take the time at the committee stage to listen to the concerns of Seguin township, that they get their chance to make these concerns known.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Parkdale–High Park has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to all who contributed.

To start out with the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, this is why committee hearings are important. I’ve also received some communications from municipalities. A lot of it is based, with due respect, on some misinformation. They may not know that there is no mandatory retirement age now and that in fact it could cost them way more if someone went on working year after year after year. But again, at the committee is a good place to raise those issues.

To the member for Northumberland–Quinte West, I believe I did discuss the bill—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Very, very, briefly.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: That’s fine. We’re supporting it. Let’s just get on with it.

The member for Haldimand–Norfolk gave a very good rationale for why we need a presumed diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder among front-line workers; There couldn’t be a better example than 9/11 of why we need that kind of legislation to protect those who rush into circumstances that we rush out of.

Finally, to the member from Scarborough Southwest, it’s good that this was raised last March. That’s a year ago. We voted unanimously on this a year ago. Here we are again debating and discussing this bill. Hopefully, we’re not going to be discussing and debating it a year from now.

Our hope in the New Democratic Party is that this gets speedy delivery to third reading through committee, that it comes back here before we rise for the summer and

that finally the association gets what they’ve been looking for for these many years.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to all who took part in the debate.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I’m pleased to have a few minutes today to speak to this particular legislation. I want to begin by welcoming to the Legislature—I don’t know if he has been acknowledged yet, but we do have here with us today the president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Fred LeBlanc. Fred, it’s good to see you. It has been a little while. I think the last time was sharing a bowl of spaghetti and a few meatballs, you and I, a few months back. I think our local association president, Eric Nordlund, was with us that night at that table. It’s good to see you again as well. And I think we have some members here in the members’ east gallery. I don’t have their names or the associations that they are from, but it’s good to see you and have you here today as well supporting this particular piece of legislation that our government has brought forward.

It was interesting to listen to the comments from the member of the third party. I’m not going to spend a lot of time talking about those, but I’m always excited and anxious to hear how the members of the third party are going to politicize just about anything that comes to this place—well, not just about anything, but everything. But there’s a difference between opposition and politicizing things. Unfortunately, I think that’s what we heard today—nothing from a policy perspective. But enough on that.

What we’re happy about today is that this legislation recognizes the distinct nature of the firefighting profession. I think it also recognizes the relationship and the continuity of legislation that our government has brought forward since we’ve had the privilege to be in government since 2003.

The title of the legislation is the Fire Protection and Prevention Amendment Act, 2011. It’s interesting: When I was getting prepared to speak today, I wondered if at some time in the future we may see this sort of provision—and I’ll get to the provision in a minute—actually expanded to perhaps include more of our protective services. I think, obviously, of police. I think the police do a wonderful job in all of our communities in terms of what it is they do for a living in terms of protecting us. I think that the bona fides are the reason and the justification for what we’re doing here today: an exemption to the mandatory retirement legislation. I think that the bona fides, you could make a pretty good case, also apply to the work that the police services do. I can picture some of our people who are 55 or 60 years old, and some of the physical work that they’re required to do providing some challenges for them as they get a little older. I don’t think that’s unfair to say. It’s difficult work that they do, and I’m not sure that at some point in the not-too-distant future we may in fact see something come forward that recognizes the work that they do.

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However, that's not what today is about, because there is no one who argues, as we've heard from all sides, about the distinctive nature of the work that the firefighters do, and that's why the legislation is before us today. As people are fond of saying—I don't always get the quote exactly right, but, "When everyone else is running out of a building, the firefighters are running into the building." So that's what brings us to the point we're at today.

A member from the second party, the official opposition, mentioned something—and I was going to talk a little bit about it, too. The events of 9/11 have galvanized the thinking around this legislation, I think it's fair to say. The work of the firefighting profession was always respected by people, but I think the images that many of us saw and witnessed on television on that fateful day have become, unfortunately, part of our memories and will remain so, I would expect, for many of us, and have only added to our ability to come forward with this kind of legislation.

Before I get into the legislation, I want to talk about a little bit else that we have done when it comes to working with the firefighters. This one has a bit of a local flair for me, a local flavour, and that is the work that we did on presumptive legislation when it came to working with the firefighter profession.

Fred may remember a gentleman by the name of Joe Adamkowski—I see you nodding up there. My local chapter in Thunder Bay, the local association—and I'm a little short on the memory right now, Fred. I forget the president at the time. But Joe was a firefighter who was very ill and in fact has succumbed to his illness.

It was during that time that the firefighter associations across the province of Ontario—with a great amount of work and input provided by the local Thunder Bay association, I would suggest—were working very hard on the issues related to presumptive legislation. Their associations all across the province—the rank and file, and their association leadership, provincial and local—were working very hard on this particular issue. As we know, they have met with success on that issue. I'm going to just reference some of the notes that we have on this particular topic in terms of exactly what it is we did.

The first step, of course, brought forward presumptive legislation for full-time firefighters, and then we moved forward in November—I think it was November 2009, when the presumptive legislation was extended to volunteer and part-time firefighters as well. Of course, what I mean when I say "presumptive legislation" is, for people who are watching and interested in this topic, that there are eight illnesses, diseases, cancer-related, that, when established with a certain level of years of service, are automatically assumed, unless it can be proven otherwise, to have been work-related. They would be covered through WSIB. Those are: brain cancer with 10 years of service; bladder cancer, 15 years of service; kidney cancer, 20; non-Hodgkin's, 20; colorectal, 10; leukemia, 15 for certain types; ureter for 15 years; and

esophageal for 25 years. Of course, heart injury is also part of the list—within 24 hours of fighting a fire or participating in a training exercise involving a simulated fire emergency. All of those that I have just listed are part of the presumptive legislation that we brought forward.

I mention that because I think it is consistent with where we are today. It is a recognition on the part of our government—not just today, as I think one of the previous speakers was trying to imply—to not only the firefighters in the audience here or watching on TV, but to others interested in this particular topic, the implication trying to be that we've been a bit late to the party. I mention this to be very clear that we have for years very clearly recognized the distinctive nature of the work that firefighters have done, and today's legislation that we're debating only reinforces that.

So the bill, again, is called the Fire Protection and Prevention Amendment Act, 2011. I do want to give a nod to our member—he's not here with us today—from Algoma-Manitoulin, Mike Brown. I think it was in March of this year that Mike brought forward a motion calling on the Legislative Assembly to do exactly what we are doing here today.

Let's go back a little bit if we can, to 2005 and the mandatory retirement legislation. I have a bit of a funny little story. It won't take me long. When I was at Lakehead University studying history some years ago, I had a professor by the name of Ernie Zimmerman. Ernie was teaching me Russian history, and on occasion Ernie would invite some of his students back to his condominium to have what he called a little bit of Russian pepper vodka. I'd never heard of it until I attended Ernie's condominium. Ernie used to invite us back there for a little bit of fun.

Ernie, unfortunately, is no longer with us, but when it came time for Ernie Zimmerman to retire, he took up the cause in a great way on behalf of and with the support of other faculty at Lakehead University to oppose mandatory retirement. And, of course, we in this government did just that: brought in legislation to that effect. I don't remember if my old professor was around at that time or not to witness what we did, but here is what we did: In 2005, the Legislature eliminated mandatory retirement in Ontario for most employees with the passage of the Ending Mandatory Retirement Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005. That legislation amended the definition of "age" in the Human Rights Code to remove the upper age limit of 65 as it applied to discrimination in employment.

However, the Ending Mandatory Retirement Statute Law Amendment Act did not change the bona fide occupational requirement exception to their prohibition against discrimination in employment. To be clear, what this means is that the Human Rights Code continues to allow for mandatory retirement where age can be shown to be a bona fide occupational requirement. Importantly for the amendment we are discussing today, mandatory retirement at age 60 for firefighters engaged in suppression activities has generally been found by the Human Rights Tribunal to be a bona fide occupational requirement.

That obviously links us to what I have just read. There was a mention—I forget who it was, the official opposition or the member from Parkdale–High Park—about municipalities; at least a reference, if not by name, to municipalities about impact. It's important to know and share with the people in the province a couple of things.

One is that, as explained to me, the average age of retirement currently for—not all, but the average age for most firefighters in the province of Ontario right now is 57 years of age. There's a number here that I'll read into the record: There are approximately 11,000 full-time firefighters in Ontario. We understand that only 65 of the 1,254 firefighters who retired between 2005 and 2009 were over the age of 60. Clearly the reference that was made earlier by a speaker from one of the opposition parties in terms of the potential impact is not nearly as significant as the implication may have appeared to be.

The other thing that I would mention in that regard, in the same vein, is that it's my understanding that two thirds of all collective agreements in the province of Ontario currently accommodate what it is that we are discussing here today. I understand that the legislation also contains a provision that is going to allow municipalities two years to prepare and adjust for this.

I think it's also important to note that what we're doing here today does not impact volunteer forces. Not that long ago—I think it was just before Christmas of this year—I had a great meeting with some of the volunteer people in my communities that I represent. My riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan has six rural municipalities in it, and at least five of them were represented at that meeting: Mike Horan from Oliver–Paipouge, Henry Mattas from O'Connor, Amy Spencer from Conmee, Dale Ashbee from Neebing and Tim Beebe—Tim did a lot of work on organizing this meeting—from Upsala was there, as well as Blair Arthur, and he's from out of my riding, from Shuniah. We all had a wonderful meeting about the volunteer service and the challenges faced by them. I can tell you that it is the volunteer services, I understand, that are thankful that this legislation is not impacting on them.

1630

Clearly, in the context of northwestern Ontario that they represented to me in the meeting I had with them—they referenced a range of issues and challenges, I think it's fair to say, affecting the volunteer people who work on our behalf in the province of Ontario. Certainly in northwestern Ontario, one of the issues and challenges that they have and that they brought forward to me is that it just seems every day like it's becoming more difficult to recruit people into the volunteer services—at least from the meeting that I was part of, that was representing five or six different municipalities and a whole lot of people and a whole lot of geography. I think it's important to mention that.

One of the other things I will say here as well, before I close, is in terms of the continuity of our government. As I said earlier, there was an implication made that we're late to the game. That's why I thought it was important

not only to talk about this legislation today, but to remind people of the work that we've done with our professional firefighters with the presumptive legislation as well.

Four or five years ago, perhaps a little longer, we brought in a wonderful program to help the volunteer side, which was a capital program. I remember very well that many of the members in the Legislature, on all sides of the House, were very supportive of this program and very happy that our government did it. We all know that those small rural detachments have a very difficult time in terms of meeting their capital needs. If I remember correctly, it was about \$50,000 per service, I think, in that range. I can remember attending announcements and events in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan and the region. In fact, I think I might have gone up to Dryden to do one, although I don't recall for sure. But it was a program that was extremely well received, and I think it's important that we make note of that.

Today's legislation is not about that, but I think it shows this continuity that we all want to ensure that the people of the province of Ontario are aware of when it comes to dealing with our professional firefighters in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, that's about 15 minutes for me. I'm pleased to hear, or assume, based on comments that I've heard, that all sides of the House are going to support this legislation. It's a good piece of legislation. It is work that is consistent with what we've been doing in the province with our firefighters, professional and volunteer, and I'm very proud of it.

I look forward to the vote at second reading, and hopefully it will be back here quickly to be passed before the House rises in a few weeks.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I must admit, I had a bit of a laugh at the member's expense at the beginning of his comments. The reason was, he stood up and said that he was concerned that the previous speaker, the member from Parkdale–High Park, had politicized the debate of this bill. I mean, to an extent, everybody politicizes all debate of every bill in this chamber. But what was really interesting was, he followed up with comments where he said he was really happy that his government had brought this bill in, and patted himself and the McGuinty government on the back for doing so.

If we're talking about politicizing, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. The bottom line is, I think we're all satisfied that the bill is on the floor, I think we're all satisfied that we're here debating this bill, and I think we're all satisfied that there will be some unanimity in the vote for the bill, because it's long overdue.

While we're talking about politicization, that government has been in office for most of the last eight years, and I've had firefighters come and visit me for the four that I've been around here, asking for a variety of changes to this particular act, the fire prevention act. This was one of them. So it's high time that this government got around to it.

I dare say that this has an awful lot to do with the fact that we're somewhere within 10 sessional days of the end of this term. Let's hope that it goes to committee, gets back out of committee and gets through third reading, and that they absolutely have the opportunity to take advantage of what they've come here to witness, which is the realization of this.

Let's not debate the fact that we all have ultimate respect for our first responders. Firefighters, police: They are folks that we can all respect, and respect them we do. We know what it takes to get into the business that you're in. It's not a business like any other business, any more than this is. The difference is, we play games where our lives are concerned. You take it for real, and thank you very much.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just to comment again, I would second my friend from Thornhill that of course the comments from Thunder Bay–Atikokan are political. We're all political here. If we're not being political here, what are we doing here? That's what we do.

Suffice to say, at the end of the day, rather than talking about it, we should be passing it, so I was very pleased to hear from our esteemed House leader from Welland that in fact that's what we're going to be doing this afternoon; that very few people are speaking to it and that we are going to be voting on it soon, because there's nothing like our poor firefighters hearing everybody say that we should get on with it and then talking and talking all afternoon. We will get on with it this afternoon. Hallelujah, I say. Finally we have some resolve in this House to move. Let's get it to committee, as you've heard; let's do that quickly, and let's get it back here. Let's have it read for third reading. It's been a long time since 2005. It's been six years by my reckoning, so six years is long enough. Let's get some protection for our firefighters and first-line responders. In fact, let this be the first of many such moves we make on their behalf.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to rise and comment on the speech by my colleague the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and certainly to support Bill 181.

The member from Thunder Bay actually did an excellent job of cataloguing some of the health issues that we have recognized already in previous legislation that firefighters who are involved in fire suppression are particularly in danger of, and unfortunately, a history of many of their members having those conditions, and we have recognized that.

But my riding is, in some respects, much like the member's riding, in that I too have a university, and university professors were very involved in having us eliminate the mandatory retirement requirements. Unfortunately, the firefighters got swept up in that, and I think everyone here recognizes that there in fact are legitimate reasons why firefighters who are involved in fire suppression do have a bona fide job requirement of some absolutely astounding physical job requirements when

they are called into a burning building and need to rescue people or lug equipment, or to deal with the heat even though they've got all the equipment—a tremendously oppressive atmosphere. I've had the opportunity, with firefighters, to go into some of their training facilities, both in Guelph and in London, and getting a very brief sense, for a few minutes, of just how hostile that environment is and the reason that mandatory retirement is a bona fide job requirement, because of those physical—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech of the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan on Bill 181, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997. Actually, the speaker before, the member for Parkdale–High Park, in her speech, talked a bit about carbon monoxide detectors and how the fire department had been first on the scene to provide help in the situation she was describing.

On that issue, I would simply like to point out that there is actually a private member's bill that is, I think, before the general government committee as we speak, and that is Bill 69, the Hawkins Gignac Act. It was put forward by the member from Oxford, and it would require the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in new homes that were built, and it's certainly one that we would like to see get passed. I bring this up partly because the Gignac family does have roots in my riding of Parry Sound. One branch of the family lives in Parry Sound, and the bill is named for the Hawkins-Gignac family from the tragedy that happened when, I believe, a fireplace malfunctioned. With carbon monoxide, it is odourless and you just don't know it's there unless you have a carbon monoxide detector, and that's why it's so important. It can really make a difference in saving lives, as smoke detectors make such a difference in alerting a family to a fire so they can get out of the home as quickly as possible.

1640

So I would simply like to make a plug for the member from Oxford's bill and say that we certainly support that bill and we'd like to see it become law. It could make a real difference in saving lives here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Let me offer my thanks to the members from Guelph, Parry Sound–Muskoka, Thornhill and Parkdale–High Park for their comments on my short speech.

I guess I can't help but comment that if the only criticism that can come from the opposition on this bill is that this piece of legislation did not happen soon enough—and I guess that's why I spent some time talking about other work that we've done with the firefighters. If that's the only criticism that can come forward on this particular piece of legislation, I guess I can't help but comment that both parties had the opportunity to do work in this regard. The NDP, from 1990 to 1995, were privileged to be the government in the province of Ontario;

the Conservatives, very recently, from 1995 to 2003. Five years here and eight years there, and unfortunately, not only were they late, but it never happened. I guess that if it's a timing issue, we can't help but discuss that.

There's not a whole lot more to say on this. I think this is one of those rare pieces of legislation that comes to this place that is broadly supported by everybody in here. I think that it is clearly obvious to anyone who is following this debate on television that this is something that's going to quite certainly pass second reading and then probably, quite certainly—although I never want to assume anything in this place. It certainly, at this point, seems to have all-party support, and we quite frankly think that, not too far in the future, we'll see this bill passed. I'm thankful for it.

It is important, once again, to remind people about the presumptive legislation that we have brought in previously, going back a number of years, that recognizes certain types of cancer, as well as heart disease, as being connected directly in certain circumstances to the work that's done by professional firefighters in this province, and ensures that their family members will be covered should they succumb to those illnesses.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I know how to take yes for an answer, and it looks to me like that's what we're going to have to take on this bill, because we've heard all three parties debate; everybody supports this legislation and obviously it will pass second reading.

I'll simply repeat, by way of starting, a comment that I made in the last short comment that I put on the record, and that is that this bill receive speedy approval by committee and come back to the House in time for us to pass it through third reading before we adjourn for the summer and before the election.

I'm going to share my time today with my colleague from Leeds-Grenville.

Who exactly are firefighters? Who are these people? Why do people decide that, to make a living, they're going to go into burning buildings? First of all, I can say that they're the people whom none of us ever want to see at our homes. But when we have to see them at our homes, we're really happy when they show up.

The answer—I happen to know a bit about who these people are. This comes from an early stage in my life when I was a young radio reporter. When you're in the radio reporting business, you get to report on everything. I got to the point on house fires particularly where I could do the report without being there. It would be something like, "The fire started in sheds at the rear of the building and worked its way up to the third floor, breaking through the roof, where firefighters were able to get a hold on it." I can still do the report by rote from memory.

I'm making somewhat light of a very serious situation, because it always involved life and limb—not the life and limb necessarily of the people who were inside the building, because often they had gotten out, but always the life and limb of the firefighters, the people who were there to respond to the call. They were people who were

driven to do this kind of work. In every case where I met a firefighter or a district chief who had been in it for life—and most of them were—they were people who said, "This is the work that I want to do. I want to intervene. I'm fascinated somehow by fire, and I want to be able to put it out and save people's lives." It was a calling. Not unlike some of the people in this room are called to serve the public in our particular way, these folks are called to serve the public in theirs. And we can do nothing but admire that drive and that spirit that brings them to the job because, at the end of the day, it serves our needs in a very real way when we are in danger.

I might call attention at this point to Listowel, Ontario, where we saw two brave firefighters give the ultimate sacrifice not very long ago: Raymond Walter, age 30, and Kenneth Rae, age 55. The first thing I should do in putting these names on the record is extend heartfelt sympathies and thanks to these two people, because as I've been talking about life and limb, there are two people who paid the ultimate price to save the lives of others. Dedication and service like that, in this particular case to the people of Listowel, Ontario, does not go unnoticed. Service like that to the province of Ontario does not go unnoticed. We thank our firefighters, and in this case the families of Mr. Walter and Mr. Rae, more than we can say because they have paid a supreme price as well.

The 8,500 professional firefighters across Ontario who dedicate their lives to help protect and save others deserve all the recognition and accolades that the province of Ontario can bestow upon them.

I've been representing the people of Thornhill for four years. Thornhill consists of two municipalities, neither of which, at this point, is at a level where we use volunteers. Both are at a level where they have professional fire departments. I see the representatives of the unions handling firefighters' concerns when they come for their annual political pilgrimage to this place, and I see them from Markham and from Vaughan. I've had four years of meetings, and I've also had informal meetings along the way because we meet in the riding, and this particular issue of mandatory retirement always comes up. I'm delighted to be standing up and talking about it today because it means real action on something they called attention to early in my political career so that I would understand what their needs were, and to be able to stand up today for them and on behalf of this bill really means something.

A Progressive Conservative government is and always has been committed to ensuring that our communities are safe and secure. I might focus for a moment on the word "secure." Security comes in a lot of forms. In the province of Ontario, people want security for the jobs that they do. They don't want to worry that they're going to go away. While we have seen some movement in the employment figures of late, we haven't seen enough movement as of yet. We know, from studies that have been done independently, that people are concerned about the security of their jobs, and approximately 30% of all Ontarians still fear for those jobs.

People are concerned about security when it comes to their health, and the fact that there will be doctors and there will be hospitals that can take care of them when they need those services. People are concerned about the security of the education system for their children, and people are very concerned about their personal safety and security.

That's where this bill lands: personal safety and security. I don't ever want anything to happen to me. I don't want anything to happen to my kids or my grandkids. I want my property to remain secure. But nobody has an absolute guarantee that that's going to be the case. The guarantee that we should always have is that if the unimaginable happens, the people who we need to respond to our gravest concerns are there. We should be able to go to sleep every night knowing that they're there, and so I want firefighters who are happy, firefighters who are equipped, firefighters who are capable, and capability and this issue of a mandatory retirement age go hand in glove.

Mr. Peter Kormos: And fairly paid.

Mr. Peter Shurman: And fairly paid, yes. I would agree with my friend from Welland.

We will continue to work with our firefighting community to ensure that they have the support and the resources that they need to ensure fire awareness and prevention. First responders respond for us. Now it's our turn to respond for them, and that's what we're doing here today.

Mandatory retirement age does not take away from the accomplishments of firefighters or our recognition of their dedication to Ontario in any way. It simply acknowledges the fact that firefighters are the special breed I've been talking about and need to be treated in a special way that is particular to them and particular to some other people in the first response area that will have to be addressed over time, not particular to people like us where we have folks ranging from age 30 up to age 80 in this Legislature. You can still do this job, because all you really have to do is stand on your feet here, and arguably not even that. You guys have to climb up and down the ladders and you have to carry people like me over your shoulders. I don't want somebody my age and in my condition carrying me on their shoulders.

1650

I want to also add a word about what firefighters bring to us as legislators in terms of things that we could do. My colleague mentioned Bill 69, which pertains to the Gignac family and the loss of life suffered there as a result of the absence of any warning about carbon monoxide. I spoke to that bill when it was presented. It sits in committee after second reading passage. It's something that firefighters in this province want, and it deserves to see the light of day and also pass third reading sometime before this Legislature ends. I wanted to get that on the record.

Anyway, on this legislation, it is proposed to standardize the retirement age across the province at age 60. I'm absolutely in favour of that. Our party is in favour of

that. I'll say again, we want this bill to be passed through third reading before we rise for the summer.

This legislation would also give firefighters who feel their unions are not representing them properly an option to approach the labour board directly. This could be a major issue. It is a major issue for some others. I can't speak to the issue of what all union locals in the entire sphere of firefighting do across the province of Ontario, save to say that the ones who come to see me seem to be doing a good job.

The issue has been talked about by the Ontario Association of Professional Fire Fighters for almost five years. However, no action has been taken by this government, and it's time. Whether this was motivated by a coming election or not is not the case, but it is shameful that it took this long. This is the government that can cut secret deals but can't do what's right for one of the most important service providers we have, essential service providers, people who keep our communities safe. Eight years in office; the election's down the road. Never mind. It's here; be happy.

We need decisive action on this issue, which this proposed legislation finally provides, finally affords. We can only hope that this government will finally see the light of day and not delay its passage. Most in this Legislature, if not all, are in agreement that the bill should pass. The leader of our Progressive Conservative Party supports this legislation. The rest of our PC caucus supports Bill 181. Mandatory retirement is appropriate in occupations that are highly physical and potentially life-threatening every time they are called to duty.

As I say, I would be concerned if somebody who wasn't 100% physically fit were involved in rescuing me. Both the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association and the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs support this bill. There is no reason why everyone in this House shouldn't support it as well.

Mr. Steve Clark: As the member for Thornhill said, I'm pleased to share my time with him in support of Bill 181.

For those who know me, although I did spend almost 15 years in the private sector, my roots are in the municipal sector, and just prior to my election I was a chief administrative officer. My first foray into municipal government was when I was elected mayor at the age of 22. I guess when I was elected mayor of Brockville, I learned early on the importance of our emergency personnel, the people who protect our people and our property. Early on in my first term, we had a very tragic fire death on Perth Street. After the area was secured, I was allowed by the chief and the personnel to go to that site and see the devastation. It was a life-changing experience for me to be on a site where there was a fire death.

I became very close to the fire department. I always looked forward to negotiations. They were a unique group because they always asked to negotiate with council, and I was always excited about the group that would come and talk to us.

I'm going to end my speech, for those firefighters who are in the crowd, with a Dr. Taylorism, because I think that was something that really stuck with me. I remember meeting with the firefighters twice since I've been an elected as an MPP and talking about this, and they gave me a pen with my three favourite sayings that Dr. Taylor prescribed to our fire negotiations.

We're here to support mandatory retirement for firefighters. We're here, as all three parties, to support Bill 181, and I can't think of a more important bill. I supported the member for Algoma-Manitoulin's private member's bill. I look forward to this going to committee and being passed before June 1.

I was speaking to the chief in Brockville, Chief Harry Jones, whom I've known for many years. In Brockville, under the FPPA, there are 37 firefighters. That includes dispatchers, firefighters, the training officer, fire prevention, the deputy and the chief. Their collective agreement is the one—for those who know something about this bill and about this industry, basically, in that city, it's OMERS. Most people realize that you need those 30 or 35 years to be able to get your pension. That's why most folks, depending on the age when they started—in Brockville, for example, some retire at 55, some at 57, some at 60, but for the most part, they're in that range.

As well, it has been mentioned by previous speakers, although I'm speaking about a full-time force predominantly—for those who deal with volunteer—some people call them part-time firefighters—this legislation provides some flexibility. I know that one of our members, the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, had a municipality concerned. I'm sure that, given the makeup of their particular force—maybe they've got some older members; maybe they're concerned about replenishing them. Obviously, the two years is an issue in some cases; in some, it may not be. But it does give the municipalities that flexibility.

As well, the other chief who is near and dear to my heart, because I was CAO of the township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands, is a chief whom we shared between the township and the town of Gananoque, a very small town, a separated town, in my riding. That's Chief Gerry Bennett. In Gananoque, he has three full-time firefighters and about 26 volunteers. Two, I think, have about 26 years' service; one has about five. In the township, he has, I guess you'd call it one and a half full-time—if you want to use the way it splits between the town and the township—and about 87 volunteers. So we've got a diverse group in Leeds-Grenville.

I think this is an extremely important piece of legislation that needs to be put forward.

I do want to mention some of the other challenges. When we talk about police sometimes, we as MPPs talk about giving them the tools to do their job. I think we need to turn our minds to giving our firefighters the tools to do their job as well. One of the issues in my municipality is communications and the huge amount of money it's going to take to convert our communications in Leeds and Grenville from analog to digital. It's going to cost us some \$6 million.

One of the issues, obviously, in our community, given the fact that we're close to the United States and we're upgrading our system, is this whole issue of interoperability, and that is to have ambulance and police and fire be able to talk to each other. We hope, in the months ahead, with the new federal government and with our election looming in October, that—the whole issue of infrastructure and qualifying municipalities to be able to upgrade their communications, to assist those on the ground in the fire service.

In my riding of Leeds-Grenville, especially in west Leeds, the topography of that area, the fact that there is a prevalence of granite, causes a very unique challenge for communications in the fire service, and I think that it's something that needs to be addressed by governments. As I said, we ought to upgrade from analog to digital but, as well, provide new paging systems and other things like that.

I do want to echo things that were said. My colleague from Thornhill mentioned Bill 69, the Hawkins Gignac bill that my colleague the member for Oxford, Ernie Hardeman, has put forward. I'm on the general government committee, and I would sure love for us to deal with that bill and to have it brought back to the House to be passed before we adjourn. That's something as well that's of interest.

With the background that I've had in municipal government, I think it's crucial for us to move this bill forward and to act upon this. We've talked at great length. We had speeches very, very similar to the ones that we've had this afternoon, when the private member's bill was discussed. This is something that I think the folks in the galleries have come year after year after year to talk to us about, and we're finally moving it forward. There is consensus among the party leaders and the House leaders to move this forward.

1700

Let's realize that firefighters are firefighters for life. I know there's a mutual aid meeting tonight in Leeds and Grenville. I know there will be a number of honorary members, members who are in their 80s, who will be attending those meetings and, although they obviously can't participate in an active way, still want to meet with their brothers and sisters in the fire service. I know that meeting is going on tonight, and I told Chief Jones—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Anybody from Athens going to be there?

Mr. Steve Clark: There's going to be lots there, Jeff. You should come and see Athens. They're missing you.

Gerry Bennett and Harry Jones are great chiefs, and I think they are looking forward to this legislation.

I want to end with the comments that I talked about first. Every time we would meet with the firefighters to negotiate, before they would lay out their book, they would always have—I call them Dr. Taylorisms. When they talked about their proposals that came to council, they always said, "They're morally sound, legally defensible and reasonably practical." It was funny, because I would always sit back as the head of council and say—it was normally Mike Bailey who was the chief nego-

tiator of the firefighters in my day, and I would say to Mike, “Lay the words on me, Mike. Lay the words on me. I want to hear those three phrases.” And I think, really, Dr. Taylor’s comments, comments that municipal councils would hear at the time of negotiations, ring clear today. This proposal in this bill is morally sound, legally defensible and reasonably practical. It’s got support from all the parties. I think it would be a great gesture for us to move this forward, bring it to committee and provide that mandatory retirement change for firefighters to recognize their importance in our communities, in our townships, in our towns and in our cities. This would be a great jewel for us, as a Legislative Assembly, to come together in a non-partisan way and move this forward.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to share the time with the member for Thornhill.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: Speaker, me too. Some of my best friends are firefighters—me too. And in my case they really are: Dave Cleary, “Beefy”—I went to school with a lot of these guys and they ended up being firefighters. As a matter of fact, they’re at the retirement age now, so, guys, give it up. It’s time to give the young guys a rest.

Anyway, I do want to take a quick moment. Before I was elected, I formed and chaired a group called the Friends of the Firefighters. We raised \$110,000 to buy thermal imagers for the fire department. Then we re-grouped and formed another session and raised another \$50,000 for the Brant County Fire Department on the volunteer side. Then, just recently, we re-formed as Friends of the Firefighters and raised \$27,000 to buy carbon monoxide detectors to be given to the fire department to hand out.

Unabashedly, I’m a very strong supporter of firefighters; I’ve worked with them since being elected. In opposition, for one of the rare moments in which a private member’s bill did get passed if it wasn’t a government one, we passed the Firefighters’ Memorial Day Act. It was my first private member’s bill, and it was the first private member’s bill I got passed. I’m proud to say that it was supported by all members of the House.

I also worked on the memorial in Gravenhurst to be improved, and then we switched that and turned it into the memorial at Toronto, and supported another private member’s bill in order to get that memorial built here in Toronto. So I appreciate the work that was done behind the scenes by a very large number of people and supported.

Regarding our first election, because I was the opposition critic, I offered the first-time capital expenditure for the fire departments in the province of Ontario, and in 2003 we fulfilled that, and the presumptive legislation and on and on. So the government has been showing its support.

Just in case we do want to play politics, go back to 1995 to 1999 and find out what Bill 85 was all about.

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

Seeing none, Mr. Sousa has moved—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Oh, sorry; the response, then. The member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I’ll respond to my friend from Brant, who had the only comments. For once we agree. I’m absolutely blown away.

What can I say? I’ll simply repeat a couple of things that I brought forward in debate, only because I think they matter. What we have to do here is continue the effort of working with our firefighting community, our policing community, the people who provide the security that every family in Ontario has come to expect over time. The fact that the government has seen fit to bring forward this bill for debate now, the fact that you see unanimity in this House and therefore this bill, in all likelihood, will get back here and pass third reading before we adjourn for the summer is a very positive indication of how everybody who represents you and represents everybody else in the province of Ontario feels about the work that you do. I used the line somewhere in the speech about the fact that you are first responders and that it is in a way a great pleasure for us to be able to respond to needs that you’ve had for a very long time, so I’m pleased to participate today in that sense.

I think it’s worth noting, in the few second I have left, that a majority of pre-existing agreements call for mandatory retirement, 50 of 75 agreements in the province of Ontario, so this bill would set the mandatory retirement age to 60 years of age if a collective agreement including a mandatory retirement age does not already exist. What that comes down to is a level playing field for everyone, and what it also comes down to is a level playing field for the people of Ontario, who have a right to expect a firefighter who is completely at the ready at their door in their hour of need.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know there are people who thought the debate was over, and I had hoped to be able to get into the debate earlier, but unfortunately, I had other commitments. I did want to have an opportunity to speak to this bill and didn’t think that I could quite fit it in with a two-minute question or comment.

I do, first of all, want to welcome the firefighters who are here with us today, and I want to assure you that I’m not going to use all 20 minutes, so we are going to end this shortly, I believe.

I come from a riding where the firefighting is primarily volunteer, but I do have a couple of professional departments—not that the volunteers aren’t professional; I don’t mean it that way, but it’s not their only professional way of making a living. I do have a professional department in Pembroke that is certainly the largest.

I want to first talk about my relationship and my respect for firefighters in general, because I also, not to the extent that my friend from Leeds–Grenville was, was a member of the council in the village of Barry’s Bay, where we worked very closely with our volunteer fire department. I was constantly amazed, and I continue to be amazed, at the amount of work these people do in

being prepared to do the job that we hope they never have to do. The firefighter is the one person you never want to meet when they're actually on the job because it probably means that you're where you wish you weren't. But the amount of training and preparation and following procedures and stuff that they go through that most of us never see is quite remarkable, and if that's the case at the volunteer level, you can only imagine what is happening at the professional level. We're very, very thankful, I know in my riding and certainly in the town of Barry's Bay, that we have a competent service, even though it is volunteer.

Now, on the bill itself, this is something that in my time here the first person I was ever addressed by on behalf of the professional firefighters was Barry Quinn, and I know he's still coming to visit us here at Queen's Park and still making his case on behalf of his brothers.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Turn around.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, he's not up there. We appreciate—I certainly appreciate the work that he has done and continues to do.

When he first raised this issue with me, I said, "Well, now, isn't that interesting?" Maybe we're coming at it from different perspectives, but my perspective was quite simply, I said, "You know, Barry, if I'm in a burning building"—with all due respect, I know people are training harder and they're in better shape than they have ever been because we have more ways of maintaining our physical fitness. But I said, "If I'm in a burning building, I'm really hoping that the guy who's coming in to get me out of there is not over 60. I'm hoping he's about six foot six and 250 pounds, built like a linebacker, and he can throw me over his shoulder and get me out of there." I don't believe that's the kind of work that I really want to see somebody doing who is getting close to what is accepted as a retirement age by most people from any job, being 65.

In the kind of work that a firefighter is expected to do, I'm pretty comfortable that we should call it a day at the age of 60. If there's another role within the department, I believe there are provisions in this legislation and certainly in some collective agreements that, depending upon the work that the specific person does for the department, if they're a chief or whatever and they're not actively involved in an active suppression role—there are some provisions for allowing them to stay on beyond that.

The other thing that I noticed, given the collective agreements that they have, is that the vast, vast majority of firefighters are retiring before the age of 60 already. This legislation only puts into law what is already the practice, and I think it is the right practice. It's the right practice and the law itself, of course, will be the right law.

I know there are some concerns that have been raised on the part of municipalities as to whether or not this will have a financial effect on them, but as we said, in the vast majority of collective agreements it already exists. I think that in the big picture it is going to have a minimal effect because of the fact that, even without a collective agreement, most of them have reached the needed number of years to retire by age 60 anyway.

I think this is a positive step forward. I know we support it as a caucus. I'm looking forward to seeing it get to committee so that we can hear from stakeholders across the province whether there are ways to improve it; and if there are objections, we do want to hear them, and I'm sure that they can be addressed and dealt with. But at the end of the day, I think we're all satisfied that this is a right and proper thing to do and that this Legislature should be able to have this bill entrenched in law before we leave for the summer.

I'm adding my support to that of our critic Garfield Dunlop and the PC caucus, and hopefully we can move expeditiously with that bill forthwith.

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

Mr. Sousa has moved second reading of Bill 181. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

This vote will be deferred. Do you have a deferral slip?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Madam Speaker, I think I can help you out here.

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

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on Bill 181, An Act to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, be deferred until Wednesday, May 11."

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Orders of the day.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): On division.

The House adjourned at 1714.

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Peter Shurman, Norman W. Sterling
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
David Caplan, Kim Craitor
Jeff Leal, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Lou Rinaldi
Tony Ruprecht
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Ted McMeekin
Shafiq Qaadri, Khalil Ramal
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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