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of Ontario

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 28 March 2012

Mercredi 28 mars 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 28 March 2012

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 28 mars 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES
AMENDMENT ACT (RENT
INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA LOCATION
À USAGE D'HABITATION
(TAUX LÉGAL D'AUGMENTATION
DES LOYERS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline / *Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne le taux légal d'augmentation des loyers.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: As the Ontario PC critic for municipal affairs and housing, I stand here on behalf of my leader, Tim Hudak, and our caucus, and am so pleased to speak to Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

I have to say, Speaker, that I've thought quite a bit about our position since the bill was introduced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs on December 6 of last year. In a perfect world, this legislation just might be something that our party could have supported, but we know clearly that when it comes to housing in the province of Ontario, whether you're coming at the issue from the perspective of a landlord, a tenant or a service provider in the municipal sector, the situation is far from perfect. All sides of this issue face serious challenges.

We know that too many Ontarians—1.31 million tenant households—are stretched to the limit trying to pay their household bills, including their rents. We know that some 20% of these households spend more than 50% of their income on rent, while some 32% are in core need, meaning that their current accommodation fails to meet standards of adequacy, suitability and, of course, affordability. That's too many households, Speaker. Our party

believes that we must take immediate action to make life more affordable for all Ontarians.

We know that that's just the problem faced by those who actually have a roof over their heads. Speaker, there are 142,000 Ontarians now waiting on the affordable housing list. Again, this bill isn't going to help them get that safe, secure place to raise their families.

It's certainly not going to offer anything for families in Leeds–Grenville. As I speak today, there are more than 500 families on the waiting list for affordable housing units. They're not going to be comforted by this bill at all, Speaker. When people contact my constituency office about housing issues, it's not to talk about the formula used to calculate rent increases; it's not the formula that they want to talk to me about. There's a bunch of questions that they have: "Why can it take up to three years"—three years—"for a family to move from the wait-list into a unit?" Three years, Speaker. Or: "Why does the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville lack the provincial support to do basic maintenance on the unit I'm living in?" Those are questions I get asked all the time, and I don't see anything in Bill 19 shortening their wait time one day, or helping to get their roof repaired any faster.

I don't see it changing another alarming trend in the affordable housing sector either. I spoke to Alison Tutak, director of human services with the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, and she shared some interesting information on how the amount of time people remain in rent-gear-to-income or some other forms of affordable housing has changed over the years. She noted that 15 years ago, a family or individual might be in a unit for one to two years before they're able to get themselves back on their feet. Now, Speaker, it takes many years, and we know why: It's because life in Ontario, under Dalton McGuinty, has become unaffordable for families.

We have hundreds of thousands of people without work while the HST and soaring hydro rates, along with increased fees, are eating away at what little disposable income people have. Under Dalton McGuinty, hydro rates have increased eight times since 2003, for a total of 84%. And if you're a family with a smart meter at your home, well, you've seen your bill go up a staggering 150%. As a result, people find themselves having to stay in these units for years and years and years while the wait-lists just keep growing and growing.

It's important to remember that when we talk about housing, it's not just bricks and mortar—or, in the case of this legislation, a formula used to calculate how much rent is going to go up for someone the coming year. A

home isn't an abstract concept, Speaker. After food and water, I suggest it's the most basic of our needs. Having a place to call home gives people the basis on which everything else in life begins. Without it, there's no hope to maintain employment or get the education and necessary training to break that cycle of poverty.

I was given the great honour to serve the people of Leeds–Grenville in a by-election in March 2010. Just 18 months after that by-election, we were on the campaign trail again. I've knocked on a lot of doors in the last two years, and I think I have a pretty good understanding of the challenges facing families in my riding. To be honest, it's not just families in my riding; it's families across all of our 107 ridings in the province of Ontario. Too many people in this province are just one missed paycheque away from finding themselves either at the mercy of their landlord or they're out on the street.

0910

But it's not just tenants who are feeling the pinch in Ontario. The reality is that landlords also, in this province, have seen their costs going up and up and up, particularly those small landlords that I speak to in my riding. Far from the fat-cat, Cadillac-driving, cigar-chomping caricature that they're painted as, all too often these folks are incorrectly categorized, are demonized. Those landlords that I've met in my riding are just small, hard-working people. They're just small business people.

The landlords in my riding speak to me right now, saying that the rental business is a money-losing operation. Considering that the cost of operating rental units is rising by up to 6% every year, we need to seriously consider the impact of this on landlords in any discussion we have on a housing strategy for the province of Ontario. Instead, Speaker, the minister has simply grabbed a number out of the air—in this case, 2.5%—and she has decided that that's going to be the cap that rents are going to be capped at. She's done that knowing that policies introduced by her government, such as the green energy experiments that have put energy bills through the roof, and the HST, which has driven up costs for things like building repairs and maintenance—those costs are not subject to any cap. They just keep going up and up and up every year.

We also need to pay attention to the reality of where rents stand when adjusted for inflation. Look at those real rents in the most recent report issued by CMHC. At the end of last year, the Ontario average two-bedroom monthly rent, adjusted for inflation, was \$840—\$43 less than where it stood in 2002. I noticed that the minister yesterday failed to mention that part of the CMHC press release in her remarks. So in the interest of having a full debate, I thought it was important for me to add this to the discussion.

Again, I'm afraid that this legislation fails to consider the impact of imposing that arbitrary 2.5% ceiling on rent increases and how it will affect the ability to pay, indeed for landlords to remain in the housing business, and on the availability of housing. It's most disappointing that the minister has brought in this legislation without even

consulting the province's landlords to find out what impact that will have on rental properties.

As Vince Brescia, president and CEO of the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, said in reaction to the bill: "We understand the government's efforts to mitigate price volatility, but setting an arbitrary price ceiling fails to recognize that housing industry costs, like repairs and maintenance, are not subject to any price caps. The government is unilaterally imposing a cap without any discussion with an entire industry and is initiating a policy that will be particularly devastating for small landlords." That's the quote. Speaker, that's an organization that represents 2,200 small landlords across the province, and they've been entirely shut out of this process.

So against that backdrop where both landlords and tenants are facing unprecedented strain on their budgets, this is the bill that the minister brings in. It's a bill that I can best describe as window dressing. It looks good from a distance, but upon closer inspection, it's just an attempt to gloss over a much larger problem. That's why our Ontario PC caucus simply cannot support this bill. To do so would be sending a message that Bill 19 will actually make a real difference to those who either pay rent or collect it. In reality, Speaker, it won't. And our caucus, in good conscience, cannot be party to any attempt to fool Ontarians to think that it will. We're not going to play that game.

Listening to the minister yesterday—I listened very carefully to what she said; I didn't utter a word; I listened to every single word she said—I actually felt a bit sorry for the minister, having to stand for an hour in this House and speak about a bill that, at the end of the day—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Could the member from Ottawa take his sidebar outside, please?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My apologies, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark:—having to stand here in this House for an hour to talk about a bill that, at the end of the day, will do exactly what the existing rent increase guideline formula in the act already does.

My colleague the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke put it well. He said the minister sounded like someone seeking to be reappointed to a job. I have to say that if I was the one doing the hiring, I'm not sure she'd get that job, based on what I heard and what I've read in this bill. While she may have talked a good game and left us with plenty of feel-good quotes and the impression that their government has made a difference, we all know—all of us—that that's far from reality. As the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke put it, she didn't really talk much about the bill, because there's not much in the bill to talk about.

I think we all need to remember, in the context of this debate, where the government is trying to paint itself as the great defender of the household budget. But what happened in this House on November 24 of last year, I think, said it all. On that day, the PC and NDP caucuses

stood united to pass Bill 4, the Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act (HST Rebate for Home Heating), introduced by the member for Algoma–Manitoulin. By a vote of 54 to 50, Speaker, as we all remember, this House passed legislation to give residents of the province of Ontario a break on the HST on their home heating costs.

That was something that made a real impact on family budgets, and that's why the opposition stood united that day. But, shockingly, this arrogant government is following the ridiculous "major minority" mantra of Premier McGuinty, refusing—refusing—to move Bill 4 to committee and ultimately back here for third reading.

I attended many events in my riding after Bill 4 was passed, and I have to tell you, people were thrilled that we listened, that members of the opposition listened. So you can imagine, Speaker, the look of disbelief when I tell them that the government's position is to so blatantly ignore the wishes of this House and, by extension, the constituents we all represent.

We've all witnessed the government's shameful handling of the Ornge scandal, which is nothing short of a scandal in itself. We watched as the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care refused to accept responsibility for her utter mismanagement of this file and thumbed her nose at the traditions of the very institution she was elected to serve. I'll get to that more later, Speaker.

There are clear signs that the system is failing, as the government continues to allow a bill that would offer real relief for families to sit in limbo.

We have to take a look at where this particular piece of legislation is getting us. Bill 19 proposes to put a floor and a ceiling on the annual rent increase guideline that is announced by the ministry every summer. We all well know the genesis of this bill and where it came from. Last year the ministry announced a 3.1% increase guideline for 2012. Predictably, that produced an outcry from tenants' groups, many of whom were based, I believe, in the minister's own riding. This bill is nothing more than the minister's attempt to convince those tenant groups that she and the government are on their side.

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Bill 19 would mandate that while the guideline would continue to be based on the annual consumer price index for Ontario as reported by Statistics Canada, the increase will not fall below 1%, nor would it be raised to over 2.5%. Yet when we look at the past history of the rent increase guidelines, when we look at those, the history, we see just how empty this bill really is and why tenants' groups are not fooled.

What are tenants' advocacy groups saying about Bill 19? Let me quote to you from a release issued by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario after this bill was introduced: "Why is the government doing so little to protect the homes of hundreds of thousands of tenants after promising so much more?" asks Kenn Hale, director of advocacy and legal services at the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. A further quote: "In the real world, tenants are losing their jobs, facing demands for wage freezes and rollbacks or living with a 1% increase in their

social assistance cheques." Speaker, obviously that was written prior to yesterday's budget.

His quote goes on, "In the real world, when tenants move, there is no limit on the rent increases that a landlord can charge an incoming tenant in any private market building." That's what Mr. Hale said. Here's the bottom line: "All tenants deserve to be protected from unaffordable rent increases, including the 300,000 tenant households that live in buildings that are exempt from rent regulation, and we hope the minister amends the bill to provide them this protection." So you heard that.

The minister spoke yesterday. She spoke about knocking on thousands of doors in apartment units and speaking with tenants who told her they need help in paying the rent. She promised to do something, and her response is Bill 19. What are those tenant advocacy groups telling you? Well, the one I just read is telling her to amend the bill; it's telling her to make changes, go back to the drawing board.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Could the member for Ottawa take his seat.

The member from Ottawa Centre, I asked before: If he wants to hold court, to do it outside the chamber. He seems to have not listened and moved over to the other side to hold another sidebar. Last warning.

Mr. Steve Clark: He's a very social member, Speaker.

Like me, the tenants' groups know this legislation won't really change a thing. It's an attempt by the government to really be seen as doing something at a time when I believe real, substantive change is necessary. It's quite ironic that this government has crafted a piece of legislation aimed to narrowcast a message to such a select group of stakeholders, and even the group they're trying to appease has called it a failure.

Here are the facts, Speaker. Over the past 10 years, the average rent increase was 2.1%, and over the last five years, the average has been just 1.8%. So what does that tell us? It indicates that the present rent increase guideline formula, as it now exists, already keeps the annual figure between what's proposed here in the legislation.

Let's also take a look at the 3.1% increase for 2012 that caused the government to put this legislation on the table. Remember that after the 2011 guideline, the rent increases were 0.7%. That's a two-year average of 1.9%, which is again right in the middle of the floor and the ceiling that's proposed by Bill 19. On average, the formula used to determine the annual rent increase in the province actually does what the legislation seeks to codify.

In her remarks yesterday, the minister cited the Poverty by Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty study released by the United Way. The minister noted that the study found that almost half of the tenants interviewed said they worry about paying the rent each month. One in four said they do without things every month in order to pay their rent, and one in three indicated that they and their family do without necessities. So it's insulting to the authors of that

study to have it quoted in the context of what the minister purports her bill will do.

She knows that if we proclaim this bill, nothing would change for those tenants cited in the United Way study. She knows that the average increase already falls between the guidelines proposed in Bill 19. It's already happening, Speaker. This isn't the part of the Residential Tenancies Act or the broader housing issue that's in the province that's broken and needs attention.

What disappoints me most as the opposition critic for municipal affairs and housing is that this legislation lacks imagination completely on the housing file. We have before us an ideal opportunity to roll up our sleeves and make some substantive, impactful changes to housing legislation that would make a real difference in people's lives.

This is a minority Parliament. It's the first minority Parliament we've had in more than 25 years, and I think, Speaker, in that spirit, I would have hoped that there would have been far more ambitious legislation coming forward from the government on the housing file. But instead, as we've seen time after time after time, bills are brought before this House and the government is choosing to play politics. They'd rather come here with a do-nothing bill designed with one purpose in mind, and that's to paint the opposition—and in our case, the Progressive Conservatives—as being against tenants. I already heard a few catcalls this morning.

Shamefully, the government is doing the same thing by refusing to work with the opposition on the issue of bullying. They've ignored an unprecedented opportunity to help kids just so they can force a vote on an inferior bill and run to the mike and badmouth the PC MPPs. It's cheap politics, Speaker, and Ontarians, I suggest, are disgusted with it. Frankly, it demeans the stature of this place.

I want to thank the member for Nepean–Carleton for her eloquent address in our lead earlier this week. She did exactly what Ontarians want. They want those two bills merged.

Speaker, let me be clear: It's not because we're against tenants that I and our caucus don't support Bill 19. We don't support it because it's not going to do anything to make rent more affordable or the wait-list for housing less lengthy in the long run. Based on the average over the past 10 years, the rent you'll be paying a decade from now won't differ by even 1% based on this bill. There's so little here, in fact, that I can't even recommend that our caucus members hold their nose and vote in favour of it at second reading while it goes into committee. No amount of committee work is going to improve this bill because, simply, there's no meat on the bones.

I mentioned this earlier, but what really disappoints me is how limited in scope this bill really is. It's so completely without any ambition on the part of the minister or this government. I've said that the minister has chosen to ignore the real problems facing landlords and tenants. I could not believe my ears yesterday when I heard the minister state that she believes this bill represents the

sum total of what either landlords or tenants require. I couldn't believe it.

Here's what she said. I'm going to quote the minister. "The act, we believe, does not at this time need significant or deep reform, but as the circumstances change for those who rent, we'll listen. We'll be open to amending the legislation" as "necessary, but at this point we're going to focus on" this "one particular area."

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That's unbelievable, Speaker. Her quote: "As the circumstances change for those who rent, we'll listen." Are you kidding me? You have to be kidding me. How much worse can it get for people in the province of Ontario to try to keep a roof over their heads before this government is going to wake up to the fact of what we've seen already? We have to make some substantive changes.

She took a lot of time yesterday to quote a lot of statistics, but hearing those comments, I have to ask: Did she really look at the statistics in front of her? Because if she did, if she truly looked at the statistics and spoke to tenants and landlords, she'd have come up with a much more meaningful piece of legislation than the one we're debating this morning.

Let's take a look at some of these situations that this government apparently—apparently—doesn't consider to address in this province. I've met with many landlords in my constituency office, and one of their real concerns is the Landlord and Tenant Board. Where's the legislation from this government to bring some substantive reform to the board and the way it works—or, more appropriately, the way it doesn't work?

I recently met with Ted Carr. Ted's a landlord in Brockville who tries very hard to treat his tenants fairly and accommodate them when they're late with their rent—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I think the minister is a little out of line, and if she has anything to say to me, we'll talk in the back.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to Ted Carr, Speaker. Ted's a small landlord in my riding. He tries to treat his tenants fairly. He tries to accommodate them when they're late with their rent. He knows that it's better to work with a tenant than to face the dreaded alternative of a trip to the Landlord and Tenant Board. It just creates animosity between the two parties, and at the end of the day, it makes him look to fill an empty unit. As much as he tries to be fair, though, inevitably there are going to be disputes, and some of those disputes will end up before the board.

I want to try to capture, this morning, in Ted's own words, his experience from a small landlord's perspective. "I have, and continue to have, money outstanding from a tenant, this after many requests for payment, different hearings and appearing at different levels of the system, the bureaucracy, getting several judgments, yet I still have money outstanding.

"Not many have the time, the patience or the resources to litigate these matters. It is the opinion of this landlord

that the system, which has seen benefits over the years, has to be simplified, the process more friendly.... One has no idea until they experience this bureaucracy from a person with no idea of where to start, the frustration of where to turn or what to do now. To go to the tribunal to be turned away because of an incorrect process, incorrect form served, to hear that the tenant has access to duty counsel, while the landlord has no support.”

He ends by stating, “The KISS system would be of some benefit here”—and we all know what the KISS system is: Keep it Simple, Stupid. I’m not directing that at anybody. That’s right, Speaker. He’s saying we need to simplify and streamline the process.

Mike Gordon is another Brockville landlord, and he has brought some concerns recently in regard to the Landlord and Tenant Act as well. Mike is particularly upset about the ability of landlords to evict tenants who wilfully cause damage to property. We’re talking, in his case, several thousands of dollars; it’s serious stuff. I know my predecessor in the role as opposition critic for municipal affairs and housing, Joyce Savoline—she’s very thoughtful, a former member for Burlington, and served the people in that riding well. She brought forward a bill to address this particular issue, and it really struck a balance, I think, between providing landlords with some protection yet not burdening tenants with exorbitant costs. Ms. Savoline’s bill proposed to allow landlords to collect a damage deposit of no more than 25% of one month’s rent from tenants when they sign a lease.

I think the current Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing should go back. She should review Ms. Savoline’s speech during the second reading debate on her bill. She spoke of how the need for damage deposit legislation was particularly acute, given the impact of the HST on small business landlords. I want to quote her words. “These additional costs of the HST” dramatically “increase costs for landlords, and many have no choice but to dip into their reserve funds in order to make up for the difference in cost. The depletion of reserve funds that are there for emergencies is a very bad idea. Those funds are not to be used for things like ongoing maintenance. This would have serious implications for the rental housing industry.” That was her quote, Speaker.

What she was warning of is that the increasing cost of doing business for landlords as a result of the HST could force some of them to fold. When they do, it doesn’t just have an impact on local economies; the loss of those units makes it even more difficult for people to find a place to call home. So her bill, I think, was a progressive step to solve a real problem, like one that Mike Gordon has brought to my attention. Those are the types of reform that I’d like to see come forward from this government for debate.

Yesterday, the minister, in her speech, also talked about the fact that she met with 50 delegations at the recent Rural Ontario Municipal Association and the Ontario Good Roads Association combined conference, ROMA/OGRA. She indicated that housing was a big

topic of discussion; I’m sure it was. Again, I don’t think any of those delegations that came to speak to her about housing are going to be calling me up to urge me to support this bill because it solves their issues. Far from it. If municipalities across Ontario—and I’ve spoken to many of them. I’m sure staff and elected officials alike were shocked to hear that this was the bill, Bill 19, that she brought forward. If this is the only piece of legislation on the housing front, God help us.

So I’m pleased to hear that she took the time; I’m pleased that the minister sat at ROMA/OGRA. I’m disappointed for her that she didn’t listen to those municipal officials, because—I wonder if, during those meetings, she heard about a resolution that originated from the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board and has since been endorsed by a number of municipalities across the province. Indeed, in my riding, the ministry’s social housing service provider is the joint services committee of the united counties of Leeds and Grenville, and they passed the resolution on February 10. Here’s what it says, and I hope the minister hears this as well.

“Whereas social housing is an integral part of the province’s social services; and

“Whereas the costs for social housing have more than doubled in some areas since funding was established and the services were transferred to the municipalities; and

“Whereas the province has failed to maintain 50/50 cost share since 2001; and

“Whereas the province has failed to provide adequate funding to share in the economic and operating increases; and

“Whereas the province has failed to provide adequate funding for existing and capital improvements; and

“Whereas the funding for social housing services across the province is becoming increasingly inequitable;

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“Therefore be it resolved by the Joint Services Committee of Leeds and Grenville:

“(1) That the Joint Services Committee of Leeds and Grenville supports the resolution of the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board and petitions the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appropriately fund the actual costs associated with” housing.

Reading that, it doesn’t sound like an ill-conceived attempt at rent control in Bill 19 is going to address the concerns of municipalities who are already delivering social housing services.

I know that the minister is also well aware of the concerns that her ministry’s service providers at the municipal level have with the past bill, Bill 140. Under that legislation, passed prior to the fall election, service managers are ordered to come up with a 10-year affordable housing plan for their municipality. Basically, what the government is saying is, “We can’t really figure this out, so you guys have to take a stab at it and come back to us at some other point in the future.”

This government created LHINs to insulate the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and now they're trying to absolve themselves from their responsibility of delivering an affordable housing strategy by passing the buck to municipalities. Oh, they've made sure to provide some funding to cover administration costs and to develop some of these plans a little bit here and a little bit there. The minister did say that they'd offer some guidance, so at least she's going to provide that.

This bill that we're debating today will do nothing, absolutely nothing, to address the ongoing maintenance issues that plague social housing units. It's estimated that there is a \$3-billion repair backlog because the government simply hasn't made the right investments. But there's more when it comes from groups who wish to seek reform.

Last week, I was pleased to meet with members of the Ontario Co-operative Association here at Queen's Park at a reception. They've also met with me to discuss some of the legislation that they see in their sector. We know they've been waiting for years for this government to make a simple legislative change to resolve a problem that all sides of this House have recognized needs to be fixed.

The member for Etobicoke Centre even put forward a private member's bill during the last session. Bill 198 would have amended the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, to finally put an end to the situation where co-ops and their tenants must go before the courts to resolve their disputes. We know that this situation creates the need for drawn-out, costly proceedings that hurt tenants and landlords alike. So again, I ask: If we all agree that it makes sense, where is the legislation to give co-ops access to the Landlord and Tenant Board? It's like everything of substance that we could see being done in this file is just nowhere to be found in this bill.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of speaking with John Argue from Parkdale Community Legal Services. John sent me an email, and we had a nice discussion about some of the concerns and some of the amendments that he feels should be added to Bill 19. He had some great ideas, but I really think that they're so substantive that the best approach isn't to do it at committee but to tell the minister to go back and start over. I really do. I think that's the only way.

One of the points he reminded me of was a private member's bill introduced during the last session by Norm Sterling, who was then the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills. Mr. Sterling's Bill 204—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: I hear some support from Mr. Sergio for Bill 204. I'm glad you supported Bill 204.

That bill, Speaker, to remind the member opposite, looked at the fact that, under the Residential Tenancies Act, any residence built after 1991 is not subject to rent regulation. Indeed, that's the case with the bill we're debating here today. Again, this is an issue that stake-

holders in the province's housing sector want to know their elected representatives are taking a serious look at.

In the aftermath of last October's election, there was a lot of talk—a lot of talk—about how this minority Parliament might actually be a good thing for Ontarians. People speculated that it was an opportunity for the government to actually engage opposition parties and work with them on legislation. But the government has poisoned that environment with the Premier's talk of this whole "major minority," and it's continued with the way they've approached the introduction of Bill 13. It's also pitting region against region with Bill 11, and refusing to back Bill 4 or to appoint the select committee to investigate Ornge—so much for a spirit of bipartisan co-operation to help us solve the real problems that Ontarians face in their day-to-day lives. It's very disappointing to me.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It is disappointing.

Mr. Steve Clark: Very disappointing.

We had an opportunity to make some real, substantive changes. It's my great privilege to have met with so many stakeholders about the housing file, and I can talk for hours, I suggest, on some of the wonderful suggestions that they've brought forward.

One of them, which I just want to give a quick shout-out for, is a report called A Housing Benefit for Ontario: One Housing Solution for a Poverty Reduction Strategy. It's a coalition that included the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, the Greater Toronto Apartment Association, the Daily Bread Food Bank, and two charitable foundations, the Metcalf Foundation and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. So there you've got a cross-section of tenant groups, landlords, poverty reduction advocates, charitable foundations, all working together to try to solve a problem. And if they can do it, I have to ask, for people who are watching the debate at home, if those groups, which represent all sides of the sector, can get together and table a report on an improvement like a housing benefit, why can't we? It makes absolutely no sense to me.

I mentioned earlier the government's total disregard to cross party lines. I mentioned Bill 11, the eastern and the southwestern fund, and how they're pitting areas against each other; and Bill 13, which I mentioned earlier, that we couldn't seem to get any agreement on between Bill 13 and Bill 14, which is a sad state. But it's the total lack of even recognition by this government that there's a problem.

The minister showed up yesterday, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. She showed up about 10 after 10 yesterday and tried to retract or modify details that she'd said—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: Come on, you know what it is. This House—she stood right in her place.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Right there.

Mr. Steve Clark: She stood right there by her chair, and when asked repeated questions by the member of Newmarket-Aurora, she said—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Sergio, she said that she would abide by the wishes of this House. This House voted—the will of the Legislature.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from York West is a little exuberant. Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: I think, Speaker, we need to draw a line in the sand when it comes to the select committee—

Mr. Mario Sergio: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from York West.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that we are dealing with Bill 19. It has nothing to do with the Minister of Health. This is a housing issue—the Landlord and Tenant Act. It's got nothing to do with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I would—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member for his input. That's not a point of order. It will be up to me to distinguish if he gets off the road. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order from the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Just to make it very clear, I believe what my colleague is doing is just setting the example of the arrogance of this minority government and what they have been doing to this assembly since they have been re-elected—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you for that compliment you gave them, but I don't think that was necessary. Continue, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. I just want to make one final comment on that. I think we all expect that when the will of this Legislature comes forward for an all-party select committee on Ornge, the minister is going to do what she says she's going to do. I believe quite sufficiently that it's time, because of their arrogance in regard to the all-party select committee on Ornge. That I move to end debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Clark has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of this House that the motion carry? I think the ayes have it.

All in favour, say "aye."

Opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it. We'll call in the members for a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0951 to 1015.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Clark has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carries?

All in favour, please stand and remain standing until the Clerk counts.

All those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 23; the nays are 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe the motion is defeated.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This House will be recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure today to welcome to the House a couple of broadcasting individuals: Sue Storr and Lindsay Hendriks from Country 103.9 FM and 1070 AM. They're doing a live call-in show back to Sarnia–Lambton and all across southwestern Ontario. Welcome them to the House, please.

Ms. Soo Wong: Shortly, the students from Dr. Norman Bethune, along with the teachers Evita and Shannon, will be visiting the Legislature. I want to welcome them to the House.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome the parents of page Lauren Barry from the Tweed area and Prince Edwards–Hastings riding: Chris Barry, who's a sergeant with the Belleville Police Service; and Lauren's mom, Joanne Barry, who's a principal at Madoc township school. Also her aunt, Paula Adam, is here, and her best friend, Marin Love, is here as well. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, I'd like to welcome, from Thunder Bay and the Ontario Health Coalition, Suzanne Pulice and Sara Williamson.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd also welcome family members of page Lauren Barry: her grandparents, Ian and Bonnie McQuarrie, from Millbrook in my riding; and her great-uncle, Robert Fisher. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce the family of page Felix Weber. They're in the members' west gallery today. I'd like to introduce Felix Weber, Sr.; Bernice Felix-Passchier, Felix's mother; and Lucas Weber, Felix's brother.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With the indulgence of the House, I want to report to the House that the pages put on a spectacular performance delivering the budget yesterday to each member. Although not a new record, it was very close, at 28.8 seconds; and considering the handicap of the size of the package, I think they deserve our very large thank you. It was a prize performance. Thank you, pages.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes. I would like to have the House consider the Roger Maris rule—an asterisk, because even though the document itself was rather vacuous, it was voluminous.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know the member tries his very hardest to always get in a shot—well

taken. I will confer with the table as to whether or not the asterisk will suffice, but it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, there are currently 600,000 unemployed women and men in the province of Ontario. That's equivalent to the combined populations of Brampton and Burlington.

One of the major omissions in your budget was any kind of jobs plan. In fact, it was a breathtaking omission.

Premier, can you tell us one new initiative in your budget to help the private sector create jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question, Speaker. I'm looking forward to speaking about the job-creating aspects of the budget. I would draw to my honourable colleague, first of all, our \$35-billion, three-year infrastructure plan that creates, on average, every year, 100,000 jobs. I'd also encourage my honourable colleague to take a look at our new jobs and prosperity fund. That's some \$2 billion. We will work with both the private sector and labour and academia and determine the very best way possible for us to deploy those resources in a way that creates new jobs and enhances productivity in the province of Ontario.

I remind my honourable colleague as well that our healthy home renovation tax credit will create 10,500 jobs every year. The Ring of Fire speaks to 1,500 permanent jobs. The Pan Am athletes' village is 5,200 jobs. This morning, Toyota announced 400 new jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. That's the same old rhetoric; those are old promises that you're trying to polish up again. In fact, all the jobs and prosperity fund is is a rejigging of plans you've already had that don't work. I know you believe—you believe—that the economy grows itself. Here's the difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives: We believe you can't simply cut yourself to prosperity; you need a pro-jobs, pro-growth plan, new ideas that take us out of this jobs crisis in the province of Ontario. And the only single new idea, Premier, the only new idea that you had in your budget was setting up a prosperity council—more people to sit around a table thinking about what they could do. We want to see action. We want to see progress today. We want to see a jobs plan that will put those 600,000 men and women back to work in the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think my honourable colleague will be interested in knowing how it is that

the Dominion Bond Rating Service has pronounced itself on our budget within the past hour: "The highly anticipated fiscal plan is encouraging, as it reiterates the province's objective to return to balance by 2017-18, maintains the deficit and debt projections for the years to come, and ... sheds more light on a strategy to be used to restore fiscal sustainability...."

"Overall, DBRS views the continuation of the fiscal recovery plan and the increasing emphasis on cost containment as an encouraging step in the right direction."

And we've maintained our credit standing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Premier, again, your lack of any kind of jobs plan, given that your spending and overtaxing have reduced Ontario to a have-not province—that omission, sir, on the jobs is absolutely breathtaking. It is a huge mistake and it's a failure to Ontario families. The Premier claims he's got new ideas for the Ring of Fire; there's no new ideas, no numbers, no action—all kinds of reviews, all kinds of studies, all kinds of new councils—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Our plan to create 200,000 jobs in the skilled trades by modernizing our apprenticeship system; reducing, not increasing, business access to open us up for investment again; getting energy policy about reliability and affordability, not big handouts at 10 times the price of power: These are good ideas for a real jobs plan to get our economy moving again. Premier, will you accept our ideas?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would refer my honourable colleague to page 126 of the budget. What it says there, what it shows in a graph, is that since 2009—since the depths of the recession—Ontario alone has created as many jobs as the other nine provinces combined. That's our record on jobs.

I outlined in my first answer the many ways in which we'll be creating new jobs in the province of Ontario. Here's another way we'll be supporting our jobs: My honourable colleague would have us shut down full-day kindergarten and lay off 20,000 people who work inside our schools—20,000 jobs. We're standing up for those jobs, just as we are for all the other jobs that we'll create through our infrastructure plan to developing the Ring of Fire and through our jobs and prosperity fund.

1040

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I looked at page 126. I'm not going to argue: The McGuinty government has an incredible capacity to increase the size and cost of government. It has grown out of hand. I'm not going to argue with that. We can't hold a candle to your record.

But I'm talking about good private sector jobs. We've lost 60,000 since the election alone. Our plan will make

Ontario a leader again in Confederation. We believe in a brighter future for the province of Ontario. We believe that we can be the engine of growth for Canada and not a have-not province with our hand out for welfare payments from the others.

Premier, I think Ontario families, the 600,000 who are out of work, those who are unemployed, are absolutely incredulous that you had no jobs plan whatsoever. If you're out of ideas, you're welcome to ours. Which of our policies will you adopt to help Ontario lead again?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The facts tell a far different story from the Leader of the Opposition, who is playing chicken with Ontario's credit rating: 300,000 net new jobs since the bottom of the recession, 121,000 net new jobs last year—one year.

Mr. Speaker, unemployment has gone from 9.4% to 7.7%. We have more to do. We have laid out a carefully crafted job strategy that will see us investing record sums of money—not just in apprenticeship training; in infrastructure, across the board; 170,000 new jobs, a strong plan for a bright future. That party and that leader have no plan. They have cheap talk and a lot of rhetoric—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): One moment, please. Thank you.

It's to the point where I'm a little concerned that this is going to be nothing more than a shouting match to shout each other down. I would ask all members, especially the member from York West, who—I explain to other members that when I'm speaking, there is to be quiet, and I appreciate that. I'm trying to make a point here. Shouting each other down is not parliamentary. Maybe making a jibe might be, but this is getting ridiculous.

Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. I'm obviously disappointed that the Premier has not responded on our ideas to help create jobs and get our economy moving again. The finance minister uses the same worn talking points, albeit—you're right, Speaker—with more volume than the Premier. But there is nothing in there to give hope to those 600,000 unemployed women and men in our province, not a single new idea to create private sector jobs except something you're calling a prosperity council, which is going to have a meeting.

Sir, that's not good enough. We need a new plan that will get our economy moving again to make Ontario a leader: apprenticeship reform; lowering, not increasing, business taxes; making energy about reliability and affordability; and getting out of the way of business, get-

ting behind them, rolling out the red carpet, not more red tape. That's our Ontario PC plan.

Will you take our plan and get Ontario's economy moving again?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Well, here's what Patricia Croft, the former chief economist of RBC Global Asset Management, had to say. She says, "I disagree with Mr. Hudak. He's talking about swift action, and swift action would mean a deep recession ... swift action in terms of cutting spending even further or raising taxes. So this budget must balance austerity with growth; that's a very tough act but I think they've done a pretty good job."

I'm with Patricia Croft on that. I think she's right. I don't think you have a clue as to what you would do if you were in our position.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, Finance Minister, I just outlined it in five straight questions. You know what? I'm not going to argue with the finance minister. If you want a slow, crawling pace of reform, or no reform at all, then you've got Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals. But, yeah, we actually want to see some action words in the budget. We want to see things start happening to address the debt and jobs crisis.

Let me tell you why I'm concerned. You look: the deficit is up, not down, and it is going to stay above \$10 billion for years. This finance minister will have produced six consecutive budgets with \$10 billion-or-higher deficits—that's a hall of fame record of failure—and 14 out of 24 ministries all had increases in their budgets representing 82%—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Mr. Tim Hudak: This is not an austerity plan; it's not a jobs plan. Will you scrap it and actually adopt our ideas to get our economy growing again?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we have laid out a credible and solid plan. Let me share with the member what one former finance minister of Ontario had to say yesterday: "To get there, the government is making some tough but necessary choices." That's Janet Ecker, the president of the Toronto Financial Services Alliance.

These decisions are difficult. We have struck the right balance between creating jobs and balancing the budget. We set out a plan in 2010, Mr. Speaker, and each year we have beaten the deficit number we set out. The deficit will continue to go down. It's still too high. That's why we made the choices we did yesterday: to ensure we continue on that path, and I look forward to making the investments in new jobs that will help this province grow even faster, Mr. Speaker, in the future.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. As the Premier knows, everyday people across Ontario are going to be looking very closely at this budget, and one of their likely concerns is going to be whether they and their loved ones are going to have good jobs. Before the election the Premier insisted that corporate tax

giveaways and the HST would create 600,000 jobs in Ontario. Today we have 600,000 people in this province looking for work. Is the Premier ready to admit that there's much, much more to do?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, there's always—always—more to do, and I commend my honourable colleague for the reflective outlook that she's brought with respect to the budget. I think nothing is ever lost and much can be gained by being reflective.

I say to my honourable colleague—I would remind her—that since the recession, Ontario has created over 300,000 jobs. Last year alone, we created 121,000 jobs. Since the recession, I say again, Ontario has created as many jobs as the other nine provinces combined.

Mr. Paul Miller: Twelve dollars an hour.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say again to my honourable colleague who interjects that the facts are, Speaker, that the overwhelming majority of those jobs are full-time jobs, and they pay above the average industrial wage. We need to understand that in terms of the evolution of the Ontario economy.

I say as well, Speaker, to my honourable colleagues that we have in the budget a number of measures designed to create new jobs, including a \$35-billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, as the Premier well knows, I don't think corporate tax giveaways are the ticket to creating jobs. If they were, the 275,000 people without work in Toronto, the 23,000 people in London and the 4,000 people in Thunder Bay would have more jobs than they know what to do with.

During the campaign and the lead-up to the budget, we proposed tax measures that would reward the job creators, Speaker, as an alternative to the no-strings-attached giveaways that reward companies even when they ship jobs away. The Premier knows, and he admits now, that corporate tax giveaways are not creating jobs. Why has he ignored my realistic plans to reward the job creators?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, I appreciate the question. I would call to my honourable colleague's attention the fact that today, under the existing tax environment, our regulatory regime, Toyota announced they're going to invest in 400 new jobs in Ontario. I would think that my honourable colleague would be open to our new jobs and prosperity fund, Speaker, which will enable all of us to have input in the best way for us to deploy over \$2 billion in job support programs. They have worked very effectively in the past. I think we can do more to sharpen them for our circumstances as we find them today.

The fact of the matter is, Speaker, our economy continues to grow. We continue to create more jobs in Ontario than they do in the rest of the country. We're feeling very optimistic about our future. Reports are coming in from non-partisan parties who are saying that our budget is getting it right: protecting health care, protecting education and growing the economy.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, for people looking for a job, this budget contains some stark news. Cancelling construction of hospitals and universities will cost hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs, and scrapping Ontario Northland means thousands and thousands of fewer jobs and less opportunity in places like the Ring of Fire.

People worried about jobs don't have to look hard at the budget to see the bad news, Speaker. Is the Premier ready to consider some measures that would actually give them some hope?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think it's important that my honourable colleague and all of us in this House understand a little bit more about the job-creating measures that we have in place as part of this budget. We've been talking about the new jobs and prosperity fund—some \$2 billion-plus there, Speaker.

Simply by investing in the new hospitals and hospital projects that we have committed to and are maintaining in place, Speaker, that alone creates 79,000 new Ontario jobs. Our all-day, two-way GO train service will create 68,000 new jobs, Speaker. Our green energy plan continues to create thousands and thousands of new jobs in Ontario.

I talked a moment ago, Speaker, about our Pan Am athletes' village. That is over 5,000 new jobs. By continuing to protect our schools and smaller classes and full-day kindergarten, that protects 20,000 jobs. Those are not meaningless numbers, Speaker. They're very meaningful to the families involved.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Patients and families are worried about a budget that doesn't deliver much positive change in a health care system that leaves families waiting longer. A simple first step we proposed was a hard cap on CEO compensation to free up money for front-line care.

My question is a pretty basic one: Why didn't the Premier take that advice, Speaker?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we did in fact take the advice, and I've indicated this morning that I would welcome further advice from the leader of the third party in this matter.

There are real challenges associated with the implementation of her ideas. For instance, you have large research hospitals, say Sick Kids Hospital—should we have compensation levels for the CEO of that hospital the same as a small rural hospital, for instance? That's one of the challenges with a hard cap. There are a variety of other challenges. There are issues of contracts entered into by independent boards.

But I do welcome further suggestions that the third party may have with respect to implementing their ideas, and we undertake to work with them on that issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, large-scale hospitals of this nature in other jurisdictions are paying their CEOs a fraction of what this government is paying our CEOs.

Everyday folks in Ontario, everyday people, hit with this budget are going to see that nurses who are struggling to keep their patients happy, people who are trying to make it on a minimum wage, people who are on social assistance—all of these folks are going to be hit really, really hard with a hard cap on their salaries, but CEOs earning \$700,000 are not going to have a hard cap at all. It raises some serious questions, Speaker, about how this budget is actually going to work and whether it's going to work for them.

Earlier, the Premier said that there was a goal of moving people out of hospitals into home care. In the budget, we don't see that happening. We don't see the wait-lists being reduced. Why didn't the Premier take our advice on getting those wait-lists—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, this budget continues for four years the cap on compensation for executives. I remind the leader of the third party that we now will benchmark against other Canadian health care institutions, which I think is an important step forward. We will require boards to have much more rigorous structures in place to measure productivity, to measure improvement.

I'd also remind the leader of the third party that we are open to hearing further suggestions. A hard cap is problematic in a number of ways. One of them is what I mentioned a moment ago, Mr. Speaker, but I think it's an idea worth pursuing more, and I undertake to work with the third party to try and improve on what we put forward in our budget yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, if we're going to build a sustainable health care system that really works for people, cuts alone are not going to work. We can't cut our way out of long waiting lists. We cannot have changes that make home care work by cutting.

In the lead-up to the budget, we told the government that it was time to end the inefficient and ineffective mess that we have in our home care system and actually start building the kind of system that ensures the money is spent on care for the people who need it. Is this Premier ready to consider changes like these?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I remind the member opposite that in fact we are increasing home care funding by 4%. It's one of the largest increases in the budget; overall health funding by 2.1%.

Here's what Doris Grinspun, the CEO of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, had to say: "On the health care front there is ... good news; it's going to increase funding for home care services and improve access to primary care, which is urgent."

Here's what Mark Rochon, the interim president of the Ontario Hospital Association, said. "The government has

very clearly signalled that it has rejected harmful, across-the-board cuts to health care funding, and that it intends to move forward quickly and responsibly with implementing its action plan for health care—a plan that Ontario's hospitals fully support."

There are a number of important choices we've made in the budget, and one of them is to in fact increase funding for home care. I look forward to working with the leader of the third party on the issue of compensation for executives. I know that's an important issue for her and her party.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Your budget shows that you still just don't get it, Minister. It shows that this government continues to back away from making the right decisions. You have not taken any decisive measures to rein in your spending, to cut the size, to cut the cost of government. A legislated wage freeze for all government salaries would have done exactly that. Even your union buddies are saying that they at least know where they stand with my party. Instead, this budget doubles down on the same failed approach this government tried two years ago.

Minister, will this budget bill include a legislated wage freeze for the next two years? Yes or no?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I'd refer the member opposite to both the budget speech and the budget documents. There's a very detailed narrative on our obligations, first, in collective bargaining that are imposed by the Supreme Court of Canada and others. So our intention is to move forward and achieve all the targets we have laid out, the fiscal targets in our plan, in a responsible way.

There is one big difference between this party and that party: We have enormous respect for our teachers, our nurses, our front-line public servants. You will not ever hear this party refer to nurses as hula hoop workers. That party wants to lay off 10,000 people in the education sector; we are working to protect those jobs through the investments we've made today.

This budget has been well received across the board. It's the right plan for a strong future for Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to quote from the very same DBRS report quoted by the Premier just a few moments ago: "The plan continues to rely on some bold assumptions, especially with respect to future growth in public sector compensation.... In DBRS's view, this entails considerable implementation risk and is expected to test the resolve of the government."

Speaker, this government has no resolve. This government has consistently refused to stand up to the unions, and we all know why. As a result, government spending is going up by nearly \$2 billion in this budget. This government has also failed to reduce the deficit. How many failed budgets will you present before you implement a two-year legislated wage freeze?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the member uses language that harkens back to a day gone by, a day that was clearly rejected by the people of Ontario.

We are moving decisively on compensation. We're moving decisively on pensions, in ways that no other government has. We're doing so working with our partners in the public and broader public sectors. Working together, we can build a strong future for this province, building on our achievements to date. We are proud that class sizes are smaller today, that test scores are improving, that graduation rates are higher.

We're going to move forward, working with all of our partners in the broader public sector with respect and understanding for the important role they play in our schools and in our society.

1100

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Millions of dollars were pocketed by well-connected insiders at Ornge. Despite all the warning signs, your Minister of Health didn't raise one ounce of concern.

The Premier has embarked on one of the most vicious slash-and-burn budgets we've ever seen in this province. Here's an idea for him: That minister didn't do her job. Why are you letting her keep it?

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

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to inform the member that this morning the public accounts committee began its hearings into Ornge, including an in-camera session with the Auditor General.

This afternoon, the Minister of Health will have an opportunity to appear in front of the committee and discuss the actions that she took, leading up to the calling in of the police and of forensic auditors before that; replacing the board and CEO; a new performance agreement; and tough new legislation which will also, if it's passed in second reading, have an opportunity to be examined by a committee of this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, there will be ample opportunity in the coming weeks—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to try to reinforce this. It's not helpful when members on the government side say things to provoke, just as much as the other side should not be making some heckling noises when someone's trying to answer, and it went both ways over the last two questions. So I'm asking you all: Bring it down and stop instigating each other, so that we can get questions and answers in this House.

Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: For the past few months, families have been reading stories on the front pages of their newspapers about well-connected insiders making millions of dollars at Ornge, paying themselves huge salaries with luxurious perks, and using health care dollars to hire

a legal team, led by the president of the Liberal Party of Canada, to hide Ornge from the public.

Yesterday's budget made the same claims about getting tough on CEO salaries as it did two years ago. How can the Premier expect anyone to believe him now?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the committee will have the opportunity to discuss the actions that the minister has taken, including new measures to make sure that there's proper oversight of Ornge. But also, the committee will have the opportunity to talk about what information was forthcoming not only to this side of the House but to that side of the House.

I think all of us look forward to an explanation from the leader of the New Democratic Party, who received a letter—a detailed briefing note—in December 2010 on all aspects of Ornge, including those that have caused so much controversy. I'm hoping that the public accounts committee will have an opportunity to discuss why she did not take action, she did not raise questions in this Legislature, she did not approach the Minister of Health and she did not raise the concerns.

Mr. Speaker, for weeks we have heard concern from the NDP about material that was provided to the Minister of Health. I find it passing strange—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

POVERTY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I'm proud of our government's commitment to reduce poverty in Ontario and the progress we've made together, but we must continue to do more. Especially during tough economic times, we must ensure that the most vulnerable, like low-income families and children, are protected.

In his report, Don Drummond recommended that the Ontario child benefit be frozen and not have any further increases. I ask the minister: Explain why the government did not follow Mr. Drummond's recommendations on the Ontario child benefit, and will he please reaffirm the government's commitment to fulfill its poverty reduction strategy?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to start by thanking the member from Scarborough—Rouge River for this important question.

I am very proud that this government introduced the Ontario child benefit. It's one of the cornerstones of our ambitious poverty reduction strategy. Mr. Speaker, you yourself will recall that the benefit began with a payment of up to \$250 per child in 2007. The next year, in 2008, that was increased to \$600 per child. In 2009, the government again increased this benefit, this time to \$1,100—two years ahead of schedule—and now benefiting more than one million children and their families.

Despite one of the worst economic downturns in a generation, the Ontario child benefit and other anti-poverty measures have already helped to lift 20,000 children and their families out of poverty. That's why we will

increase the Ontario child benefit to \$1,210 by July 2013, and again, the following year, to \$1,310 by July 2014.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Minister. I am pleased that we remain committed to reducing poverty, but I am concerned about some of our province's most vulnerable—those who rely on social assistance to help them get through a tough time.

After social assistance recipients had their benefits slashed by 22% under the Mike Harris Conservative government, many of Ontario's most vulnerable were left languishing in poverty. During tight economic times, it has become increasingly important to ensure that those on social assistance have the opportunities available to them in order to get back on their feet.

Could you outline the steps this government has taken to support those in need?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the member raised a very important question, and I want to stress what I had a chance to say yesterday, and that is that in this budget, there is very little room in terms of modest increases for programming, but we've designated three areas: health care and education, but also, just as important, social services. We will not balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable. We saw what happened when the Conservatives were in power, with a 22% decrease in social assistance rates.

The resources that are outlined in the budget will help build upon the measures that we've taken to improve and strengthen social assistance and, perhaps, most importantly, it will help with the social assistance review which is being undertaken right now by Frances Lankin and Munir Sheik—one of the most comprehensive reviews of social assistance in decades in the province of Ontario. We look forward to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. For the last number of days, the government House leader has been dispatched to revise the facts about what the opposition did and when to warn the Minister of Health about the scandal at Ornge.

I want to set the record straight. On the 5th, the 13th and the 21st of April 2011, I warned the minister here in this chamber that tax dollars were being siphoned out of this minister's \$150-million annual flow of funds to Ornge into for-profit companies. On April 27th, I received this 13-page letter from Ornge that threatened me with legal action for raising those concerns in this House. It was a patent attempt at litigation chill to silence me.

I then met with the auditor to convey to him my concerns. In September, the auditor tabled a draft report. It was nine months from the time that concerns were first

raised in this House until the Minister of Health took action. Is that the Premier's definition—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

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

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, the public accounts committee began its hearings this morning. Over the next couple of weeks, it's going to have ample opportunities to discuss knowledge on both side of the House, because what's very interesting is that the honourable member has forgotten to tell the House about another letter that was received by their caucus, one that was received by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Hudak, on April 27. I'm sending it over right now with a page.

I'd like to quote in part from that letter. The letter tells us that not only was the member of Whitby-Ajax briefed back in early 2011, but so were four other members of the Ontario PC caucus and members of the Ontario PC research office.

I'd like to quote from the letter: "To date, we have had the privilege to provide an overview of our operation to Mr. Norm Miller"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

1110

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, the government House leader makes my point precisely. There was a great deal of information about the goings-on at Ornge that this government and this minister did nothing about. We are talking here about a minister who received very precise briefings on what was going on there.

The Auditor General said it stunk to high heaven. He could smell it. Why couldn't the Minister of Health take one step to stopping what was going on under her watch to waste millions of tax dollars and put patients at risk?

I want to hear from the Premier. How can he justify keeping this minister in her place under that kind of irresponsible behaviour?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The member wants to talk about detailed briefings—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will begin to name members if they do not stop. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the member asks about detailed briefings, and yet he forgot to tell this House about the detailed briefing for the member from Whitby-Ajax, and the only thing she did was pose for some snazzy photo to go in her householder.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from the letter, a letter which I hope will have some attention at public accounts. I quote: "To date, we have had the privilege to provide an overview of our operation to Mr. Norm Miller, Mr. Jerry

Ouellette, Ms. Christine Elliott, Ms. Sylvia Jones, Mr. Garfield Dunlop and members of your research staff.”

I look forward to discussion at public accounts about this letter and the detailed briefings that were held by the PC Party, briefings that resulted in—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la Premier ministre, s’il vous plait. Mr. Drummond recommended capping health care spending at 2.5%. That in itself would have made it very difficult to ensure that health care services are there when people need them, but yesterday’s budget went even further than what Drummond recommended. It is capping funding at 2.1%.

How can the Premier be so confident that his plan, his budget, won’t hurt health care for families who need this?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I’m very pleased to be able to speak about initiatives in the budget that completely reflect our determination to transform health care in this province. I am delighted that we will see increased spending in health in coming years, and we have been very, very strategic about how we are spending the additional funds that we have in health care.

Our action plan outlines the transformation that is now under way in Ontario’s health care system. We are determined to improve patient care by providing the right care at the right time in the right place. We know that our health care system would benefit from more investment in the community and home care sector, and that is exactly what this budget will permit us to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: New Democrats agree that investment needs to be made in community care. But for the residents of 34 communities in northern Ontario, their little community hospital is it. So when the Premier says that the budget is protecting health care services, does he include northern Ontario in that statement?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Oh, absolutely, Speaker. In fact, I think that an objective observer would say that northern Ontario has benefited enormously from our focus on health care. In fact, we’ve created a new medical school in the north with the explicit goal of training people in the north, training people from the north so they will practise in the north.

We are seeing improved numbers when it comes to care in the north, and we will continue to focus on those parts of the province where we still have work to do to ensure that all of us have access to excellent health care.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Yesterday our government released its budget, entitled Strong Action for Ontario. Throughout his speech, the Minister of Finance made it clear that the most critical thing Ontario can do to create jobs and to spur economic growth is to eliminate the deficit and bring the provincial budget back to balance. Can the Minister of Economic Development please explain how this Strong Action for Ontario will spur job growth and prosperity for Ontario families?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is absolutely right: The best thing we can do, and I think economists agree on this, to strengthen our economy is to eliminate the deficit. Strong Action for Ontario is our five-year plan to bring the province back to balance by 2017-18.

You know, Mr. Speaker, our efforts to build a globally competitive tax environment, our efforts to make Ontario’s workforce one of the best educated and trained anywhere, and our efforts to invest in a strong, competitive infrastructure system have helped Ontario create over 300,000 full-time jobs since the global recession. This budget builds on those efforts. In fact, over 170,000 jobs will be created or retained through the measures contained in this budget.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Premier was right this morning: There is more work to do. The creation of the new jobs and prosperity council will help strengthen our partnership with business and help us ensure that we improve productivity across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for this wonderful information about job creation in our province of Ontario. Strong Action for Ontario is just what the province needs in order to return to balance and eliminate the deficit while still creating jobs.

The minister mentioned the proposed new jobs and prosperity fund. However, before the budget, we were debating the Attracting Investment and Creating Jobs Act and the eastern and proposed southwest development funds. Can the minister clarify: Will these important regional economic development funds also be consolidated into the new jobs and prosperity fund?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This government recognizes that certain regions in the province were hit harder by the recession than others. That’s why we’re so supportive of the southwest Ontario development fund and the eastern Ontario development fund. I can assure the member, Mr. Speaker, that our intention will be to ensure that these funds do indeed remain distinct, to create jobs in southwestern and eastern Ontario.

Speaker, while the PC leader appears to be eager to cause an election by not supporting the budget, I think his own members in his own caucus from southwestern Ontario and eastern Ontario would be very uncomfortable campaigning with a party and a leader that’s opposing jobs in southwestern Ontario and opposing jobs in eastern Ontario.

Ontario families who care about jobs support our proposed regional economic development funds, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, they’ll also support our budget for the very same reasons.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question's for the Minister of Health. Minister, I have to tell you that I'm quite shocked with the responses we're getting today. I listened with great interest to the questions raised by my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora, and also to the answers from the House leader. I think, as you know, although my colleague, back as early as last April, didn't get the attention of you and your government, he certainly did get Ornge's attention, and Ornge responded by sending the member and CTV Toronto a letter threatening litigation. The letter, by the way, was written by Liberal Party president Alf Apps. It was an attempt to silence the opposition, to silence the media through intimidation and threats.

I ask you: Do you endorse that culture of intimidation that was created by Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The answer to that question is, "Absolutely not," and that is why I have taken the action that I have taken, Speaker, to completely change the leadership at Ornge.

The auditor raised very serious issues. As soon as I became aware of those issues, I acted. Within weeks of learning about the findings of the Auditor General—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The shouting has returned, and I have about three members in mind that I would like to ask them to think about it.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Within weeks of learning, we had new leadership in place. We have a new performance agreement. I've introduced legislation. The auditor supports the progress we have made.

Speaker, I look forward to attending public accounts this afternoon, where I trust that members will take the time to actually understand what happened there.

My focus is on implementing the changes that are in this budget: positive changes, changes that will improve health care and protect the sustainability—

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Back to the minister: I didn't hear a response to my question: Do you support the culture of intimidation created by the management at Ornge? I think the reason why is because we're also seeing a culture of intimidation in here. We see the tactics that are being used now in response to questions, and you're trying to create the same political chill for the opposition, as the House leader cites letters and briefings that were provided to others, indicating that we should have acted. We did act, and this is a very disgraceful attempt to give cover to a weak health minister.

I ask you today: Are you prepared to do the honourable thing and resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am very excited about the opportunities that are in this budget. I must say, I'm just a bit surprised that the opposition, the day after the budget, is not focusing on elements of what is in fact a very important and very transformative budget.

When it comes to health care, I know that we can get better value for the money that we're spending in our health care system. I know we can provide better patient care in a more cost-effective manner, because we're going to be focusing on the patient. We're going to be focusing on the needs of the individuals who rely on our health care system when they are ill.

I am excited about the possibilities. I'm excited about the transformation. I'm excited about our focus on seniors in the budget. We will be strengthening supports for seniors, providing house calls, providing more care at home, and I wish the opposition was as excited as I am.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. New question.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Michael Mantha: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Yesterday's budget confirmed that families in northern Ontario will not only lose transportation services they rely on, but 1,000 will lose their jobs as a result. It also ignores proposals to create jobs in northern Ontario, like rewarding companies that create jobs, making sure resources are mined in Ontario and processed here in Ontario, and investing in infrastructure in the Ring of Fire. Why did the Premier's budget ignore constructive proposals to create jobs in northern Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The question is an important question. I'm sure the member from Algoma–Manitoulin missed the section on the Ring of Fire, the greatest opportunity to ensure that we bring economic opportunity and wealth to northern Ontario. We're committed to the Ring of Fire.

We're also committed to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp., and unlike the NDP when they were in government and they cut the northern Ontario heritage fund by \$60 million to put in general reserves, we are ensuring that the northern Ontario heritage fund is protected to the tune of \$100 million.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: The Premier's misguided plan to close down Ontario Northland destroyed a way to provide infrastructure needed to develop the Ring of Fire. Northerners were shocked that the Premier would close down Ontario Northland but were at least hoping for a plan for job creation in the north. But there was none.

Is the Premier ready to consider some measures that would give families in northern Ontario some hope?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There's absolutely no question. Over our eight years, we will compare our record with their record when they were in power and with the

official opposition's record when they were in power. We have shown a commitment to northern Ontario greater than any other government in the past. We will continue that commitment, because it is very, very important.

We are committed to ensuring that the potential of the Ring of Fire is realized, we are committed to investing in infrastructure across northern Ontario—that is very, very important—and we are committed, Speaker, to ensuring that we have a modern transportation system in northern Ontario that meets the present and future demands of the economy of northern Ontario, which looks very, very bright for the future.

EDUCATION

Mr. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, is for the Minister of Education. The government tabled its budget for the upcoming year on Tuesday, and I know there were some tough choices to be made. Ontario weathered the worst economic recession many of us have ever seen better than most jurisdictions, but as the economy continues to recover, the government has to take serious steps to bring the budget back to balance.

Will the minister please tell this House how she will protect education in Ontario in the face of these tough choices?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I thank the member for Don Valley East for the question and for his advocacy on education.

Let me be very clear, Speaker: The commitment of this government to a strong, publicly funded education system will never waver. This commitment, coupled with the dedication of our partners in education, has brought us real results. We've brought test scores up. Our grad rates are up. We've restored public confidence in our schools after years of neglect in the previous Conservative government. Our work in education, together, has brought us recognition across Canada and around the world as a leader in educational excellence.

In spite of challenging economic times, we will protect the gains that we've made in education. That's why we are protecting the classroom experience for Ontario kids.

Members opposite, when they had an opportunity, chose a different path that put our students at risk—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the minister for her response.

My constituents in Don Valley East understand how important good schools are. We currently have 22 full-day kindergartens in Don Valley East, and recent research shows that all-day kindergarten gives kids a great start to education. In addition to that, it saves parents thousands of dollars each year in child care costs. But I know there are some parents in my riding who are concerned about education funding.

Will this minister tell this House how she will protect the classroom experience for kids in Don Valley East and across this great province?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to stand in the House and say this. To protect the gains Ontario has made in education, including full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and more classroom teachers, we will look to other areas. We will look to board amalgamations to find efficiencies in bringing low-enrolment boards together. We're also finding savings all outside of the classroom by reducing the EQAO budget.

Speaker, I believe that it's so important to make sure that the taxpayers' dollars go to where they're needed most, and that is in our classrooms. Education is the best investment that we can make to the future prosperity of this province, and we make that investment in classrooms across the province every single day.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Ornge created a culture of intimidation for anyone who wanted to blow the whistle on what was going on there. It started with letters to former employees, threatening to sue them if they talked. Then the member for Newmarket–Aurora got a letter from Ornge threatening to sue him for the questions he asked in this House—his duly appointed job. Then Paul Bliss and CTV got a letter from Ornge, threatening to sue them for an exposé it ran just prior to the election. Then Ron McKerlie, your hand-picked and newly installed CEO, threatened staff with jail time if they talked.

What made you think that the way to fix the culture of intimidation and litigation chill is more intimidation and litigation?

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

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I think all members should welcome the opportunity at the public accounts committee today to hear from the Minister of Health firsthand the actions that she took when she learned about the wrongdoing at Ornge.

1130

At the same time, there has been so much discussion about letters and briefings. I also think it's going to be an excellent opportunity for us to talk about what members of the honourable member's party knew in terms of Ornge. Again, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very worthwhile taking a look at the letter that was sent to the leader of that party which outlined briefings that were held by a number of members—and I must correct the record, Mr. Speaker. I said Whitby–Ajax earlier; I meant the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

But again, let me quote: “To date, we've had the privilege to provide an overview of our operation to Mr. Norm Miller, Mr. Jerry Ouellette, Ms. Christine Elliott, Ms. Sylvia Jones”—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: To the Premier again: I guess I'll be probably be getting a letter later today now that I've asked a question. The culture of intimidation and use of litigation chill as a tactic to silence critics comes from the top. One doesn't have to look much further than the tactics of the Liberal House leader and the Premier—although I'm getting confused which is which here when I ask a question. They've tried to create a political chill for the opposition by citing letters and briefings Ornge provided to others. It is a disgraceful attempt to give cover to a weak health minister. It sends a signal to the front-line staff that the Liberals will stop at nothing to try to bury the Ornge file.

Why not do the right, the honourable thing? Cut out the chill tactics, let front-line staff speak freely, and fire a weak and incompetent health minister.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, my mother used to say, "They can dish it out, but they can't take it."

For weeks, we've had to hear from the opposition about how the minister received this briefing, the minister received that letter. And yet, when we stand up legitimately and say that we want public accounts to get to the bottom of what happened over there in terms of letters and briefings, we're somehow offending them.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the member from Whitby–Oshawa was that intimidated when she posed for that snazzy photo at a press conference with Ornge to talk about her success in getting a base in her riding, instead of coming to the police or the Minister of Health with the information that she had received.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you will know that the community of Fort Albany is in a state of emergency in regard to the rising of the Albany River. One of the problems that happens to be going on right now is that they need your help. The main community itself is on St. Clair Island, and across from St. Clair Island on the mainland is where the airport and the northern store are. The problem is, there's not enough fuel to fly the food to and from St. Clair Island so that the residents there are able to have something to eat.

I'm asking you directly: Will Emergency Measures Ontario today communicate with Chief Solomon in Fort Albany in order to arrange to get fuel to the community so that we can fly people to and from St. Clair Island so that they have enough food to eat while they're waiting to see what happens with the river?

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a very important question. First of all, let me say thank you to all the people from EMO, from northern services, from First Nations who work diligently all weekend and 24 hours a day to help these people in the community .

My ministry is working very closely with the people from Fort Albany to make sure that everybody is safe there; everybody has what they need. They are also working in co-operation with DND, with the federal government, to provide all the necessary stuff that they need, including food, including transportation for medical reasons, and to be on standby to make sure that if they need to be evacuated, we have communities that are there to welcome them—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, the community needs you to intervene. The federal government is dropping the ball, like usual. The absentee landlords of the First Nations, they are not acting on the requests from the community in order to fund the fuel that's needed in order to transport people to and from St. Clair Island so that they're able to eat. I understand that EMO has the authority and the power to do what needs to be done in order to make sure that the people of Fort Albany are able to get what they need so they can survive through this particular emergency.

I'm asking you directly today: Can you please have your staff contact the community of Fort Albany? Andrew Solomon's the chief; I can provide you with the phone number. They need help from you to put some pressure on the feds to get the fuel flowing to that community so that community members are able to put food in their fridges, food in their cupboards, and they can have what's necessary to survive through this emergency.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to praise the member from Timmins–James Bay for his concern about his community. He's always bringing to the House those very important matters.

I'll meet with you after question period. I know that they are in contact with the community, and I'll feed you on what we are doing and what we will be doing to make sure that this community is safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Eglinton–Lawrence on a point of order.

Mr. Mike Colle: I just want to remind members that everybody's invited to the children's choir from the Anatolian heritage community—the Turkish community. They want to have you come listen to their singing, view their food and their dialogue. Please drop by room 220.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. It's not a point of order, but I'm sure the members appreciated the reminder.

I have a reminder. I did hear it, and I had to digest it, so I will do this as a generic reminder. Even in quotes, it is the custom of this House to refer to every member either by their title, their ministry or their riding, and I would ask that you continue to do so.

This House has no deferred votes. We stand adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CAMBRIDGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Mr. Rob Leone: I stand here today to congratulate the winners of the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards that were held last Thursday. Much like the Ontario PC caucus, the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce recognizes that a strong and vibrant private sector is the key to a better quality of life for all of our citizens.

Each year, the chamber hosts the Business Excellence Awards in an effort to recognize the leaders of our business community and acknowledge their services. Over 60 businesses were nominated for last year's awards.

The winners of the Business Excellence Awards are businesses and individuals in my community who have demonstrated a significant and sustained commitment to positive business development, economic growth and diversity within our community.

The 2011 award winners are: Homewood Suites by Hilton; Pinebush Road Canadian Tire; Greg Durocher; Cambridge Mill; Gary Hauser, Hauser Law Office; Eva Vlasov, Argus Residence for Young People; Cliff Rego, the Re/Max Real Estate Centre; Linda Defoe from Cambridge Hotel and Conference Centre; Haley Bartlett; Tom LeBrun; Langs Farm Village; and Bennett Chevrolet Cadillac Buick president David Bennett.

Thank you to the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce for recognizing these organizations, and congratulations to the 2011 nominees and award winners. Thank you for the work that you do to grow the private sector in Cambridge and North Dumfries.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wanted to talk about a report that was done by ICES that came out on March 6. It looked at different models of primary care in Ontario—more specifically, how we serve the most vulnerable population. What ICES did is they compared community health centres, family health teams and other models of primary care.

Some of the results: Community health centres served most of the population from lower-income neighbourhoods, populations that had a higher proportion of newcomers and those on social assistance; populations served by CHCs have more severe mental illness, more chronic health conditions and had higher morbidity and comorbidity, compared to the rest of the population of Ontario.

What else did they find? They found that patients that received their primary care at community health centres, both in urban and rural areas, used emergency departments way less than what we would have expected.

They also found that the same thing cannot be said for the other models of primary care, that family health

organizations—and there's an alphabet of them—saw a model that received increased payments while failing to serve the needs of patients. They found that payments to physicians had almost doubled from \$750 million a year to \$1.6 billion a year, but that the people served use emergency departments more often than expected.

Hurray for community health centres, Mr. Speaker.

ANDREW SIGMARINGAM

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to rise in this House today and congratulate one of my constituents, Andrew Sigmaringam, who has been recognized as an Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year. The award recognizes youth ages six to 27 who are outstanding leaders and making a difference in their communities.

Andrew, who is only 17, was born deaf and received a cochlear implant as a toddler. He frequently speaks about his personal experiences to help and motivate other youth. For example, he spoke at the Hospital for Sick Children's annual cochlear implant program, where he was awarded with a Student Achievement Award. In addition, Andrew has worked with children with autism and has helped raise \$5,000 for Free the Children, a charity that empowers youth to remove barriers that prevent them from being active local and global citizens.

Currently a student at Chaminade College School, Andrew will be attending Ryerson University's social work program this fall, where I'm sure he will continue to flourish.

Andrew Sigmaringam is an outstanding example of youth engagement and the importance of volunteer work. On behalf of the community of York South-Weston, I would like to congratulate and thank Andrew for his selfless work and devotion to helping others. Congratulations, Andrew.

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to announce that one group and one individual in my riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London have won awards at the recent annual Ontario Library Association conference held in Toronto.

Elgin county's library won the Minister's Award for Innovation. This award recognizes the library's radio show for children, Check it In, Check it Out, a partnership project with Mennonite Community Services that bridges the cultural, linguistic and economic barriers of Elgin county to bring the library, its resources programs and services to the Low-German-speaking Mennonite population of east Elgin. Congratulations to the staff and council of Elgin county, in particular the show's host and producer, Julie Berry.

The second award won was the W.J. Robertson medallion for Librarian of the Year, won by Middlesex public librarian Margaret Rule. The W.J. Robertson medallion is presented by the Ontario Library Boards' Association to a public librarian who has demonstrated

outstanding leadership in the advancement of public library services in Ontario. Margaret Rule has been a practising librarian for 41 years, and has been with the Middlesex County Library for 25 years. She's also been the CEO and county librarian for the past 20 years. Margaret has retired from Middlesex County Library. We thank her for her service and wish her well.

I'm very proud of our award winners from my riding.

HOME CARE

Ms. Cindy Forster: Today I had the pleasure to meet with Todd Beaudry, Christine Peacock, Ron Walker, Sue Hotte, Patrick Edwards and Aina Flack from Niagara and from my riding. They are with the Ontario Health Coalition. With yesterday's budget announcements on health care, they, like I, are concerned that seniors and families still will face a broken home care system with long wait-lists for care, and that aggressive cutbacks to health care funding will lead to more reductions in services, particularly in the Niagara region, where we have huge issues to start with.

The health budget, they believe, is lacking a detailed plan in home care to take the pressure off the hospitals in Niagara. The wait-lists continue to grow in my riding, and every day I get many calls from people whose loved ones are waiting for a bed. A 92-year-old woman named Nellie in my riding, who died recently, only needed help for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening, but stayed in bed for 12 hours many days waiting for that care.

This is just not right, and this government needs to revert to a non-profit system and consult with front-line workers on the best way to deal with home care for our seniors and for patients in my riding and across this province.

OTTAWA MUSLIM ASSOCIATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very pleased to be joined by my colleague Minister Chiarelli at Queen's Park today to congratulate the Ottawa Muslim Association on their 50th anniversary.

The Ottawa Muslim Association came into existence in 1962 and has been working hard within our community of Ottawa for the last 50 years. Many members of our community are exemplary leaders in all walks of life, serving not only the Muslim community but the larger Ottawa community as well.

One of their great achievements is a beautiful main mosque in Ottawa, located on Northwestern and Scott in my riding of Ottawa Centre. The mosque is very much in keeping with tradition in the use of copper on its rooftops and its dome, and it stands out beautifully.

1510

The Ottawa Muslim Association will be celebrating its anniversary at a dinner this Saturday. I'm very excited. I want to thank directors Naeem Malik, Mohammed Dayfallah, Tanveer Ahmed, Mashiur Rahman and the

other board members; and the council of trustees, Nazih Hammoud, Ali Nawar, Mohammed Adi, Alia Ghadban, Ghassan Akrouche, Fayez Aboulchaar, Hazra Sheikh and Ahmed Osman; and the Ottawa Mosque Imam, Samy Metwally.

Thank you very much and congratulations to the Ottawa Muslim Association on their 50th anniversary.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: This statement is a direction to the Minister of the Environment. I hope he's listening.

Recently, the Globe and Mail covered a story on a topic I've been raising in this House since early 2010. In fact, I raised this issue in question period, in petitions, in member's statements and in direct discussions with ministry staff and the minister himself. I'm talking about commercial fill. This is the moving of soil from a construction site to an abandoned pit.

Let me use the words Mayor Chuck Mercier from the township of Scugog in my riding said recently in the Toronto Star: "Dig a hole in Toronto and they get development charges and property-tax revenue. And what do we get ... here? A pile of dirt." I might add that it might be contaminated dirt.

We understand the need for soil remediation. However, we need regulations and guidelines. It's been almost one year since I asked the minister, and he promised to have guidelines for the industry as well as setting standards on issuing permits, managing the movement, testing the soil and managing the nuisance in the process. What's worst of all is that no one has been consulted on this process, to my knowledge.

Minister, I call on you to take immediate action to provide guidelines to regulate the management, movement and transportation of commercial fill and the potential contamination of our water sources. You've had enough time. The aggregate resource review is going to go on. I urge you to bring up the issue of managing commercial fill; otherwise, you can potentially contaminate the aquifers in the province of Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Speaker, our government is making thoughtful choices to build a better tomorrow for Ontario families. Right now, the single most important step the government can take to grow the economy is to balance the budget, to make the economy stronger and better able to create jobs while keeping education and health care strong.

Our government is taking strong action for Ontario through the 2012 budget. This is serious action for a serious time and puts Ontario on track to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 by maintaining a low rate of growth in spending, and beating deficit targets laid out in the 2010 and 2011 budgets.

But we will continue to focus our priorities on further strengthening the economy and spurring job creation. We

will build on our investments to create a sustainable and high-quality health care system. We will build on our plan to have the world's best-educated workforce.

The Conservatives would choose to continue a \$345-million subsidy to horse racing while shutting down full-day kindergarten. When asked to choose between horse racing and protecting the results we've achieved in our public services, we will choose protecting education and health care every single time, and we will continue to make thoughtful choices that support the goals, needs and aspirations of Ontario families.

This is about taking strong action when strong action is required.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yesterday was a tough day for Huron-Bruce after the budget was officially unveiled.

Last year, on August 19 in Wingham and on August 26 in Kincardine, mere weeks before Ontarians in Huron-Bruce went to the polls, my predecessor, on behalf of the McGuinty Liberal government, shared an empty promise with both communities and announced funding for the long-awaited expansion of the Wingham and Kincardine hospitals. Yesterday, the rug was pulled out from under these projects, leaving these communities behind who were misled and lied to by this government.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I withdraw.

These were clearly pre-budget ploys to swing voter favour to the side of the Liberal government. My predecessor said to the media that these projects would be cancelled if the Liberals lost the election. How ironic is that?

Why did the Liberal government choose to play give and take with the executive, staff, volunteers, fundraisers and patients at these hospitals when they knew there was no money left in the provincial coffers to fund these projects?

This government needs to come clean to the people of Huron-Bruce and recognize that the promised hospital funding was nothing but a seat saver that did not work, and explain why they broke their promise to the good people of Wingham and Kincardine.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: On a point of order: Mr. Speaker, I know that you frown upon this type of behaviour, but I believe I was inadvertently missed during the introduction of guests. I wanted to introduce two members in the gallery here today: Bruce Allen, who is the vice-president of CAW Local 199 in St. Catharines, and Audrey Longley, who is an injured worker and an injured worker activist. They are here visiting us today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member. He does know that it is not a point of order, but we welcome our guests today. We're glad they're here.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr3, An Act respecting Master's College and Seminary.

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

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that yesterday the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 27, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AMENDMENT ACT (STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS FOR HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE (COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS SUR LES SOINS DE SANTÉ ET L'ÉDUCATION)

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to establish the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for Health Care and Education / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative pour créer le Comité permanent des comptes publics sur les soins de santé et l'éducation.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: With the health care and education budgets being well in excess of 62% of the provincial budget, it's important that we give the Auditor General the ability to review those particular ministries to ensure that they're being spent in the best interests of the populace of the province of Ontario.

PETITIONS

UTILITY CHARGES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents. This group here were supplied to me by Dale Gibbons, a well-respected person from Port Perry. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Premier and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas section 398(2) of the Municipal Act, 2001 (the 'act'), allows a municipality to add public utility arrears incurred by a tenant to the municipal tax bill of the owner; and

"Whereas Ontario regulation 581/06 permits such arrears to have priority lien status under the act; and

"Whereas these provisions reversed the long-standing law in this area that held that a landlord was not responsible for utility charges where the landlord was not the consumer; and

"Whereas landlords may now be burdened unfairly, and potentially catastrophically, with fees and charges they have no control over; and

"Whereas these provisions will also impact tenants who are not in arrears with their utility payments but who will now face rent increases and/or increases in utility payments where such payments are pooled as landlords attempt to recoup these outstanding liabilities; and

"Whereas a number of municipalities, including Penetanguishene and Bracebridge, Niagara Falls" and others, "have reversed such policies as a result of the demonstrated and unprecedented negative impacts on landlords and tenants; and

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"Whereas municipalities and utility providers in Ontario already have at their disposal a number of means by which they can control or collect outstanding arrears, including by requiring deposits for the utility service pursuant to the Public Utilities Act and by seizing personal property in the possession of the ratepayer;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Repeal section 398(2) of the Municipal Act, 2001, and amend Ontario regulation 581/06 accordingly, to ensure that property owners are not responsible for the payment of outstanding utility arrears where they are not the consumer."

I'm pleased to sign, support this and present this to Liam, one of the pages here.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed move of the current Temiskaming Shores ServiceOntario site to the Haileybury land titles office will result in less access to people with disabilities because of the topography and building characteristics of the site; and

"Whereas this move will separate ServiceOntario from Service Canada, who currently share offices and provide a one-stop location access point for residents; and

"Whereas service will be reduced if the offices are split; and

"Whereas both buildings are owned by the government of Ontario; and

"Whereas space is available in the current building if needed;

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

"That the Ministry of Government Services be immediately directed to reverse its decision to move the ServiceOntario site in Temiskaming Shores from its current location."

I wholeheartedly agree and would like to sign this petition and give it to page Abigail.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am pleased to present a petition to this Legislature signed by 3,542 people from my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

I want to commend June Anderson and her committee for getting these signatures to support the continuance of interim long-term-care beds at the Marguerite Centre. It's a short petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Champlain Local Health Integration Network," otherwise known as the LHIN, "has developed an integrated health service plan for Renfrew county that will not improve residents' health, does not take into consideration the chronic doctor shortage in rural Ontario and fails to put the needs of patients first; and

"Whereas the decision to remove long-term-care beds from the Marguerite Centre in Pembroke will result in hardship for seniors;

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

"Direct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to order the Champlain LHIN to reinstate the 30 long-term-care beds at the Marguerite Centre in Pembroke, Ontario."

I sign this petition and send it down with Kyle.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas global climate change is the most serious threat facing humanity and poses significant risks to our environment, economy, society and human health; and

“More than 97% of scientists working in the disciplines contributing to studies of our climate and all national science academies accept that climate change is almost certainly being caused by human activities mainly due to the use of fossil fuels; and

“The objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is ‘stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system’; and

“Climate scientists are now warning us that limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees centigrade is essential; and

“Ontario has a clear responsibility to reduce our emissions given that our per capita greenhouse gas emissions are among the highest in the world; and

“With the introduction of the Green Energy Act and feed-in tariff program, Ontario is an example to the rest of the world of the principle of renewable energy development; and

“The best research today indicates that energy demands are decreasing and that sufficient potential energy from a diverse supply of renewable sources exists to meet Ontario’s current and projected energy demands;

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

“Immediately prepare a plan that requires that 100% of Ontario’s stationary energy be from zero-carbon sources before the end of 2023, with a timeline to be audited annually by the Auditor General and published reports.”

I’m going to sign this and give this to Aylin to be delivered.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the closure of the Bluewater Youth Centre will have a negative economic impact on Goderich and the surrounding area; and

“Whereas there is a need to deal with overcrowding in the Ontario correctional system; and

“Whereas the federal Bill C-10, Safe Streets and Communities Act, will increase the population in the Ontario correctional system over the next four years; and

“Whereas the Bluewater Youth Centre would need very little retrofitting and the staff would need minimal retraining to open as a medium-secure correctional facility which could hold more than 200 beds required by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services; and

“Whereas specialized treatment programs within the correctional system such as drug treatment, mental health issues, could be offered with the skilled support staff currently in place; and

“Whereas we believe that this is the most economical way to add an additional 200 beds to the Ontario correctional system, as the building is in place and staff are currently hired to run such a facility;

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

“That the government engage in meaningful community and employee consultation in order to find alternate uses within the youth services or correctional services system for this facility, thereby preventing job losses and economic hardship for an area already badly impacted by plant closures and tornado damage.”

I totally agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I affix my signature.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I’m pleased to present this petition on behalf of injured workers in Ontario. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government blocked workers over the age of 65 from receiving WSIB benefits if they are injured at work and exempted the WSIB from the legislation abolishing mandatory retirement age at 65;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to end these discriminatory measures.”

I wholeheartedly agree, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name and submit it with Abigail.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government is forcing Ontario municipalities to build industrial wind turbines without any local say or local approval; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government transferred decision-making power from elected municipal governments to unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus has committed to restore local decision-making powers and to building renewable energy projects only in places where they are welcomed, wanted and at prices Ontario families can afford;

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

“That the McGuinty government restore local decision-making powers for renewable energy projects

and immediately stop forcing new industrial wind developments on municipalities that have not approved them and whose citizens do not want them in their community.”

I agree with this and I shall sign it.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas on April 22, 2002, Premier Dalton McGuinty signed a pledge in North Bay to never privatize the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission; and

“Whereas high energy prices have forced northern Ontario businesses to close or move, including Xstrata, which had moved its Timmins smelter operations to Quebec and made up 10% of Ontario Northland railway’s business; and

“Whereas some 60 lumber mills have closed across northern Ontario in recent years with a loss of 10,000 resource jobs, and Ontario fell from being the number one mining jurisdiction in the world to number 23 due to high taxes and government red tape, resulting in the erosion of Ontario Northland’s commercial customer base; and

“Whereas the Far North Act that has banned development and turned much of northern Ontario into a virtual museum is the biggest barrier to new job creation in northern Ontario and cost Ontario Northland business; and

“Whereas the ONTC was completely omitted from the province’s northern growth plan issued two years ago; and

“Whereas the former MPP for Nipissing staged an election campaign announcement on September 30, 2011 regarding what is now known to be a non-existent strategic alliance between the ONTC and Metrolinx; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario on March 23, 2012 announced it would wind down and divest itself of the ONTC and its assets with no prior consultation with community stakeholders in Nipissing and across north-eastern Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, hereby demand Dalton McGuinty come to North Bay, look workers in the eye, and explain why he broke his word and has abandoned northern Ontario.”

1530

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Michael Mantha: “Whereas Ontario taxpayers have been paying over millions in extra charges on their hydro bills to help retire the debt. The amount collected to date, as per the Auditor General’s report, is \$8.7 billion, but the amount owing was \$7.8 billion;

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers are asking, where is the money being invested?

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers are asking why this was not addressed at the time the debt was paid;

“Whereas electrical rates have increased with the new creation of green energy coming online to include solar and wind, refurbishment of nuclear plants and deregulation of Hydro One;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows to obtain answers to the following questions:

“How much of the debt remains?

“When will it be eliminated from Ontario taxpayers’ hydro bills?”

I agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker, and present it to Abigail.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here about the future of 80 long-term-care beds in the village of Tavistock, signed by a great many people, not only in Tavistock but all the areas around it. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Tavistock’s Bonnie Brae Health Care Centre is an 80-bed, D-class nursing home that must be either rebuilt or closed by July 2014; and

“Whereas there is currently an application by a private operator to move the 80 licensed beds outside of Oxford county to the city of London, despite the recent opening of two other long-term-care homes in Middlesex county in 2010; and

“Whereas long-term-care wait times in Oxford county can be as much as 135 days longer than in Middlesex county; and

“Whereas Tavistock receives referrals from the nearby Waterloo Wellington CCAC, which has among the highest waits for long-term care in the province;

“We, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario retain these beds in Tavistock and seek partners to fast-track replacement of the Bonnie Brae as part of Ontario’s 10-year plan to modernize 35,000 long-term-care beds.”

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this petition on their behalf. I affix my signature, as I agree with the petition.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a report from Ontario’s Auditor General on the province’s air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers’ dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

“Whereas Ornge officials created a ‘mini-conglomerate’ of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

“Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined;

“Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent;

“Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge;

“Whereas, despite being made fully aware of the situation at Ornge, the Minister of Health continues to supply Ornge with funding to transport 20,000 patients by land transport each year, despite the fact that Ornge only carries 3,000 patients;

“Whereas Ornge is being paid an average of \$7,700 for each patient they transfer by air and \$1,700 for each patient they transfer by land ambulance, both clearly amounts vastly in excess of reasonable compensation for the services provided;

“Whereas this latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where \$2 billion in health dollars have been wasted;

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

“The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge.”

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition and I affix my name to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2012 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2012, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The leader of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. I rise to offer my party and the PC caucus’s response to yesterday’s budget address.

As I said in my National Post column yesterday, in my job I try every day to imagine Ontario as I’d like it to be: a place with a hopeful future, where opportunities abound for people who work hard, who take risks to succeed; a place that offers the highest quality of life anywhere on the planet, with good schools; excellent, accessible health care; prosperous, welcoming, safe and diverse communities; world-leading infrastructure—a place that helps the most vulnerable in our communities. These are the things I want for Ontario, and I try to visualize them every day when I come here to work for the people of this province in this great place. It’s a touchstone for me. It guides my thinking, it guides my decisions, and I know it motivates my PC caucus colleagues. I like to think it’s the kind of

Ontario that all of us here hope for, all those watching or listening at home.

But in order for me to imagine the kind of Ontario we all want to live in and contribute to, you need to have a realistic point of reference, and that reference point necessarily means Ontario as it exists today. It means to get to that great place, we need to take stock of what’s actually happening on the ground across this great province, where things actually stand.

Now, Speaker, the optimist in me says Ontario today remains a place of enormous potential. We are a civil place. We are free. We are governed by the rule of law. We have a well-educated, dedicated workforce and we have tremendous, still-untapped natural resources that are in demand worldwide. We are uniquely situated in the heart of the vast North American marketplace for Ontario expertise, Ontario goods, Ontario services. We are inventors, discoverers, innovators, builders; we are thinkers and we’re doers. In short, we have everything we need in Ontario, not just to survive, but to thrive in 2012, in the 21st century. These are the fundamentals that have always made Ontario great, the Ontario that attracted my grandparents from then-Czechoslovakia to build their home here—and that should continue to be open to the best and the brightest, those trying to find refuge from across the world right here in Ontario today. These are the strengths upon which we should be building our future.

So many of them are in place right here and right now, but the reality is, as I take stock, that some of those fundamentals are still missing—and if they’re not missing, they’re in a state of neglect and disrepair. So here’s one of them, and it’s much on our minds in this place today: I speak of our fiscal foundations in Ontario, or, more plainly put, whether we have the money to pay for the things we all most value: health care, education, world-leading infrastructure and so on. This is the fundamental building block for our province and, indeed, for a stable, prosperous society, because if the money’s not there, then none of the rest is possible.

Ontarians understand this. By and large, Speaker, we are a thrifty people. We know intuitively that we can’t live beyond our means as individuals or that, if we do, sooner or later we hit a wall. As a friend of mine likes to say, there will be month left at the end of the money. We’ll max our credit cards, some could even lose their homes, and for some, especially in trying times like these, there’s the threat of personal bankruptcy. So Ontarians inherently understand that there are limits, that there are things that we’d like to have and there are things that we need to have, and that sometimes in life you have to choose between them.

Businesses understand this as well. That’s what business is: Money comes in, money goes out, and they live right on that line every single day. They’ve got to stay lean. They’ve got to compete. They’ve got to do things better and more efficiently than their rivals. They have to innovate. They have to have the next best thing, or else they go out of business. Sadly, it happens every day, and

then here come the creditors, here come the shareholders, here comes the bailiff, and there goes your business, there goes your home.

1540

So the idea that you've got to pay as you go and watch the pennies is a basic value that everyone here in Ontario understands—or almost everyone, because the checks and restraints and rules that apply to individuals and families and businesses that I described don't always seem to apply in government, and to this one especially. It seems like there's never really a threat of being fired for making a wrong decision, for taking advantage of taxpayers, there's never the threat of bankruptcy, and there seems to be no real penalty for screwing up—at least, that's how it sounds to most of the people who pay the bills.

People say, "How come they can get away with it and I can't? How come my business has to live within its means every day and the government doesn't?" These are good questions, and I get them all the time and I know my colleagues here in the House do as well. So it's little wonder, and no surprise, that many hard-pressed Ontarians—women and men, business owners—were looking in this place yesterday, as the budget was read, for some of those answers. It was budget day, the one day of the year when government is expected to actually account for itself, to bring out the ledger, to show people how much of their money is coming in and how much is going out, and, importantly, where it is all going, whether the numbers actually add up, and if they don't add up, then why not.

So, Speaker, yesterday what did they get? What did they see? What did they hear in this budget? And now, almost 24 hours later, what can they conclude today?

Let's start with the surface of the budget yesterday, the language in yesterday's budget. I was struck by words like these, and I'll read a few back to you, Speaker: begin discussions, consider, seek input, delay, encourage, consult, review, set up a panel, seek advice, consult on the details, help enhance—it goes on and on.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Any action?

Mr. Tim Hudak: No action verbs, I say to my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. What we heard in the budget yesterday was the language of equivocation and the language of evasion. It's all light, it's content-free and it doesn't really mean anything. They're the kind of words that you use, Speaker, when you've got nothing left to say of substance. Those words, those exact phrases, are right out of the 2012 Ontario Liberal budget. It was a budget titled Strong Action for Ontario, but it contained no action verbs. So the title and the language, Speaker, were not a good start, and it was downhill from there.

It gets worse, especially for those 600,000 women and men who woke up this morning and now have no job to go to—they're out pounding the pavement, emailing out their resumé's, looking for a job to help make ends meet, to put bread on the table again for their families; for those who are underemployed, knowing that they could be in a

better spot; for those who have to contemplate the reality of moving to other provinces because there's no work here in Ontario. Six hundred thousand people: That's actually the combined populations of Burlington and Brampton. These folks were looking for a little accountability yesterday, too. But you know what else, Speaker? They were looking for a little hope. They were looking for a little bit of optimism, a plan for a better day, a job at the end of that long line, the endless string of emails.

But the budget failed them, and it failed them in two of the most basic ways.

First, it's not just the total absence of any kind of jobs plan—although that's true; there was no jobs plan in this budget, despite 600,000 unemployed people in the province—it's the fact that the budget actually makes things worse for job creators who could help get our 600,000 unemployed women and men back to work. So this government actually, in the face of a jobs crisis, decided to throw up even more barriers to actual job creation. They have effectively increased the tax load by cancelling what they promised as the next round of business tax reductions.

In the middle of an economic downturn, in the middle of a jobs crisis, they made the wrong choice. They chose to have higher taxes on job creators, and we in the Ontario PC caucus want to see lower taxes on job creators. We want them to create jobs in the province. That was failure number one, Speaker.

Here's the second problem: The budget yesterday does far too little to steer us off the path towards a massive \$30-billion deficit and a looming \$411-billion debt. As huge as these numbers are, as hard to grasp as a number the size of \$411 billion can be, they're not abstractions at all to businesses, to investors, to entrepreneurs. A \$411-billion debt and a \$30-billion deficit along the way to that are a clear signal to job creators and to credit agencies that Ontario cannot afford those things I talked about at the outset of my remarks, the things that made Ontario great and strong and prosperous in the past, things that have made Ontario an attractive place to relocate to, to expand, to invest in, to create jobs: things like good infrastructure, a competitive business climate with low taxes, superior public services, and flexible and responsible and pro-growth regulation.

Remember, Speaker, these aren't my numbers; I didn't make these up. They're Don Drummond's numbers, the economist hired by the McGuinty government to provide them with the path forward. It's Mr. Drummond's cautionary tale. Mr. Drummond basically said that unless we take immediate and measurable steps to balance the budget by 2017-18, Ontario will drop off a cliff and into the maw of a \$30-billion deficit and \$411 billion in accumulated debt.

So after about a year of buildup—you may recall Mr. Drummond was appointed during the 2011 budget—this was supposed to be the Don-Drummond-inspired budget. Where is the road map for getting us the critical way to 2017-18, to the destination that Mr. Drummond so emphatically said we needed to reach? It wasn't there, Speaker.

In fact, the budget's own spending numbers keep going up and up until 2015. This is a budget that increases spending; it doesn't decrease it. The deficit is actually up, not down.

Sadly, it's no surprise. I mean, that's what the Liberal budgets have done. That's what Liberal spending numbers do. But at least in Mr. Drummond's report, there's some detail on how to support those numbers, how to get back on path. After a while, in the Liberal budget yesterday, the spending curve mysteriously starts to flatline until, as if by magic, it hits the Drummond target of a balanced budget by 2017. So the deficit continues to head up and then, all of a sudden, as if by magic, a few years down the road it heads towards balance.

When you look at this and you look at the chart in the budget—we see the deficit going up—there's no explanation as to why magically it declines towards balance in 2017. There are no details in the budget. Nobody knows how they magically bend that cost curve.

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: There are many suggestions on how to characterize the budget here from my colleagues in the PC benches. They're perplexed as well because they say where they want to go, but they have no steps to take us there. Most of Mr. Drummond's recommendations that had to do with actually making some tough decisions to rein in runaway spending to control our costs were rejected by the government.

1550

If it was a revenue increase, they were all for it. They embraced it with open arms. But if it was a cost-reduction measure, it disappeared. I'll make the argument today, Speaker, even within 24 hours of the budget being read, that it simply cannot sustain serious scrutiny. It won't stand the test of time.

So this government's sort of stage-managed tough talk, I think in short course, will be revealed as nothing more than focus group test and spin. It is not an austerity budget—not even close. Spending is actually up by \$2 billion, not down. As a result, there's actually no reduction in the deficit; it's greater than last year.

The government is projecting the exact same deficit for 2012-13, pretty well—a hundred million here or there. And believe it or not, in 14 out of 24 cabinet ministries spending actually increases. So all 24 cabinet ministers, to paint a picture, go cap in hand asking for more spending despite the fact that they claim it's an austerity budget, and 14 are given increases in their budgets.

You know what, Speaker? That actually represents, as well, when you look at the value of the budget—so of those 14 ministries, more than half actually got increases. That represents 82% of the total budget. Let me say that again: The government increased spending across 82% of their budget. So if this wasn't the year for this Premier to finally start saying no, how much worse does it actually have to get?

You paid Mr. Drummond to do work. He did good work, very informative for the House. It's the first actu-

ally objective view we've had of the state of government finances. I thank him for the work that he did.

Mr. Speaker, I worry it's all for naught, because what Mr. Drummond said and these guys said they were going to do didn't happen. Spending is up \$2 billion, the deficit is up, and 14 out of 24 ministries—representing 82% of the budget—saw spending increases.

In the face of all that, the government continues its trademark spending at a pace of \$1.8 million an hour more than it takes in. So approximately \$2 million we go further into debt during question period every time we have it. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, we're spending \$1.8 million more than we take in in revenue.

I said this very directly, Speaker, upon reviewing the budget yesterday: It is a surprisingly weak budget and disappointingly so. It was a disappointing response to a serious and deepening jobs and spending crisis in Ontario under the McGuinty Liberals, a budget with no plan to manage down Ontario's looming \$411-billion debt. That will worsen investor and business confidence, confidence that will be further eroded by the budget's increase in business taxes—in the middle of a downturn, I'll reinforce—both of which throw roadblocks to expansion and investment, roadblocks in front of economic investment and job creation. It's anti-growth when it called out for a pro-growth budget.

We saw a lot of, as I said, studies. We saw a lot of postponements and gradual phase-in. We saw one-time sell-offs or initiatives. All that adds up to, Speaker, is kicking the can further down the road, and it's some can. The deficit now is three times the size of all the other provinces' combined. The deficit for 2011 actually increased over the previous year and doesn't decrease for another. There is a complete lack of a jobs plan, except for creating another advisory body. The single, only, unique jobs plan in this budget was the creation of an advisory body. I'll add to that: There is also a firm commitment by this government that that advisory body will have a meeting.

You know what we'll see, too. We've seen this pattern before. Starting tomorrow, we'll see a phony war with Ottawa over equalization payments. Whatever. It's predictable as summer following spring; just wait for it.

There's no concrete action on the cost of public sector compensation; no plan whatsoever to address the largest driver in the budget: the labour cost of the public service. They will have more consultations, Speaker, but no action.

So the only conclusion I think you can actually draw is that the McGuinty Liberals still think they have a revenue problem, not a spending problem. They believe their problem is they're not getting enough money from taxpayers and from businesses to fulfil their never-ending appetite to spend more money. But I assure you, Speaker, that's not what Ontario taxpayers think, that's not what Ontario business leaders think and it's not what the Ontario PC Party thinks. It's time to address spending in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, I had the chance last week to visit New York City to meet with some credit rating agencies, investment institutions, some of the banks, and look at investment worldwide. You know, I said to them: “What are the top three things you should do to create jobs in a province, a state, a country—whatever jurisdiction?” They said, “Number one, reduce your debt; number two, reduce your debt; and number three, lower business taxes to invite investment into your province or your state.” That’s what they should have done.

So, Speaker, for our part, we’ve been very clear on what we want to see and what we think is the right path forward for our great province of Ontario to make us the engine of job growth again, the leader in Confederation and not a have-not province for one day more. What do we believe in? We believe in policies to nurture the right climate for job creation, policies that actually reduce the size and cost of government. For months now, I’ve been calling for a pro-growth, integrated plan to rein in the bloated public sector on one side, but on the other side, too, to create a dynamic private sector economy to create jobs.

You can’t cut your way to prosperity: You also need a jobs plan. You need a growth plan. These are the steps that should have been taken years ago, and if we had, we would not be in this mess today. I believe in this plan, and we will fight for it every single day here in the Ontario Legislature to move Ontario forward again.

You know, Speaker, I had a chance to sit across the table from the Premier last November. I sat down in his office and I presented these plans, piece by piece: the pro-growth, pro-jobs plan to make Ontario a leader again, and a plan to rein in the size and cost of government, to actually cut spending, not increase it. I put those across the table to the Premier and I think that, sadly, that’s the last we’ve seen of them, because not one of those good ideas appeared in yesterday’s budget. That’s why I would have headed down an entirely different path, Speaker, had that task fallen to me last year, with an urgent fall economic update that actually would have reduced spending, not increased it; to integrate the Drummond planning with a top-to-bottom full program review; and to bring forward an early budget that reduced the deficit and put us on the path of balanced books and job creation in the province of Ontario.

Along the way, Ontario would have seen the advent of an integrated, pro-growth plan that actually reduced the size and cost of government on one side of the ledger and fostered a dynamic private sector economy on the other.

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A dramatically smaller cabinet, down to 16 members—that would focus on jobs, spending and the debt crisis. It would have held ministers personally responsible, financially responsible for missing fiscal targets—to actually put their paycheques where their mouths are, to hit those goals, to balance the books, to reduce red tape, to hold cabinet accountable for the results they promised to taxpayers.

An Ontario PC government would have brought in an immediate mandatory public sector pay freeze—no

exceptions, no special rules—and a plan to fix our broken public sector salary arbitration system to respect the ability of taxpayers to pay the bills, to respect local economic circumstances.

We would have brought in competition in the delivery of government services. I don’t believe that the same public sector unions should get the same contract each and every year. Open it up for competition. Let the best quality of service at the best price to the taxpayer reign supreme, whether it’s the public sector unions, private sector unions, small business, not-for-profit. We’re not ideological about it. We want the best quality of services at the best price for the taxpayers who pay the bills and depend on those services.

A PC government would have brought in lower taxes on job creators, not higher taxes, as the McGuinty Liberals are doing.

We would put in place our plan to create 200,000 jobs in the skilled trades by modernizing our apprenticeship system, moving to a one-to-one journeyman-to-apprentice ratio to keep that talent here in the province of Ontario and not heading to Alberta, to Saskatchewan, to Manitoba to find their way ahead.

We would have brought in a more flexible and responsive regulatory system where all ties go to growth, where all ties go to job creation. I would have said to my cabinet, “You’ll reduce the regulatory burden by a minimum 33%. If you don’t do it, I’ll dock your pay and I’ll dock my pay as Premier as well.”

We would have changed the attitude of government. It seems like every time a small business leader has the audacity to try to create a job in Ontario, we have an army of bureaucrats standing in their way, telling them what they can’t do, telling them to wait for that email, telling them to wait for that call that never comes. We will change the attitude of government to get out of the way of business, get behind them, help them create jobs and make Ontario open for investment again.

We would bring in a pro-jobs policy that treats northern Ontario’s resources as resources, not as props in a theme park. Our view of northern Ontario is that if Ontario is the engine of Confederation, northern Ontario is the fuel for that engine. It is not meant to be frozen in time as one giant park. It’s a place where people live, where families want to raise their children, where they want to find a good job. We would free up northern Ontario to create jobs, to develop resources and bring job creation across northern Ontario again.

Our pro-jobs policy includes an energy policy that gets back to basics, that makes energy policy about reliability and affordability, not a social program. A PC government would end the outdated European industrial policy that sees us in Ontario paying up to 10 times the price of power for wind and solar, that then sees us signing contracts based on taking power when the wind blows and the sun shines—to take that surplus and then pay Quebec and New York and other states to take that power off our hands. This is a policy that’s been rejected wherever it was started before. It’s time Ontario get off

that path, back to reliable, affordable energy so businesses will create jobs and consumers can actually pay their bills again.

This is what we would do. This is our plan to create jobs. This is our plan to get the books back in order.

Do you know what, Speaker? I presented that plan to Dalton McGuinty back in November. My colleagues here in the House have brought it up over and over again in debate, in press conferences, in their columns back in their ridings. It's not about politics. It's not about doing what may or may not be good for our party. It's about doing the right thing for the people of the province of Ontario, to fight every day for those 600,000 unemployed.

Speaker, we saw no jobs plan. We saw no real spending control plan. Sadly, of all those good ideas that we presented to the members in government opposite, directly to the Premier himself across the desk in his office, none of it appeared in yesterday's budget. It has no jobs plan. It has no debt-control plan. This budget is trying to get off the ground without having either a pro-growth jobs plan or a deficit-reduction plan. It has no jobs policy. It has no plan to deal with our crippling debt.

We hoped for better, Speaker. We hoped we'd walk into the budget yesterday and see a jobs plan. We hoped we'd walk into the budget yesterday and see a plan to actually rein in spending, to reduce spending, to balance the books, to stop this mortgaging of the future of our kids and grandkids because they didn't have the leadership to make tough decisions today. We saw no jobs plan, we saw no debt-control plan, and the Ontario PCs cannot support this budget. We will not support this budget. It fails the people of Ontario.

Speaker, I said it yesterday and I say it again today and I'll say it tomorrow—for however long it takes: There is no need for Ontario to be condemned to a \$30-billion deficit. There's no reason Ontario should be condemned to a continuing stagnant economic growth regime. So I will continue—and my colleagues beside me will as well—to promote our positive Ontario PC plan to

reduce the size and cost of government, to build a more dynamic, growing economy with new jobs, that sees Ontario lead again. We owe this to Ontario families. We owe this to Ontario businesses. We owe this to all those who chose to make Ontario home, as well as those born and raised here. They've invested their lives in this great province, and they know, like we do, what Ontario is capable of being, capable of actually becoming again.

Ontario is like a grand old family home, and in so many ways, it has been lovingly preserved for generations. As they say in real estate, Speaker, it's got good bones. But the foundations are going, and it falls to this generation of leadership, in this place, to shore them up, to build for a better tomorrow, to get our economy moving again, to fight each and every day for those out of work, for those leaving the province, to stay here, to find that good job, to raise their families.

We believe that there are better days yet to come in the province of Ontario. Our best days are yet ahead of us. We just need a change in leadership, and we need this plan to move us forward, to create jobs and get our books back in balance. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Parkdale–High Park has moved adjournment of the debate. Agreed? Agreed.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Orders of the day? Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Do the members agree? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1608.

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| Crack, Grant (LIB) | Glengarry–Prescott–Russell | |
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| MacLeod, Lisa (PC) | Nepean–Carleton | |
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