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Wednesday 18 April 2012

Mercredi 18 avril 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 18 April 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 18 avril 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCEPTING SCHOOLS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 POUR
DES ÉCOLES TOLÉRANTES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 17, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui a trait à l'intimidation et à d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member from Huron–Bruce.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise this morning to participate in the debate on Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act. Sorry, we just didn't know if some other parties were participating, so we're back to this.

None of us in the House dispute the fact that bullying, in all its forms, has become a scourge in our schools, victimizing young people all over the province. I know that the newspapers have been certainly pronounced in the last several months in highlighting this fact with several cases that we've seen.

You know, in my day, I wish I could say—and I won't say the date—that when I was in school, this did not exist, but we all know that's untrue. We've always had bullying in our schools. I doubt that any of us went through our school years without either experiencing bullying first-hand or seeing it perpetrated on someone else, a friend or a relative. Although I hate to think about it, there may even be a couple of former bullies sitting here today.

Today, our schools are much more diversified in our society. That wasn't so obvious in the past decades. In recent decades, Canada—and Ontario in particular—has undergone a social and cultural metamorphosis. People from all over the world now make Ontario their home. They bring with them different customs, languages, clothing, religious practices, and appearances, which we now

take for granted. So this very diversity which makes our society so rich and vibrant can, unfortunately, spawn even greater opportunities for bullying and intolerance, often with tragic results, which we have unfortunately witnessed in this province. My colleagues, who spoke on this bill before, have aptly described instances of such tragedies, which are heartbreaking.

With the advent of technology, social media, bullying today has taken on a far more sophisticated and malicious demeanour. We have Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. They can be educational and social bonding experiences; they can be fun, informative and entertaining. However, when used for the wrong purposes, these technologies can also be hateful and virulent in attacking and ridiculing the vulnerable.

Young people are bullied because of their skin colour, their religion, their accent, the labels of the clothes and shoes that they wear, their ethnic background, their perceived social or economic class, their complexion, how fat or how thin they are and, of course, their sexual orientation. No one is disputing any of this; it is a reality that we all share.

As some of my colleagues have already said, there is no one in this House who has the knowledge, experience and expertise on this subject of my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo, Elizabeth Witmer. She's a professional educator, a parent, a school board chair, an opposition education critic and a former Minister of Education. Ms. Witmer brings wisdom, compassion and practical experience to this debate. Her private member's bill, Bill 14, the Anti-Bullying Act, is a culmination of several years of research, analysis and passion.

It is a well-written, researched, documented piece of legislation which comprehensively addresses all forms of bullying. It drew on the personal and tragic experience of real victims of bullying, which she so eloquently detailed during her debate on the bill. It was influenced by the high statistics on bullying, such as the survey by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health which stated that about one third of all students have been bullied and another one third have been the bully. Ms. Witmer's bill also drew on a 2010 survey of grade 12 students by the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, which found that 46% had either been the victim or the perpetrator of bullying.

So while Bills 13 and 14 take quite different approaches to the problem of bullying, both were developed with the most honourable intentions, I believe, by their authors. However, this is where the bills diverge: Bill 14 is a far more comprehensive document in detailing all the conceivable reasons that a child may be bullied.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It addresses the issue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. It analyzes the far-reaching social impact which bullying has on victims, their families, the perpetrators of the act, the school environment and the educational process itself. It puts a specific focus on cyberbullying, which of course is the most dominant and prevalent form of bullying in today's society. Bill 13 only touches on this phenomenon.

What Bill 13 does do is single out specific victims of bullying rather than addressing the far broader aspects of it. All victims of bullying are equal. They share a common pain, a lack of self-worth, a helpless anxiety of who they are and where they come from, and this is the problem. Our education critic, Ms. MacLeod, has done an excellent job in her analysis of the bill—her examples that she's brought from her riding have been actually nationally portrayed—and the changes that we'd like to see.

But this government believes that some victims of bullying are more worthy of special focus and attention and need to be specifically singled out in the legislation. Mr. Speaker, I'm reminded of the great George Orwell classic *Animal Farm*, in which the animal kingdom is ruled by the pigs and other animals are there to serve them. In that social satire, the first item on the animal bill of rights is that all animals are created equal, except pigs, who are more equal. Bill 13 creates a super class of bullying victims, and that's not right. No victims of bullying are more worthy of support, compassion and understanding than other victims.

As my colleagues have already said, I'm appealing to the Minister of Education to draw on the comprehensive and well-researched bill which my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo has put forward, and which passed second reading two or three weeks ago. The incorporation of Ms. Witmer's ideas into the official government bill would strengthen it immeasurably. As my colleague the member from Dufferin–Caledon yesterday said so eloquently, simply because an idea originates on this side of the House does not mean that it's unworthy of consideration and further discussion.

0910

This is not a game of good guys and bad guys. As members of the House, we are all elected by our constituents for whatever skills and talents we have to offer the people of our ridings. We all stood for office and come here every day to do our small part to try to make this province a better place for all our citizens. None of us comes here in the morning saying, "What can I do to make Ontario a worse place and make life more miserable for our citizens?" To take this type of approach is silly, childish and, I believe, political. It is partisan politics at its worst.

As many of us have said, Bill 13 would be vastly improved by incorporating much of what Ms. Witmer has put into Bill 14. As Bill 13 currently stands, it is too narrow and one-dimensional. It does not recognize the complexity of bullying in terms of both the victims and the degree and variety of bullying to which these victims are subjected.

This is not the time for partisan politics. We have pleaded on that for weeks and months—I see the education minister shaking her head, but really the stakes are too high. Stop it.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm surprised you'd do this.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Really? Too many innocent young victims and potential victims are counting on us to do the right thing and make their environment safer and more respectful. Again, I implore the Minister of Education to put aside the partisanship which we have seen in the preparation, introduction and debate associated with Bill 13. As I said earlier, there is no one in this House who has the knowledge, expertise, wisdom and passion for this subject as do my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo and my colleague from Nepean–Carleton. The government needs to put aside its fear of ideas which don't originate on the government side of the House and embrace good ideas from proposals, regardless of where they come from.

So we cannot support Bill 13 as it is currently crafted. However, a modification of this legislation to reflect the main components of Bill 14, the Anti-Bullying Act, would undoubtedly produce a bill that's worthy of support. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this, this morning. I trust that the minister and the government—I've genuinely got up and said my piece—will do the right thing and amend this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Mr. Speaker, I support much of what the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has said, and I'm concerned about both political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. We're dealing with an issue of bullying here, and it's clear to me that there is bullying on both sides, and this has got to stop.

The New Democrats could have introduced Bill 15, and we didn't because we thought that would be yet another element of division within the political parties, and we thought, given the topic, that that wasn't a fair thing to do.

I think the Minister of Education has really—I mean, she says she's making efforts to reach out, although in her work with the school boards, I notice that she has been quite a tough person—dare I say that she has bullied some.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have it from good sources. What I really want to say to both parties is, just reach out a little bit on either side and end the schoolyard stuff, because this is what we're talking about. I think if you did that, we can solve this.

I support Bill 13. We do. We supported Bill 14, and there are elements in both bills that are reasonable. So I reach out to both political parties—you are both equally unfair around this issue—and I say to you both, stop it. We're dealing with bullying, and I think one of you has to stop it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I'm pleased to rise again to speak to Bill 13 as we continue this discussion with regard to accepting schools and making children feel safe and helping our schools accept all our children. As a mother, again this is an area that I speak to my children about. I hear the stories, and we can all remember when we were younger, as was pointed out earlier. This isn't a new phenomenon but one that has certainly come to the fore in terms of the changes that are occurring in our schools.

We've had many hours of debate on this bill. Quite evidently, we all agree: Something needs to be done. But we are spending so much time here talking about which is the better bill, who has the better definition and who has the better information, where what we should be doing is proceeding with this, bringing this to committee and making changes if we need to make them so that we can actually go forward and protect our children. We are spending too much time discussing which is better, Bill 13 or Bill 14; again, another point where the opposition seems to think they have all the answers, they have the right definitions, they have the right bill, whereas we have the wrong bill.

So I would agree with the statement that was just made: We need to work together on this; we need to bring this forward. Bring this to committee so that we can continue to do what we need to do, and that is to protect our children, support our schools, and support our families and our community.

Our legislation provides clear expectations. I know that the opposition seems to think it doesn't. It increases accountability. It's a complete bill. I can't agree with the statement that this government has been selfish or that we're not doing what we need to do for our community. This is a world-class bill, and this government has invested heavily in our schools and our education system to work with our children and with our school boards.

So let's remember, it's all about the children. That's what we're here for. And as we continue to spend time here debating this or debating what should or shouldn't be said in the bill, we're wasting time. We need to bring this forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to congratulate my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock on her opportunity to speak to the anti-bullying legislation.

I'm a bit disturbed at what I heard from the New Democrats and from the Liberals today that they effectively think we shouldn't continue to debate important issues of the day in the chamber and do our due diligence. That's the right of the opposition; it's also the right of every single member here to actually talk about the important issues of the day, and this piece of legislation, of course, is one that's important to my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party. I know it's import-

ant to members of the other parties as well, but we shouldn't be bullied for our points of view. I mean, that's where they need to be careful, because at the end of the day, this impacts kids' lives.

Parents have contacted us. As education critic for the Ontario Progressive Conservatives, I can assure you that I speak about this on a daily basis with concerned parents throughout Ontario and from my home community of Ottawa. We know, for example, that we can be doing better, but doing better doesn't necessarily mean doing it faster. We must do our due diligence. We must allow members of this assembly to have their say. After all, Speaker, that is why they were elected to this place in the first place. They were elected to bring their views from their constituents.

I think we all agree that the stories we have been hearing and that have been told in this Legislature on this anti-bullying law have been very important and have helped shape our views, and we find that there are actually elements of commonality among all of us in this chamber, because at the end of the day, we all care about Ontario's children. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I just wanted to weigh in on this debate. First of all, I think the term "bullying" has been taken way out of context that somehow what goes on in this House between the opposition parties and the government on this particular bill can be referred to as bullying. You know, bullying takes place in our schools, in our schoolyards, on our streets, when kids feel so intimidated that it changes their lives forever. To relate what's happening in this House on this particular bill, or any other bill, to parties somehow bullying one another is really taking that totally out of context.

These two bills both have good aspects to them. We have a government bill before the House that we would urge all parties in the House to get along with, so that we can actually do something of a very definitive nature with respect to the bullying that goes on and has been going on in our schools for years. I can remember instances when I was a child many, many years ago—my kids say it's so long ago it was probably in the Stone Age, you know—when kids were bullied, and they carried that stigma, that feeling that goes along with it for many, many years to come.

These are good attempts to stop the kind of activities that have been going on in our schools, at times—not by most students, but by some students—for too long. It's important that we get a hold of this by giving the school authorities the right kind of mechanisms—and that's the way I look at this—to stop these kinds of behaviours and to also be of help to those individuals, those kids, that are involved in the bullying that takes place in our schools.

0920

Let's not somehow pretend that the kind of discussion that takes place here, let's not relate that and say that that's bullying of any nature whatsoever. This is the typical kind of political debate that takes place. We're all

adults here. We know how to take care of that. Let's deal with the real issue, and that's with the bullying that takes place in our schools on a day-to-day basis.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has a two-minute reply.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I thank the member from Trinity–Spadina with his comments on the bill, but also him saying to stop it and let's all work together on the bill. He's right, and that's what I'm saying. We are here to debate the bill and to try to make amendments. We have the right to bring forward amendments and make changes, and we've articulated this. We had the opportunity for Ms. Witmer to have her private member's bill brought up and discussed, and her points made and the changes she'd like to see.

The member from Windsor West: We're not blocking it from going to committee. That is the next stage. We are still in the debate here. We're doing our times; we're on our 10-minute cycles. Yes, we do need to work together, and I said that in my comments. I was very, very serious that this is a huge issue that we need to get right. Yes, we have felt some partisan pushback from you, and I'm not going to hide that. I say we shouldn't be doing that on this bill. It's a very important issue.

The member from Nepean–Carleton is correct with her passion, her articulation of what she'd like to see, her real-life examples that she's spoken so passionately about here. When you see members of the opposition kind of heckling when that happens, it's absolutely ridiculous and uncalled for in this bill. I know that partisan politics is part of our culture here, but this bill is very serious. When we see that being abused and used for political purposes, of course we get upset, and we have a right to do that.

The member from Kingston and the Islands: Sure, bullying that happens to children at a young age does shape their lives, and you see lots of newspaper articles that say if that occurs, the less chance of getting a better education, the less self-confidence they have, the less productive they are in society. This is a serious issue. We all need to deal with it. We are here to work co-operatively. We are giving our feedback, and this government should listen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand today to participate in the debate for Bill 13. Yesterday, we had some colleagues in the PC caucus who were very, very eloquent and stated so many examples of bullying and why it's so important to address this whole issue in a very comprehensive manner.

Yesterday, I literally had tears in my eyes as my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings was sharing real-life experience of bullying from his riding. It just breaks my heart. I was inspired by my colleague from Dufferin–Caledon when she so sincerely stood up and spoke for the need to collaborate between Bills 13 and 14.

This is not the time to be partisan. This issue is so important to every individual in Ontario. We need to set

aside party colours and do what's right for both the victims and the bullies themselves.

It's interesting, because I found it very unfortunate yesterday—I'm a rookie in this House, and I'm very, very inspired through the history and motivated to represent my riding to the best of my ability, but I have to admit I was taken aback a little bit and disappointed when yesterday I heard the Premier himself say to the leader of the loyal opposition that Tim Hudak, the leader of the PC Party, was not allowed to ask questions, and it's like, "Oh, my goodness. What on earth is this?"

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Check the Hansard. He said, "You are not allowed to ask questions."

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This is a sensitive issue. I don't understand why the government, if they don't like what they have to hear, then leave—this is a serious issue—and not heckle her.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Continue.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that no one is above any other in this House. We all have an opinion and we should have the right to express it, and no one should be told whether they can or cannot ask a question. You know, I haven't decided yet whether yesterday was an example of bullying in and of itself, or just simple arrogance.

But here's the deal: When I worked for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, one of my favourite responsibilities was staffing provincial 4-H leadership camp and regional camps, and also other experiences around leadership development with regard to the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario and the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program. In those leadership opportunities, I just took great pleasure. There were individuals from all points of Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member from Huron–Bruce to stick to the bill. You're wandering a bit. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, but I do have a point, and I beg some lenience here.

The fact of the matter is, a topic that we studied and that those young people, and young at heart, identified as a priority was the fact that diversity mattered, situational leadership mattered, problem-solving mattered. And these young people, ranging in age from 12 to 21 to 32 and, as I said, to the young at heart, came to understand that every individual mattered. That experience that we had in those leadership environments was like turning on a light bulb that had a dimmer switch. Essentially, those lights got brighter and brighter and brighter. It is absolutely not acceptable to let any individual who for whatever reason chooses to bully dim those lights.

The fact of the matter is that every child, every person, deserves an uninhibited opportunity, like they did in 4-H camp, to discover their potential and discover who they are meant to be without any bullying, without any stress. Because let's face it, life can have a lot of pressures in and of itself, and we do not need any extracurricular or extraneous events that maybe make individuals question themselves or their self-worth.

No one can argue that support systems and prevention of bullying in our schools should be overlooked. The support systems in our schools and the prevention of bullying should be paramount. Legislation to protect our children should be all-encompassing and made to protect every child from any instance of bullying, and that's why I'm very pleased to support my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo in her bill, Bill 14. Bill 13 just doesn't go far enough. I find that Bill 14 is a comprehensive anti-bullying bill that focuses on prevention, accountability and awareness.

Awareness is so important. We have to get to the root cause: Why are people choosing to bully? Bill 14 provides students, parents, educators and the community at large with a strategy to raise awareness and prevent bullying, as well as a process to resolve it. That is so important. We need to collect data and report back to the ministry so that we can build, as I said, a comprehensive bill like our esteemed member from Kitchener–Waterloo's. She has spent so much time making sure all the i's are dotted, all the t's are crossed and that her approach is relevant in terms of identifying, addressing and, most importantly, resolving the whole act of bullying.

We have to get to the root causes, because bullying happens for what seems to be a reason of validation. Individuals need to feel good about themselves for one reason or another, and they stand up and they talk over top of people. They physically bully or push people around, or they even resort to our social media and cyberspace to validate themselves by propelling themselves over top of another individual, and this just isn't acceptable.

We have to find a way to compromise. Speaker, we have to find a way to massage both Bills 13 and 14 together, because this is an issue that should not have any partisan stripes in terms of colours. This is an important issue whereby we need to take off our party hats and do what's right for the children and all victims of bullying.

0930

Again, that comes down to collecting data, reporting to the ministry and having a comprehensive anti-bullying bill that focuses on prevention, accountability and awareness. We believe in tackling bullying head-on and, unlike the Liberal bill, the PC bill does so with four critical areas: (1) reporting and investigating bullying; (2) the accountability of school officials and boards to the ministry; (3) education and public awareness to prevent bullying; and (4) remedial education for bullies to teach them that bullying is unacceptable.

Bill 14 requires anti-bullying lessons to be incorporated in the provincial curriculum from JK to grade 12,

and I would suggest to you that that's exactly what we've done in terms of our leadership experiences in rural Ontario—again, the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario, 4-H, the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program. We learn about diversity. We learn about coping and dealing in difficult situations. We learn about situational leadership. We learn that no matter what community you come from, what religion you represent and what ideals you have, everybody matters. That is so, so important, and I feel very strongly that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo held that in her heart when she took so much time to get it right in Bill 14.

Again, Mr. Speaker, every individual in this province deserves an opportunity to discover their potential and to discover who they're meant to be in a totally uninhibited environment. Unfortunately, if we were to move solely forward with Bill 14, it wouldn't allow that environment. We need to explore the best of the best, take off our party colours, work together, collaborate and appreciate the essence that comes out of Bill 14 and, as I said before, massage Bill 13 and Bill 14 together. We have a chance to make a difference.

Last night we heard very eloquently from Speaker Levac that history could be made in this session, and I think we can do that again with the massaging of Bill 13 and Bill 14. Again, it's because every individual deserves the utmost opportunity to discover who they are and make the best of their lives and feel proud about who they are. In actual fact, even the bullies themselves need a little bit of attention. They need to understand why they're choosing very obtrusive actions to validate themselves so that they too, the bullies themselves, can address their potential and discover who they're meant to be as well. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy once again to rise to this very important debate regarding bullying. We've definitely faced quite a bit of it in Hamilton. My niece is still in high school and I speak to her on a regular basis and question her about what's going on in the school, and over and over and over again I hear how bad it is in her high school.

The biggest issue with these bills that I see—and that's from listening first-hand right from the children's mouths—is that there's nobody there to enforce it. So if we're not providing funding for the schools to be able to bring in people to watch over them, to be there, and make sure that there's adults in place to monitor these situations and that there's therapists on-site to deal with these situations, we're just going to continue to beat ourselves in the head here. Because no matter how many rules we make, if we don't give them the tools to do it, they're not going to be able to do it.

So between both good bills, Bills 13 and 14, if we're not providing them the tools to be able to implement it, we're not going to get any further. So hopefully when this goes to committee, these will be the changes that are put into place. We need funding to go with this bill. We

need to make sure we have adults on duty who are specifically going to pay attention to this kind of stuff, and that's the only way it's going to work, because regardless of what they're being bullied for, they're being bullied and it needs to be addressed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be able to stand to have an opportunity to speak in support of Bill 13. I want to share with the Legislature what I learned and heard last week in a constituency week with my residents and students in Scarborough–Agincourt.

I heard very clearly from my constituents that they do support Bill 13, particularly the fact that this is about inclusion, this is about acceptance. Okay? This is nothing about sex education. This is not about changing the curriculum. This is about making our schools safe. That's the first thing I heard very clearly.

I also had an opportunity last Tuesday to visit one of my high schools, Dr. Norman Bethune high school, to speak and to consult the students about this particular bill and to talk and also to thank the students for their efforts in making their school an inclusive and accepting school. Let me share with you what the students are doing in this particular high school. They're making the entire school turn pink for the month of May as well as the month of April. So they're having activities every day in the school to celebrate pink. So this is a very diverse school, Mr. Speaker. Over 99% of the students in their school are Asian students. So for me, this is what the school is all about: making acceptance, inclusiveness.

But the other piece I took some time to ask the students with regard to Bill 13—I asked them, “Can you share with me, do you have any problem with regard to section 303.1(d), dealing with having ‘activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name’?”

They said to me, “What's wrong with having a club? What's wrong with having a club that has a different name than us?” They very, very clearly told me, “Do not back down, Soo. Do not—do not. Support every student in our school.” This is what this bill is all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I have to agree with the member from Hamilton Mountain that we should collaborate on these two bills. We should put it together. We should work together on this.

However, from the first day in this House, I saw leaders of all three parties get up and say, “We have a minority government. We have to work together and we have to get the job done.” And unfortunately, the members opposite didn't hear the same speech I did. We need to merge these two bills. There are too many people in my riding who do not like Bill 13 for obvious reasons, and I certainly couldn't support it.

Mr. Bob Delaney: What are the obvious reasons?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Obvious reasons?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's not comprehensive enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's not comprehensive enough. It singles out too many people to be specialized. So that's why they don't like it.

However the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has submitted a very good bill, and we on this side of the House believe that you should look at it. However, like happened in the past, we never see any co-operation from your side of the House. And that includes on things such as the budget and whatever. We need to—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: So it is my opinion that since there's no co-operation on your side of the House for this bill, that the other two parties should put pressure on you to merge these two bills because of the good ideas in Ms. Witmer's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

The member from Huron–Bruce has a two-minute reply.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, I have to draw everybody's attention back to what really matters here—and again, I'm a broken record—but I believe with all my heart it's about young people discovering their potential and being uninhibited and realizing the person they're meant to be without any sense of bullying whatsoever, no matter what walk of life they come from, what jurisdiction in the province they come from. Everybody matters. Just like rural Ontario matters, I might say.

But that said, I really appreciate the comments that were shared. Our member from Hamilton Mountain—absolutely. It's disappointing to hear that your niece is still reporting the fact that it is still really bad in her high school. I totally agree with you: The right people need to be in place, and we have to have the tools at hand to implement the proper approach.

0940

That reinforces the fact that the member for Kitchener–Waterloo was so much on track when her bill revolves around (1) the importance of reporting and investigating the issue of bullying; (2) the accountability of school officials and boards to the ministry; (3) the education and public awareness to prevent bullying; and (4) the remedial education for bullies to teach them that bullying is unacceptable, and that perhaps in that whole experience they can realize what they have that's special so that they too can discover the person they're meant to be instead of trying to tromp all over top of other folks.

I totally agree that this issue is properly addressed in Bill 14, and it needs to be massaged together with Bill 13.

To the member from Scarborough–Agincourt: I agree, schools definitely need to be made safe, but I respectfully say it's so much more than just acceptance or inclusion. It's about a comprehensive approach to managing the whole issue of bullying.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's my pleasure to stand here today and give my two cents' worth on this very serious issue of bullying.

We have two bills that have been brought forward, 13 and 14, and as noble as the members who crafted those bills are and the sincerity—I honestly do believe there's a sincerity to move on the issue of bullying, because bullying affects, of course, young people. As a former educator myself, Mr. Speaker, for the last 13 years, I can honestly say that I have witnessed and experienced bullying first-hand.

One of the things that disturbs me the most about individuals who bully others is the fact that it's obviously a self-esteem issue. There are issues behind the scenes that, as educators, we are not necessarily privy to: their lifestyle at home, what happens at home, among their peers etc. It's a human instinct to lash out, sometimes, especially for young people who don't know exactly how to focus their energies, and so they pick on younger individuals because of their differences, their variances. It has to be through the education of such seriousness that we extend that to those young individuals.

As noble as Bill 13 is—and Bill 14, I have to say—the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, Ms. Witmer, has done extensive research talking and listening to stakeholders about the issue of bullying and has actually listened to what the experts have to say. Bill 14, Mr. Speaker, I believe definitely outlines the parameters of how to address bullying within our education system, even within our society as a whole. It definitely brings forward a defined definition of what bullying on the Web is and what those penalties are for those individuals who partake in bullying in the social media.

So I think as nice as Bill 13 is and as nice as Bill 14 is, the member from Hamilton Mountain is right: We have to work together, collaboratively, towards the betterment of such a serious issue.

One thing that is concerning, however, where I have to disagree with my esteemed NDP colleague, is more funding to address the issue. As an educator myself, one of the frustrating things is, teachers and administrators don't have the tools and resources, the power, if you will, to enforce. If an individual does something or bullies an individual, what kind of—not punishment, but what are the alternatives for an individual who does that? We need to work with the young individual, but at the same time that's what, as an educator, I do. That's what the guidance teachers do, right? We have other staff members—EAs, ECEs—who work with those individuals.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They're being cut because my esteemed government's budget is going to do that.

So the funding isn't an issue and I don't see it as an issue. What we need to do is give the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the members go through the Chair if they want

to talk, not to each other. This should come through me, okay? Thank you.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Sorry. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. You're absolutely correct.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that we actually need more funding in order to educate the young people about bullying and the seriousness of the impact bullying has. I think Bill 14 is a huge step forward in fighting bullying within our education system, and I honestly think that what the member for Kitchener–Waterloo has done is the correct approach to addressing any issue.

This is a nonpartisan issue. This is an issue that goes beyond political stripes. A young person on the playground being picked on can be a Conservative, a Liberal, a Green Party—it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, their religion, their creed. What happens, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to make sure that this doesn't happen at all; equality for all across the board. It doesn't matter. Equal: We are all equal, Mr. Speaker. That's what I think Bill 14 definitely addresses, the equality for all. It outlines the parameters which those individuals will face if they do not adhere to what I, as an educator, and as my colleagues in the teaching profession try to do, which is instill good character in individuals.

A good point was made earlier that we, regardless of political stripes—my Liberal counterparts are great individuals. My NDP esteemed colleagues here are great individuals. They come to the House and they have great ideas. They represent their people. This is a nonpartisan issue.

I think the member from Nepean–Carleton had it right as well. She has worked very diligently with local groups in her riding and she's done a fantastic job of reaching out to families and communities who have been embraced and thrust into situations that, quite frankly, are almost unbearable. We have individuals who have taken their own lives, and it's very sad because no one, regardless of their religion, creed, where they live, what their beliefs are, what their value systems are—these are individuals that should be nurtured in our society.

I think Bill 14 addresses that and I think the member from Nepean–Carleton would agree with me when I say that what Ms. Witmer has actually done—and I'll say this again with the stakeholders, listening to them—is an extensive, extensive outreach. “Listen” is the key: Listen to what people have to say. Only by listening can you actually get to the bottom of things and resolve those concerns.

0950

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the NDP is correct. My esteemed colleague from Hamilton Mountain is correct in a sense, and what I'm hearing from my esteemed colleague is that no piece of legislation is perfect. We understand that. That's the humanitarian part of what we do. You're not going to get everything perfect on the first try, but we have to try. And this is why I think, Mr. Speaker, when Bill 14 goes to committee, hopefully when it's in committee, we can actually collaboratively work together to ensure that amendments from various bills—in Bill 13,

I'm sure there are parts that may improve Bill 14. My esteemed colleague here said, "Well, we could introduce Bill 15." In committee, that's essentially what we're doing. We're working towards the betterment of a more perfect piece of legislation that's going to have a positive impact on the lives of so many.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to add, as I close today, that it's a great honour to stand here and debate this bill in the sense that we honestly have to take a positive approach. I think Bill 14 is a massive leap towards addressing the issue of this serious nature. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to say that I agree with everything that the member from Northumberland–Quinte West has said. I have two comments in relation to what he said, however. One of them has to do with listening. Listening is always a two-way issue; it's never one-sided. So when one person claims that the other person isn't listening, it's very likely that two parties are not listening, and it's often possible that three parties may not be listening. But you have to remember that unless we mutually listen to each other, it's not going to work. So one-way listening doesn't work, and that applies to all groups, is the first point.

The second point has to do with funding. Not all teachers know how to solve problems. You would know that. Some mediate well, and some don't know how to mediate problems. In some elementary schools and some high schools, some teachers are incredibly frightened to be involved in solving a bullying issue, with individuals potentially being very, very aggressive and teachers not knowing how to deal with that from a physical point of view, or indeed even a social/psychological point of view. So when you say that we are skilled as teachers to be able to tackle that problem, it isn't so.

We need help. Teachers need support and principals need support to be able to do this job well. So when the law prescribes that school boards will have to solve the problems of bullying, it means that you as a teacher, now, and a principal, have an additional responsibility to deal with it, and unless they are trained and unless they are given support, it's not going to be easy. It means another responsibility on teachers that they have to deal with, and that's a problem of funding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me a brief opportunity to talk about this bill and the debate that's taking place on this very important bill, Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act.

I'm heartened to hear the comments I'm hearing that we need to work together, that this is an important issue, that we need to ensure that students are protected. These are all steps in the right direction. What's also important, Speaker, is timing. Time is of the essence right now. We need to make sure that we've got protections in our schools as soon as possible. This message of urgency is not just from us, the members. We're not in schools any-

more; we really don't know what's happening. I think all of the members talk to students in schools. This is a message coming from the students.

Like everybody else, I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time in our schools just last week. I do that pretty much every Friday when I'm home. Students don't get this debate. Students don't get this politics. And I don't blame them. They are saying, "Am I going to have an opportunity to ensure that there's programming available in our schools starting this September?" Guess what, Speaker? I couldn't give them an answer, because we don't know what's going to happen.

So my request, my urging to everybody is, let's get together and get working on this. I was really disheartened when I read in the Toronto Star today that Mr. Wilson, the House leader for the Conservatives, said, "We will continue to ring bells and use whatever tactics we can on our side to delay government legislation"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Ottawa Centre knows we don't use names; we use ridings.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My apologies.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: The House leader said that they will continue to use delay tactics to delay any legislation, and that's not what we need to do, Speaker. We need to pass.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Just to the other member's point, the reason bells are being rung in this place is in opposition to this government's refusal to follow the will of this assembly in calling for a select committee on Ornge and the abuses that were taking place. I just—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member knows that's not the topic. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But to point out that our party is trying to delay this is really not quite—it's heifer dust, Speaker, because we know that we all have a vested interest now.

Yes, I actually have been to schools. I went to a few last week—one in your riding—and in fact I've also spoken to a number of other people who have been affected by this, and I must say, people want to make sure we get it right. Doing due diligence is a good thing. Allowing members to speak to this topic, anti-bullying legislation, is important work. If the members opposite really want this to be done ASAP, they've got their tools in their legislative toolbox to do whatever they like. They're that major minority government, as you remember Mr. McGuinty talked about.

I do say this: We have an opportunity to have a fulsome debate, a great discussion here; we are having that. We know that there are parents who are concerned with the legislation. We're going to hear them out at committee. But don't try and shut down the voices of members of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, because we do speak on behalf of our constituents, and we do have a right to our opinion, and we do have a right to share those views.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I listen to the constituents of Algoma–Manitoulin, and the opinions of my constituents vary in support of Bill 13 and Bill 14, which is why I think there's good in both and which is why I really think that we should sit down and get this done properly. However, you need to have those discussions, and there seems to be an air of darkness here right now, that we can't seem to get to that point.

The last time I rose, I spoke about a young woman. Her name is Candice, and unfortunately—she's from my riding—she made a difficult decision. But what she managed to do is to get a group of us together, and when we sat down, we sat down in what's referred to as a sharing circle. A sharing circle is a First Nation practice. When you sit down, you try and use some of the sacred words that they've used, and also their teachings, words like love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth.

When you look at these words, let's try and use them to get to the point that we need to get to with these two bills. If we love our kids, then let's get this done. If we respect each other across the way, it should bring us to the proper table in order to address the issues that we need to address; and respect means listening to both sides. And then if we take the courage to take that next step in order to get together, to get to that table, that will demonstrate that we are working together in this House. Honesty: It speaks for itself. Let's show the wisdom that we've learned from each other and that we're going to present a bill that is actually going to be beneficial to our kids. The humility: Let's check our partisanship at the door before we get in here, and let's get this done properly for our kids. The truth: Let's keep it, let's live it and go forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland–Quinte West has a two-minute reply.

1000

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague from Trinity–Spadina, who eloquently expressed his concerns for more funding in education. As an educator myself, I agree that we have to have the funding in place to ensure that not only bullying is addressed but other aspects of making our young people the best-educated individuals on the planet.

Also, to the member from Ottawa Centre, and perhaps the future Minister of Health: I agree that we need to work collaboratively, again, towards this. I hope that, as the member from Algoma–Manitoulin pointed out, it's a matter of respect, Mr. Speaker.

I also am very happy to say that I listen. I truly do try to listen to all sides of what is being presented to me, and I, honestly, would love to work with each of the parties involved in this. I do, however, think that there are certain individuals, or perhaps partisanship sometimes—and I understand partisanship. I do get what partisanship is and what it does, but I think once partisanship gets in the

way of progress on something non-partisan, like a piece of bullying legislation that's actually going to have positive influence and impact on the lives of our young people, surely as mature adults we can sit down and agree.

I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, that once these bills go to committee, we can come to some understanding, some appreciation, that is going to be for the betterment of the people which we represent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to speak for a few minutes on Bill 13. It's a bill that, I think, is in the media pretty well every day. In fact, just riding in on the GO train this morning—I'm just going to read from local papers.

On the very front page of the paper that most commuters read: "Teen's Racist Rant Shocks Peers". It goes on to say, "Students at Brampton's Turner Fenton Secondary School said they were shocked by a YouTube video of a girl from their school making racist comments." That is related, because I think we're all talking about cyberbullying and the damage—and with this whole social networking, you're kind of anonymous when you're trashing someone, and that's kind of the growing part.

In fact, another article in the same paper—I just took a few of the pages out; there were three different articles on that same issue: "Nova Scotia to Propose Legislation on Online Bullying". It goes on to say, "Legislation aimed at cyberbullying to be tabled Wednesday in the Nova Scotia legislature is being described by the education minister as a first step in the government's approach to bullying in schools."

It talks about the Minister of Education and says: "For faster government action from the family of a teen who committed suicide.

"Jennex didn't reveal details about the legislation, but she said it would address recommendations set out by a task force on online bullying last month."

So it's clear that the largest and fastest growing of this is the online bullying.

I think if you look at Bill 13 and Bill 14—there's been much said about them—I think it's unanimous that all members agree on a general statement that all forms of bullying are reprehensible and unacceptable. In fact, I think our critic, Lisa MacLeod, has spoken quite passionately and in a very informed way with respect to an incident in Ottawa, on which she's given out a piece this morning, on the Huble family calling on quick action on this bill.

I think the government and some people viewing say that there's been some inappropriate use of procedure wrangling here to make another point, which isn't related to Bill 13, but it is related to the idea that the government of the day—that's the McGuinty government—should be listening.

Let me say this: I've put on the table a couple of things. In my riding of Durham, which is the community of Uxbridge, Scugog and Clarington, I have called almost

all the members of the clergy: Islam, the imam of that particular persuasion; the Baptist church—all of the churches that would respond directly or indirectly about their impression of this. They want to be considered. All of them want to be considered, whether they're Christian or non-Christian—I would just generalize that way. They are looking for leadership from the church group. We've heard that out here.

But what I'm hearing, most importantly, is that Bill 13 somehow ranks bullying, and that's what I find wrong. All forms of bullying, whether it's your body shape, your colour—whatever it is—are reprehensible, unacceptable. There are certainly going to be children of all persuasions, whether it's their gender orientation—whatever it is. I understand that. I'm a parent of five children. I have nine grandchildren. I've been a school trustee. My wife's a teacher. She's now a trustee. We're engaged on this.

I have a couple of articles here and I won't, in the limited time I've been allowed—I may seek unanimous consent, Mr. Speaker, to have more time.

But the issue here is that the parent is the primary educator for sure. I can say, with all due respect, that I would encourage all families to be engaged in that and that the parents have—they have to consult with the experts; I understand that fully. But they are the primary educator, and as such, when I look at all the documents, I want to see a role for the parent.

The provision of opting out of some of the classes would be an appropriate compromise. Opting out, you maybe want to sit down with the parents and explain the reason. Maybe it's a conflict with the particular perspective of those religions. And that's the challenge here. In a nutshell, that's the challenge.

Now, I have talked directly with the conference of bishops and also read the document respecting differences from the Catholic school trustees, and from that document—I've cited it in the House here before—there's about four reasons. But I want to repeat, repeat and reinforce: All forms of bullying and intolerance are unacceptable. Education is the forum for changing your mind, learning, expanding and appreciating, respecting differences. That document says that respecting one another and not taking action to belittle the other person in any way, physically or intellectually or whatever, is where the real essence of this debate is.

Power, in its definition, is the ability to have others do your will. If you look at the study of power, it's the ability to have others do your will or conform with your ideology.

Now, we're seeing that in the Legislature, about how much waste is tolerable. On the McGuinty side, it seems quite tolerable. They wasted billions of dollars on eHealth and Ornge and OLG—you name it. It's intolerant for us, and we discuss it and argue, and the people of Ontario make the decision.

But on this issue here, we've got to move forward. I'd like to see something in place myself for September, some clear rules. But don't forget for one moment that there's lots on the agenda in our schools today. I've listened and heard from schools, even now, about certain agendas that

are being aggressively pushed in the school. I will put that on the record, and I can refute it from parents and students from high schools and elementary schools who are upset with the current curriculum driving an agenda. That's really the issue there. I think parents should have the right of opting out. It might be important for them to sort of sit down and explain their reasons, "It conflicts with the teachings of my faith." I'm putting that on the table.

Now, if we don't like that, then we're moving to a secular model of the world. And I believe that in life our children should be taught that faith is important, whatever faith. That's important.

In law, under the charter, it's called the duty to accommodate. As we found out last summer, certain religions pray during the day, and the public school board was accommodating them in Toronto, which is the proper thing to do if they're praying on a Friday or whatever it is. I'm saying the duty to accommodate will arise. Some faiths will not accept teaching things that are in conflict with the values and teachings of their faith. That's the essence of this whole thing.

Let's get on with it. Let's not force schools. Let's not bully them into having these particular clubs of a particular name so that it satisfies a particular goal. All I'm saying is, we can move forward in consultation, step by step. You can educate people over time to these various combinations that are required. I would say the names of groups. The use of technology in these meetings that may occur—children in the schools are tweeting and twittering all the time on their little BlackBerrys or iPhones; if they're going to be saying things that people are confiding in a meeting, that could constitute them harming themselves in the public by some electronic means. How about the home schooling groups? Are they going to be forced to accommodate to get their diploma or whatever it is? How about the freedom of religion itself?

I think this bill can move forward in an incremental way, looking at and respecting the work from the member, Ms. Witmer, and her Bill 13. But bullying, as the minister has said—as she is saying now with the teachers in their negotiations, "My way or the highway." That's not the way, in a democracy, to move forward. We can deal with bullying. We can respect parents, we can respect students, and Respecting Difference is the document that I'm referring to. It's a document by the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. I would encourage it for all members, for your reading. There's an extremely exemplary section in it that I would say is mandatory reading. It's on page 5 and it says, "To insist that others share our beliefs and to eradicate the frameworks that make ... choices ... forced acceptance of beliefs ... is not the hallmark of a ... democratic society," but quite the opposite. I think that is a very profound statement and is something we can learn from here. By me, I should first respect people with differences, and not humiliate or demean them or diminish them, and they should also accept my interpretation of the world as well, respectfully. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this chance.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Viran Toor, a dentist from Port Elgin in my riding of Huron–Bruce, who is here today for the Ontario Dental Association's Queen's Park day. Welcome, Viran.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'd like to welcome Girls Government here from Holy Family and Parkdale public. We've got Nicole Cebuano, Sobana Thanablasigam, Carolina Deguzman, Yeshi Lhamo, Ivana Mihalovic, Danielle Silva, Helen Costa, Patricia Dumlao, Lobsang Dolkar, Yangchen Domo, Akira Ali, Seemal Syed and Dave Belanger, their teacher, and Tanya Ricci, their teacher. So welcome all to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have the very special honour to welcome for his first visit to the Ontario Legislature His Holiness Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Sri Swami Narendracharya Maharaj, the esteemed Dharmaguru of the Hindus who is visiting us in the Legislature today. He is joined by Harish Gandhe, Kishor Gore and Jay Prakash, who are my friends from the Hindu Heritage Centre in Streetsville. It is a matter of honour for this Legislature, Swamiji, to welcome you.

Remarks in Hindi.

Please join us in welcoming them.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to welcome today to the Legislature Sonny Allinson from the Canadian Kennel Club, Heather Mack, Frances Coughlin and Elizabeth Sullivan from the Support Hershey's Bill group, and Sarah Dann, who are all here in the Legislature bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning to make presentations to the committee on Bill 16.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. You should know this one by now.

It's my pleasure to welcome Dr. Les Armstrong from Longbow Lake, who is here for the meetings with the Ontario Dental Association.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like the Legislature to welcome Dr. Ivan Hrabowsky from the city of St. Catharines, representing the Ontario Dental Association.

Mr. John Yakubski: I would like to welcome, joining us in the Speaker's gallery no less, Dr. Kevin Roach and Dr. Bruce Harle from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. They're here today with the Ontario Dental Association. Welcome.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to present to the Legislature, sitting in the members' east gallery, a member of the Ontario Dental Association, a great friend of mine, my dentist and an old high school basketball teammate, Peter Hyriniuk.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to welcome to the House today Dr. Arthur Worth, president-elect of the

Ontario Dental Association. Dr. Worth has extensive background with the Kent County Dental Society, has served with the ODA board of governors and general council. He will soon become the 135th president of the ODA, which, by the way, is 145 years old, just six months older than Confederation. An author of several clinical papers and a proud practitioner in rural Ontario, I'm pleased to count Arthur as a friend and a fellow ball-player.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my pleasure to welcome Dr. Rick Caldwell to the House today.

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm really honoured to recognize Dr. John Thompson over in the members' gallery. He's with the Ontario Dental Association, but more importantly than all of that, he's my dentist from Niagara Falls. So thank you very much, John.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my privilege to welcome to the Legislature today, from the great riding of Sarnia–Lambton and the Bluewater Bridge duty-free shop, Tania Lee and Peter Brain, and from the Peace Bridge duty-free shop, Glen Mills and Jim Pierce. They're here today representing the Ontario Duty Free Association, who will be hosting a reception in room 230, and I take this moment to invite all members to join us between 11:30 and 1.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today the family of page Shanice Nazareth. Joining us in the members' gallery are her mother, Annette; her father, Cederic; and her sister, Sherece Nazareth.

M. Gilles Bisson: J'aimerais prendre l'occasion de remercier M. Michel Gravel, qui est un dentiste de Kapuskasing, ici aujourd'hui pour nous parler.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'm glad to introduce—I have my brother Brad Milligan here with us today.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to welcome—although they're not yet in the chamber—the students and teachers from St. Brigid's school in Beaches–East York.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I'd like to welcome to the Ontario Legislature Dr. Diri from the great riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, a member of the Ontario Dental Association.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I regret to inform you that we are well past the time limits established for introductions.

I would take this moment to welcome all of our guests today, and I would ask all of us to join in welcoming all of them to the House today to observe question period.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Acting Premier. Since the election just over six months ago, we have heard from a number of people, including Roger Martin, your hand-picked economist

Don Drummond and even the Ontario Auditor General. All of them have told us one very simple thing: Ontario's corporate handouts aren't working. Your lack of leadership has put us on the path towards a \$30-billion deficit and staring directly in the face of a \$400-billion debt. Will you continue to try to spend your way to prosperity, or will you take control of your government and make serious efforts to reduce the size and cost of government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I was pleased last year when the Auditor General signed off on our budget books and our estimates. I was pleased to appoint Don Drummond. I was pleased to receive his report, with some 362 recommendations. We have acted on all but nine of those recommendations. We have said "no" specifically to nine of them. We did that because we do believe that we need to be continuing to invest in education and health care, full-day learning, smaller class sizes and lower surgical wait times. These are important values, not just for this government but for the people of Ontario.

We've also met the expenditure growth targets that Mr. Drummond has laid out, which the official opposition refuses to acknowledge. In fact, we've been criticized in some circles because, in the first few years, the health number is actually below that forecast by Mr. Drummond.

We've laid out a plan. It's a clear plan to get back to balance that protects the important gains we've made in health and education.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, back to the Acting Premier: Your government has spent billions to help out various hand-picked corporations. Indeed, the current budget shows corporate welfare amounting to over \$3.5 billion. I was recently briefed by Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation officials, and we talked about WindTronics. WindTronics is a company that your government handed \$2.7 million of wasted taxpayers' money to, to open in Windsor. Now Windsor families are realizing the 200-job-loss nightmare of your failed corporate welfare policy.

When will you give up on the fantasy that job creation can be achieved by government spending and put forward a real jobs plan?

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Today in Windsor, 8,000 people will go to work at Chrysler Corp. as a result of this government working with the federal government and with the government of the United States to protect those jobs.

In addition, workers across Ontario that feed General Motors and feed Chrysler Corp. are going to work today with good-paying jobs, greater job security. We're seeing a rebound in the auto sector. It's important that the people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not helpful that when I'm standing, other people continue to talk. And it is also not helpful when the answer being given—I hear

heckling from the same side and also the yelling on the other side.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Those investments were important, and we were happy to partner with the federal Conservative government in spite of the fact that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —and their provincial cousins opposed it. So there's a long track record of success in places like Windsor, in places all over Ontario, where businesses are operating and running today as a result of careful consideration and investment made by the governments of Canada and Ontario. We stand by those decisions. We'll continue to work with every—

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I can tell you, economic recovery will come to Ontario the day Dalton McGuinty loses his job.

Back to the Acting Premier: While it's insulting to Ontario taxpayers to see billions of dollars being wasted by your government, it's more insulting that you're continuing down this path with no plans to reduce corporate welfare and, clearly, no plan to create jobs and grow the economy in Ontario. Your failed \$3.5-billion corporate welfare scheme is just another example of your government's failure to manage the public purse; add that to the money your Liberal government has wasted on eHealth, Ornge and the Mississauga power plant.

When will you stop the waste and stop trying to spend your way out of this jobs-and-debt crisis that you, yourself, created, sir?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I need to respond to this and, at the same time, respect the rules of the House.

The member opposite is trying to have it both ways. He stands in the House today and speaks about corporate welfare, but when he's out in his riding, he staunchly defends giving more money to racetrack owners. That is having it both ways. He says one thing here, something quite different over there, and he's quite consistent with his party.

The leader of their party says we should have adopted every one of Don Drummond's recommendations; no, I think the words were "no cherry-picking." Two minutes later, he rejected the recommendation on subsidies to horse racing.

Sir, you can't have it both ways. You can't stand in here and complain about subsidies to business and then go home to your riding and advocate—

Interjections.

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

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Deputy Premier as well. Over the past week, the Ontario PC caucus has offered strong proof that your budget is nothing

but a weak response to a looming \$30-billion deficit. You, meanwhile, spent your week ignoring our questions, as you spent the past six months ignoring our recommendations. You also ignored the Auditor General who told you that you had to “provide legislators and the public with long-term targets and a strategy for how” you plan “to address the current and projected debt burden.”

I couldn't find that strategy in the budget; could you? And if so, what page is it on?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They said they were voting against the budget before they read it. They are continuing to nominate candidates across Ontario.

They stand in here and say no to business subsidies. They go to their ridings and tell the racetrack owners they're going to keep giving them \$345 million a year. They can't have it both ways.

They tell us to adopt all of Don Drummond's recommendations. Let's look at the ones they've rejected. Mr. Drummond said keep LHINs. We are; they said don't keep them. Mr. Drummond called for our wage freeze; they're against him on that. Mr. Drummond talked about the Niagara casinos; they disagree with him on that. Mr. Drummond said not to subsidize horse racing; they said no to that. Mr. Drummond said to introduce school bus competition; they said no to that.

Mr. Speaker, this party has a consistent, well-thought-out plan. We're working with all Ontarians to build a better future, because Ontario rejected them and their right-wing—

Interjections.

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

Interjection: Another question from talk radio.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: They talk about the radio a lot. You know, when I was on the radio, I could call him what he really is.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There is a way to say things without saying them, and I think the member came close to that, so I'm warning him.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Your responses to our questions, Deputy Premier, over the past week have been pitiful, and you continue to ignore us when we tell you that Ontario needs urgent and immediate action to get our debt under control, but you can't ignore this: RBC said your budget was only “one third of the way there.”

Empty gestures and halfway measures will not get it done, Deputy Premier. Where is the rest of your plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, that member and his party want an unnecessary election that will put at risk hospital expansions in Cambridge and in Burlington, that will undermine our ability to continue to reduce the deficit—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to hear.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: So, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to implement. We will implement a budget that is bringing down the deficit. We will implement a budget

that continues to protect the important gains we've made in health care and education.

They can resort to name-calling, and they can say things in this House that really don't add to the public debate. But I'm confident that the people of Ontario share our objectives; that is, to get back to balance, to build a strong and growing economy, and to protect the gains we've made in education and health care. That's what this government, this party, are all about, and I'm confident the people of Ontario share those objectives.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: Your Premier used to say, “We will make sure the debt goes in one direction only: down. We will not add to the provincial debt.” He used to say, “We will continue to ... pay down the provincial debt.” He used to say, “We need a plan that reduces the debt....”

Now having failed in all of those commitments, you of all people have the audacity to dismiss our right to comment on your budget. You are the Minister of Finance. You are not the king of Ontario. You follow the same parliamentary rules that we do; you do not write them. Sir, you are accountable to the people of Ontario, who we represent, as you do. Now tell them and tell us, where in this budget is your debt reduction plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives chose to walk away from any form of negotiations. They have chosen not to do what the people of Ontario want them to do.

Interjection: Abdicated responsibility.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They have abdicated their responsibility as the official opposition. Instead of sitting down and talking with us and the third party, they're out nominating candidates right across Ontario. Instead of having a thorough debate, they choose to use language more attuned to low-rated radio station programs, Mr. Speaker.

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I reject their ways. I reject their desire to have an election. The people of Ontario rejected them last fall, and if they insist on an election now, I believe the people of Ontario will overwhelmingly reject them in a general election if that's what they try to force.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Since their election in 2003, the Liberal government has imposed a regressive health tax and an unfair HST on Ontario families. Can the Deputy Premier explain, then, the government's concerns about a tax on high-income earners in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would refer the leader of the third party to some work done by Hugh Mackenzie, called Not a Tax Grab After All. We were quite pleased to have the support of people like Mr. Mackenzie, like virtually every major anti-poverty group in this province who said that that was the most progressive tax budget in the history of Ontario. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because we

made it more progressive. We introduced the most generous sales tax credit anywhere in the country. People in the lower-income brackets are paying less in overall taxes. That's not me saying it, I say with respect to the leader of the third party. That's from somebody like Hugh Mackenzie, like people from a whole variety of anti-poverty groups.

That was the right thing to do for low-income Ontarians. In fact, it raised taxes on higher-income people but lowered them for lower-income people. We're proud of it, it's working for this province, and it's creating jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Over eight long years, people have been hit with two regressive, unfair tax hikes. They're finding it a little hard to take, Speaker. Now we have an opportunity to make life a little bit better for them.

The Liberal government hasn't hesitated to hit people with unfair taxes. Why won't they try a fair one, Speaker?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would refer the leader of the third party to a comment that her finance critic made on March 11, 2011, referring to our tax policy. He says, "I mean, the tax burden has gone down on everyone, in spite of what people think. You know, taxes have gone down, literally on all income groups."

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party has come forward with a number of proposals to try to make the budget better from her party's perspective. We welcome those. We're looking at them. The leader, I think, has done so in the hope of keeping this Parliament working, unlike the official opposition, which is nominating candidates and can't wait to get out and campaign. Lord only knows why, because they'll be handed their heads if they do it.

Mr. Speaker, we stand by our budget choices, and I do look forward to dialoguing further over the next few days with the third party to try and achieve a better budget for all Ontarians.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, here's what people have seen: first, a regressive health tax that hit middle-income households the hardest; and then they imposed an unfair HST that strained family budgets even further, all the while handing out billions and billions in tax giveaways to Ontario's richest corporations.

Now, this government has made it clear that they're happy to raise taxes on everyday people. Why are they then afraid to raise taxes on the super rich?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that we are able to find common ground with the third party in some areas. I look forward to continuing the dialogue as we move forward towards the vote next Tuesday.

I think the member needs to remember that, in fact, there was more than \$12 billion of tax relief as part of the 2009 budget that went to all Ontarians, particularly Ontarians of lower and more modest incomes, Mr. Speaker. I have to refer her back to the work by Hugh Mackenzie,

where he said that it was not a tax grab after all, that in fact it was very positive.

I'd also remind her that her NDP compatriots in Nova Scotia raised their HST by two points, and I remind the member opposite that her predecessor wrote to us and asked us to raise the provincial sales tax. We don't think that's the right thing to do.

We believe you've brought forward some constructive proposals to make the budget fair, and I look forward to working with her and her party as we move forward.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In putting my next question to the Deputy Premier, I'll remind him that the Nova Scotia NDP took the HST off home heating, and they just, as a matter of fact, started reducing the HST costs on their people because they know it's an unfair tax.

Rob from Campbellville said this about the budget, though: "I could find nothing good for regular people that go to work every day to keep a roof over their head and food on the table."

The Liberal government has not hesitated to hit everyday families with unfair taxes. Why are they unwilling to make this budget a little more fair?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would remind the member opposite that the NDP government of Manitoba just raised the tax on gas yesterday. I think it's important to keep these things in mind, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the leader of the third party and the Premier pointed out yesterday—again, Mr. Speaker, I want to respect the Chair—the dichotomy of view in the NDP policy. On the one hand, she calls for a tax increase on the wealthiest. On the other hand, she proposes a big tax cut. Frankly, the leader should know that the people who will benefit the most from that are the people with the biggest houses, the most expensive to heat, the ones with pools—all of that. We need consistency in our tax policy.

Unlike the NDP—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek will come to order

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —we don't want to raise the HST. Unlike the NDP in Manitoba, we don't want to raise fuel taxes. We believe we've found the right ground here. The leader of the third party has brought forward some constructive ideas, and I look forward over the course of the next days to continue—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Skye from Kenmore writes: "I do not see shared responsibility in this budget. The rich should be contributing far more, instead of penalizing the middle- and lower-income citizens."

The Liberal government has asked people to sacrifice in this province again and again and again. As a result, they're falling further and further and further behind. What do they now say, the Liberal government, to people who don't see the shared responsibility in this budget,

who don't see it at all, Speaker, as New Democrats don't see it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member opposite about a number of the undertakings we have worked together on; first of all, the corporate tax freeze. That was a reasonable response put forward by the New Democratic caucus, and we were pleased to work on that.

Infrastructure: \$35 billion over the next three years, which will create or sustain more than 100,000 jobs. I know the New Democrats support that.

The 30%-off-tuition credit: Over 300,000 students are eligible. We were pleased to work on that together. That helps average families.

We're protecting 10,000 education jobs through full-day kindergarten and small class sizes. I know the leader of the third party shares our values in that area.

The Ontario child benefit: We're continuing forward with it, Mr. Speaker—the largest tax cut for families of modest incomes in Ontario's history.

I look forward to continuing to deal with the leader's ideas, her caucus's ideas, her party's ideas as we move towards the vote next Tuesday.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people are telling us that this budget simply is not balanced. It hits everyday families the hardest, while those who can most afford it get off scot-free.

Zak from Oakville writes that there is “no plan for jobs, [or] families.”

The Liberal government has not hesitated to hit Ontario families with unfair taxes. Why aren't they willing to make this budget a little more fair?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the budget is fair. I've had an opportunity to go over a number of the recommendations that are already in the budget that I know the NDP support.

I'd remind her that today Chris from London announced that we're going to merge the IESO and the OPA. I'll remind her that Kathleen from Toronto has done more to improve the relationship with municipalities than anyone else. Dalton from Ottawa has worked very hard on an anti-poverty agenda for many years.

Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to work with the third party. I hope we can resolve some of the challenges. I know you don't want an election like the Conservatives. You've been responsible in this and progressive. We're pleased to work with you and hopefully to resolve some of these challenges.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I suspect that, while tongue-in-cheek, the member does know that we use, in this House, all members' ridings.

It is now time for the next question.

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AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Finance. This morning in the public accounts committee,

it was confirmed that the entire government—certainly the Ministry of Finance—was fully briefed before Ornge floated a \$275-million bond offer. It was also confirmed that that debt, which was implied to be guaranteed by the government of Ontario, is, according to the secretary of cabinet, not really the responsibility of the government.

Given the scandal at Ornge, I'd like to know from the Minister of Finance, what does he have to say to those bondholders as to who will secure the debt that they hold?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would remind the member opposite of the entire testimony that was given today. Ornge was consolidated into the financial statements of the province starting in 2007-08. Like other senior Canadian governments, Ontario's consolidated financial statements are prepared in accordance with the accounting standards independently established by the Public Sector Accounting Board. The consolidation of financial information has no bearing on the roles and responsibilities of an agency or organization, its board of directors or responsible ministry for program management.

As Ornge is not a provincial crown agent, the province of Ontario did not guarantee the bond issue, nor was the government's approval of the financing required. That was the testimony. It's consistent with public accounting. It's consistent with the treatment of debt on provincial statements, not only here but across Canada and other jurisdictions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Now we know the minister can read, but we also know that he doesn't understand the question. I made it very clear, Speaker, that what we heard today from the secretary of cabinet was that in his opinion, the government of Ontario is not responsible for that debt.

My question to the minister is, what does he say to the holders of those bonds, \$275 million worth? Given the scandal at Ornge, given the bankruptcy of most of those companies, who will stand good to pay the \$275 million, and who will pay the interest on those bonds? Will the minister tell us who will stand behind that debt?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the secretary of cabinet was entirely correct. The government did not back up the bonds, and bondholders purchased them with that full knowledge and disclosure. That's the way it is.

What we haven't talked a lot about on this is a chap named Kelly Mitchell. Let me tell you a little bit about Kelly Mitchell. He is a Progressive Conservative Party stalwart. He was paid almost \$400,000 by Ornge to lobby and schmooze the PC Party for Ornge and its profits. At the same time, he was on the board of directors for Ornge and five for-profit companies, the same companies that paid Chris Mazza \$1.4 million. Kelly Mitchell was also a top fundraiser and close adviser to Mr. Hudak's leadership campaign. His company donated \$17,000 to the party, 15 candidates, and he personally donated \$7,500. We'll be exploring those—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister, take your seat. A reminder to all members: When I stand, you sit down.

New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre adjoint. Former Liberal Party of Canada president and Ornge lawyer and financier Mr. Alfred Apps said that the government was fully briefed every step of the way in the development of the web of shell companies at Ornge. He even threw in a chat with the Minister of Finance over cocktails about Ornge practices. He also said that although the government was fully briefed, they never raised a single objection. Is any of that true?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Speaker, I followed the testimony given by a number of individuals today. First of all, the secretary of cabinet, who was my deputy minister at the time, informed the committee that at no time had I been briefed on Ornge formally or informally by him and the officials in the ministry.

I can confirm with you that, yes, I think Mr. Apps's testimony is correct: I never met with him; I was never lobbied by him. We did travel in similar social circles, and he did raise the issue of those bonds with me in informal conversations, just like he pointed out that Guy Giorno was very involved through a contract. In fact, I haven't reviewed all the testimony but I will confirm what Mr. Apps said and I can also confirm what the Deputy Minister of Finance at the time said, that the elected officials were never briefed by their department on these issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, Alfred Apps claims that the ministry—actually, ministries, and that went on for the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care and Finance, and even the Premier's office—had been fully briefed every step of the way about the corporate structure, but they only started to react to this in December 2011. How can you explain the disconnect? How can you explain that Mr. Apps himself said that he attended the briefing, that the ministry was fully briefed every step of the way but that only in December 2011 did it become unacceptable, when you knew all along?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Minister of Health moved quickly, responsibly and in a fashion that was open and transparent, in an appropriate time frame, as was identified at the time. We have legislation before this House which will help us prevent this sort of thing from ever happening again. We have this before committee. The OPP are investigating this. The auditor had a good look at this. And so I'm confident that the challenges associated with this file have been well handled by the Minister of Health and by this government. Our challenge now is to move forward and ensure that we continue to build the best and strongest health care system that this province can offer.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The operating funds that our government provides to colleges and universities help ensure that post-secondary education stays accessible, affordable and of top quality. It's very important to note that last month here in our great province of Ontario we achieved the highest enrolment rate among secondary students in a decade. This shows we are well on our way to ensuring 70% of all Ontarians will have a post-secondary education. By introducing the 30%-off-tuition grant program, our government shows its leadership to students and families, ensuring that all Ontarians are able to transition from the best schools in the world to post-secondary education. Minister, how have you ensured that Ontarians will have access to publicly funded post-secondary institutions across the province?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: As you know, Premier McGuinty has made a priority of higher education and public education for a very, very good reason: 70% of all jobs right now in Ontario require apprenticeships, trades, colleges or universities. Our universities and colleges and our trades are doing an excellent job advancing that.

Beyond the simple creation of a sufficiently skilled workforce, we also know that we are second only to California in direct foreign investment. We also know that one of the biggest determinants of where international capital goes is to where the highest-skilled workforces are. So those hard-working young Ontarians who are going to university and colleges now, 210,000 more than eight years ago, are also not only helping their own future, they're one of the largest reasons that we are one of the world leaders in attracting foreign capital investment and generating wealth.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Minister. As we all know, the budget is about choices. That's why our finance minister listened to Ontarians and the choices that Ontarians make. I am proud that our government has included indexing of the tuition reduction plan, unlike the PCs, who are going to reject that in our budget. It's most unfortunate. My constituents in Pickering-Scarborough East keep telling me they don't want an unnecessary and expensive election. They want us to put our partisan issues aside and work together to create the jobs, ensure we have the right education.

Minister, how specifically will the government show commitment to post-secondary education through the 2010 budget and ensure we continue to build on the great investments we've made since 2003?

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Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member for Pickering-Scarborough East. There is a very high collaborative relationship between my ministry, Minister Duguid in Economic Development and Innovation and the Ministry of Finance.

The investments that we're making are really extraordinary. Brock University, since we were elected, has

seen a 69% increase in its budget. Nipissing University in the opposition has seen a 92% increase in its budget. UOIT, also in an opposition constituency, has seen a 368% increase in its budget.

While I was supposed to be meeting with my opposition critic to discuss this budget and how we could work, he thought it was more important to be here trying to ring bells. But he should know that Waterloo University and Wilfrid Laurier University, in his part of Ontario, have seen over a 75% increase—

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

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Finance: I am asking this question because I believe the financial markets will be very interested to know what the finance minister of the province of Ontario has to say about a \$275-million bond offering that is out there that has been taken up by investors. Now we're told that the organization behind that bond offering, namely Ornge, is no longer the entity that it was when that offering was made.

We hear the finance minister tell us that the government of Ontario is not responsible. The organization behind that is the air ambulance service of Ontario. Will the province of Ontario allow Ornge to default on that offering?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm glad that the member raises issues that came up in committee, because we have some issues we'd like to raise in committee.

Will that member and his party agree to have Kelly Mitchell come before the committee? We are given to understand that this person, who was a member of the board of Ornge, made \$17,000 in donations. He made a donation to the leader of your party, the members for Simcoe North, Whitby-Oshawa, Leeds-Grenville, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, and Thornhill. Those were all contributions. Did he inform any of your members? Did he talk to your members about these issues at all?

So, I would ask the member—we're interested to know—will you agree, here and now today, to bring Mr. Mitchell before the committee so we can understand the full extent of the relationship of your—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: The government House leader will inform the Minister of Finance that anyone who is called by the committee will show up, and if not, we'll issue a Speaker's warrant.

But I want to go back to the question I asked the minister that the financial markets are very interested to hear. Will the Minister of Finance of the province of Ontario allow that \$275-million bond offering to default? Will he stand up and tell us whether, notwithstanding what the agreement said, the government of Ontario will stand behind that debt?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member didn't answer the question. Will they agree to bring Kelly Mitchell before the committee? They're stonewalling in this House in front of the cameras. They're playing the same game they've been playing right from the beginning with this.

It's a simple, simple question, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Will they call Mr. Mitchell to appear before the committee? I remind the member that Mr. Mitchell was paid almost \$400,000 to lobby and schmooze you and your party on behalf of Ornge. Will you or will you not agree to call him, or will you continue to stonewall and play silly political games instead of working with us to get at the real truth?

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Minister of Energy: This morning, you announced that the Ontario Power Authority and the Independent Electricity System Operator will be merged, but, Minister, privatization stays. Privatizations that followed the disastrous 2002 deregulation of the electricity system have led to skyrocketing rates. Will the minister admit that ongoing privatization of local utilities will wipe out any savings that will come from this merger?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I was pleased this morning to have announced the intention to merge and consolidate the Ontario Power Authority and the Independent Electricity System Operator, a consolidation that the NDP had specifically asked us to consider. We have common ground on this issue.

For months, we've been making announcements in this sector about finding ways for families and businesses to get their electricity supplied at lower administrative cost. We're going to keep doing that.

What we did with the local distribution centre consolidation panel is simply set up an advisory panel to give us some insight into whether those families and businesses would benefit from any form of consolidation. We look forward to receiving their advice in due course.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, no one will disagree that getting rid of some high-paid unneeded executives and CEOs is a good thing. But you know that that panel you've set up is an open door to privatization of local utilities, and you know the impact it will have on the cost of electricity. Will you admit that we would be far better served for you to consolidate all four agencies and stop the privatization initiative?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Over here, we're on the side of families and businesses. Families and businesses want us to deliver power as effectively as possible and at as little cost as possible. So we set up this panel with Mr. Elston, Mr. Laughren and Mr. McFadden to take a look at the 78 distribution companies we have around the province and answer a simple question: Can it be done

more effectively for less, and do those families and businesses benefit?

I think we should find some common ground with the NDP on this: That it is about families; it's about making sure families can better manage their budgets; it's about finding savings wherever we can. I hope, in the months to come, we'll find more common ground in supporting families, as we have in the budget of the province of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Energy as well. Minister, many of my constituents asked me if more could be done to find efficiencies within our electricity sector. I know that both Hydro One and OPG have been working hard to find efficiencies from within and reduce costs for ratepayers while at the same time ensuring that Ontario families have a strong, reliable and modern electricity system. I know that my constituents appreciate the hard work of these agencies to better serve them on a daily basis. Minister, can you please tell us what is being done to find efficiencies within our electricity system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Do you know what? It's a really important question from the member for Ottawa-Orléans because he hears from families and businesses in his riding, as I do in my riding; we all do. They want the most effective system at the least administrative cost.

So we've taken a number of steps. The major agencies—Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One—have launched a cost reduction exercise. They're already at half a billion dollars, and they're looking for more.

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When we launched the green energy review, we saw that the prices paid for renewable energy—extremely important—are going down. Last Friday we launched an international benchmarking exercise which will help us in our major agencies, like Hydro One and OPG, further reduce costs. We've launched a review of the local distribution companies to see whether we can get the power delivered for less. Today we announced another step, the consolidation of two agencies.

It's all about delivering it for as little as possible to families and businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for that excellent response.

I know that my constituents will be pleased to hear that the merger between the Ontario Power Authority and the Independent Electricity System Operator—

Interjections.

Mr. Phil McNeely: It's strange; every time you talk about energy or conservation or the environment, that group across starts to yell.

We want a more efficient organization that will save families and businesses money. Minister, I know that the Independent Electricity System Operator plays a vital role in managing the day-to-day operation of the electri-

city system and the Ontario Power Authority is responsible for the long-term planning of our electricity supply, as well as ensuring that clean energy comes online. Both of these organizations ensure that Ontario families have a clean and reliable supply of electricity that they can count on tomorrow and into the future.

Minister, how will the day-to-day operations continue during this process to ensure the vital functions of our electricity systems are not compromised?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: That's a good point, because the Ontario Power Authority and the Independent Electricity Supply Operator perform extremely important functions every single day. They're both involved in planning. In fact, they are our two largest planning agencies. So bringing them together, we want to not only maintain but build on their planning expertise. That will be better for today and tomorrow.

The IESO manages the market. We're going to make sure that that continues, because that's a very important and independent function. The Ontario Power Authority manages our conservation programs. We've taken great steps, very involved across the province, in ensuring that we only use the power that we need. Those contracts will continue. The Ontario Power Authority also manages the tens of thousands of contracts, which are really ways that families and businesses in the province participate in clean, green renewable energy. Important work—it will continue, just at less cost for the people of this province.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Back to the Minister of Finance: I want to bring to the minister's attention just how serious this question is and the fact that this is not about playing politics in a sandbox. This is about—a very serious question to the Minister of Finance—\$275 million of debt that was used by Ontario's air ambulance service to buy a fleet of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft and a number of other assets. The minister is saying that the government of Ontario is not responsible for that debt. They have put into bankruptcy companies that comprise most of that Ornge organization. There is one organization left, and that is the organization supplying the air ambulance service.

My question to the minister is this: Will the government of Ontario guarantee the interest payments and the principal of that \$275-million bond offering?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I repeat for the member what I said right at the very beginning: The government of Ontario will honour its commitments. There would have been a prospectus, a syndicate; all these things would have been very clearly disclosed as to whose obligations are what. So, until he's read those—which I'm quite certain he hasn't, and if he has, I'd like him to share with me the sections that say that Ontario has guaranteed them—we'll look forward to continuing to work on getting this thing back in order and continuing at the committee hearing.

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: And that's why we want to hear from Kelly Mitchell.

You know, we do \$35 billion to \$40 billion a year in bond issues, Mr. Speaker. They continue to sell out around the world. They continue to be repaid according to schedule. In fact, indeed, we've been paying them back ahead of schedule.

The government of Ontario will honour all its undertakings, its commitments. I'd be curious to hear what the member's views on the prospectus are and on the syndicate—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to assure the Minister of Finance that I did read the prospectus. If he reads it, he will also see that the government of Ontario is very prominent throughout that entire offering. There is an implied guarantee by the province of Ontario, and now what I want to know is, will the government of Ontario stand behind that? And by the way, the minister introduces a very interesting scenario, because through Infrastructure Ontario there are many, many more offerings very similar to this that offer the same implied guarantee. Yet what we want to know is, is the government of Ontario in fact guaranteeing those bond offerings? Will the minister at least answer that question once and for all?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I won't use the same kind of language that he has, but the word "implied" is very interesting. Obviously, he has read it and he knows what the undertakings are, and it's a shame he chose to play politics before he revealed that in the House.

I should say that Ornge is still responsible for the bonds, and yes, Ornge still has a very good credit rating.

Quit playing games. Call Kelly Mitchell. Let's work together to fix this once and for all.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Ms. Najla Mady of Hamilton contacted my office recently. She is 73 years old and struggling to pay the bills. She is at high risk for a broken hip and takes injections of Prolia for bone strengthening. These injections cost her almost \$400. She said she was counting on a lump-sum income tax refund to pay for her July 3 injection but was shocked to discover that she would not be receiving it because of a change that was made without notice to anyone at all, and without consulting those who are the most impacted. Can the minister explain how he is going to help people like Ms. Mady?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I want to thank the member for his question. In fact, the member, I believe, either has introduced or is about to introduce a private member's bill. We intend to give people choice. We did consult in advance. There were, however—the member is right—a number of people who did not like the way we set things up. I've indicated that we'll change that. I also indicated to the member that I'm quite prepared to work with him

based on his private member's bill. I thank him for raising this case with us, and I'll make sure I follow up with finance and health officials to see if we can be of some assistance to your constituent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I thank the minister for his considerations, but the bill that he speaks of was tabled a month ago. We understand that the minister and the ministry said that if the bill was tabled, efforts would be made to ensure quick passage, because the minister at that time agreed that changes were unfair. But a month has gone by and nothing has happened.

My question: What action has the minister taken to date to ensure that people will have the choice in how they receive their tax refunds, and when can we expect this bill or something similar to this bill to be passed?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I appreciate the member's inquiry. Unfortunately, the official opposition has been ringing the bells in here, and we can't get things to the floor of the House—blocking important legislative initiatives like that.

I give the member opposite my undertaking to continue to work with you. I do want to thank you for your work on this—a number of my colleagues as well—and I look forward to moving as quickly as we can on this with you.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Since the budget, like others, I've been out in my riding speaking to constituents. During these tough economic times, many were concerned that our government would be making cuts that would hurt them, that would hurt our families, especially those that need our help the most, like the previous government, who cut social assistance rates by over 22%. Through you, Speaker, to the minister, can you please tell the House how this year's budget, Strong Action, impacts social programs for people in my riding?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for the question, and she's right: In the recent budget, we had to make some tough decisions. But to reiterate what both the Premier and Minister of Finance have said often, we focused on three key areas: education, health care and the other one, the area of social services. Unlike the party opposite, Mr. Speaker, we did not dramatically slash rates for those on ODSP or Ontario Works. In fact, over the life of this government, we've seen seven increases to those rates, and they were maintained in the recent budget.

1130

I'd also point out, Mr. Speaker, that moving forward, when you look at what's called the children and social services cluster in the budget, it's actually going to increase by an average of 2.7% over the next three years. In fact, my ministry will be increasing by 3.7%.

We recognize the needs of those who are marginalized, the less fortunate in our society, and we're going to continue to identify that area as a special priority for this government as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Minister. I'm pleased to hear that we won't be punishing some of the province's most vulnerable with cuts to social assistance rates. I also know that the social assistance system is currently being examined by the social assistance review commission, so I look forward to seeing their report in June, as I was involved with some of those meetings in our community.

I was also pleased to see that this year's budget allocated an additional \$25 million for residential placements for adults with a developmental disability. Please explain how this investment will help those in need of service across the province.

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for the question, and I'm pleased that she referenced the social assistance review, which is undertaking one of the most dramatic examinations of our social assistance system in decades. It's being led by Frances Lankin, a former member of this Legislature, as well as Dr. Munir Sheikh, the former head of StatsCan.

As well as the social assistance side of the ledger, my ministry of course also deals with those with developmental disabilities. As the member pointed out, our most recent budget committed an additional \$25 million for people with a developmental disability in urgent need of residential services. This additional funding is based on anticipated need for residential placements for our clients, some whom live with aging parents who can no longer care for their adult children at home. This funding and the placements it creates will also help support the ongoing transformation of the developmental services sector as we continue to move away from the old institutional model to one that's based more on community living.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Not only does the government not know or understand how to prepare a proper budget to deal with the debt crisis and the jobs crisis that we have in the province of Ontario, but the government is also confused about whether they authorized robocalls be placed in my riding, in the riding of Burlington and other ridings across the province of Ontario.

In the Legislature, the finance minister seemed very familiar with the content of those robocalls, but in the scrums outside this place, he wouldn't commit to having knowledge about them. So since the finance minister is out of the loop on this question, maybe I'm going to ask the Deputy Premier if he was aware of these robocalls and if the Liberal Party actually authorized them.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: When I became aware of them, Mr. Speaker—I'm glad they went out, because they told the people of Cambridge that he's voting against their hospital expansion. They told the people of Cambridge that he wants an election. The people of Cambridge want their hospital, they want that expansion; the people of Cambridge do not want an election.

They know that he's scheduled his nomination meeting, Mr. Speaker. Instead of working with us to pass a budget that will build the hospital, the hospital expansion, he chooses to schedule a nomination meeting.

So yes, we're going to do phone calls, we're going to knock on doors, we're going to go into Cambridge and we're going to tell the people of Cambridge that that member, his leader and his party want to kill the hospital expansion in Cambridge. Someone has to stand up for Cambridge. It's unfortunate their local member won't.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: It's quite clear that in one person-ally the finance minister really is going to be confused.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to hear your own member's question, and that's it—here too.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oxford, come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: The April 13 edition of the Windsor Star says that the finance minister is looking for a campaign manager. Who's gearing up for an election, Minister?

As a result of the Liberal leader's authorization and actions, Mr. Speaker, I have sent an official complaint to Elections Ontario to investigate the robocalls and the potential illegality of those calls. I am encouraging all citizens, like Tony Malvar, to do the same thing in Cambridge.

It is clear that the government has so much contempt for the people of Ontario that they have refused to accept the results of the last election and their minority status by governing like they were a majority.

They want to go back to the polls. They're gunning for it. They're putting Liberal ads on the radio. They're putting them in ads—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member did not impress me.

Answer.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm less concerned about cheap politics than getting that hospital in Cambridge done, and I want to get the hospital in Burlington done next. At least that member hasn't scheduled her nomination, that I'm aware of.

I would urge the member, work with us. Do what the third party is doing. Instead of scheduling nominations, work on your hospital. That's what you were elected to do.

This party, this government will stand up for the people of Cambridge. Why won't you, sir? You're not representing your constituents. Let's make it work. Let's make it work together to provide the best health care possible for the people of Cambridge and the Cambridge region.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

New question. The member from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am disappointed in the fact that you know I'm standing and there continues to be heckling.

New question.

CURRICULUM

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Education. The Bealart program in London has been providing high school students with an excellent art education for almost 100 years, but access to this program, which is being provided to students who have completed their grade 12 requirements, is being threatened by the McGuinty government's plan to charge fees for fifth-year credits. Over 3,000 people have signed a petition. Why won't this government listen to the people and stop permitting the Bealart program to be in jeopardy?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me be absolutely clear that, unlike Don Drummond's recommendation to charge students for credits, we will not charge any Ontario student for their credits.

Let me also be absolutely clear that although Ontario moved to eliminate the fifth year of high school more than a decade ago, we continue to see 13% of our cohort continue in that fifth year.

We want to work with our partners in education, work with our school boards, our guidance counsellors, our parents and our students to plan a successful journey through high school for our students so that they complete it and graduate in four years.

We will work with our partners. This is about more students graduating.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Charging fees for fifth-year credits will threaten the viability of a renowned educational program like Bealart—and hitting families with costs they can't afford. Why is the McGuinty government willing to deny Ontario families access to the public education they need to succeed?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'll repeat again, because I think my friend opposite was not listening: We will not charge students to take their courses.

What we are doing is working with our partners. The students should work with their board. The work that we're doing in the province to ensure that more of our students graduate and have a successful future is about ensuring that we work with them and continue to see success.

Students like this and programs like this are not meant to be impacted by this initiative.

We look to continue to work with our partners across the province to ensure that more students, not less, graduate.

VISITORS

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to again invite all the members to room 230 for the reception from the Ontario duty-free people.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to welcome to the Legislature Dr. Vipin Mithia. He's a friend, a supporter and has been a dentist in Mississauga for the last 22 years. I want to extend to him a very warm welcome.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to recognize a number of people from my riding: Ananya Majumder, Chandras Swargam, Indra Ali, Asgar Ali, Phillip Niedzielski, Haruko Cornish, Govind Kantawalla and Ramila Kantawalla.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'd like to warmly welcome the president of the Ontario Dental Association, Dr. Harry Höediono, who's from the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome guests from my riding of Durham. They're members of the Central East Local Health Integration Network: Wayne Gladstone, the chair; Deborah Hammons, the chief executive officer; James Meloche, senior director of systems; Paul Barker, senior director of finance; Katie Cronin-Wood, communications; and Karen O'Brien, a very good friend, who's the communications coordinator. They gave us a briefing on the Central East LHIN action plan.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome Dr. Ron Yim, from Burlington. He sits on the board of directors for the Ontario Dental Association and is part of the zero tolerance task force.

I'd also like to welcome Dr. Larry Pedlar. He's on my board as well, here today from Burlington.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Merci, monsieur le Président, de m'accorder quelques secondes. Le D^f St-Aubin, un dentiste de Sudbury, a pris le temps de descendre pour venir nous voir ici à Queen's Park. Je voudrais lui souhaiter la bienvenue.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Dr. Don Friedlander, from Ottawa, and Dr. Khaled Hashem, who is also visiting from Ottawa. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Absolutely none of these were points of order, but we're glad our guests are here.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1141 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: Today I'd like to introduce here at Queen's Park for the Ontario Dental Association day—they're also here for the presentation of a bill that I'm going to have in a few minutes. I'd like to welcome ODA president Harry Höediono; board members Dr. Ron Yim, Dr. Victor Kutcher, Dr. Raffy Chouljian; dentists Dr.

Peter Fendrich and Dr. Stephen Abrams; ODA executive director Tom Magyarody; and Frank Bevilacqua, director of professional, government and component society affairs; as well, past president Dr. Lynn Tomkins. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Dr. Wendy Low from Orléans, a dentist. I hope that you enjoy your day here at the Legislature.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce a friend of mine from my constituency and a great help to my campaign last October, John Nater.

Ms. Soo Wong: I, too, want to recognize our health partners from the ODA, but I want to make a mention of Dr. Raffy and his work with the Brush-a-mania program. As a great Rotarian, he has been giving and leading the charge on Brush-a-mania province-wide every March.

Mr. Steve Clark: They're not in the chamber, but I know members enjoyed their products over the lunch hour from the Ontario Duty Free Association. From my riding of Leeds-Grenville and the Johnstown Duty Free Shop and the 1,000 Islands Duty Free, we had Heather Howard, Carl Donovan, Brian Allen, Jeff Butler and Andrew Butler. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to rise to welcome Willa, Katie and Glynnis from City View alternative school, grade 7 students. They're here helping us on a campaign to electrify the train in our neighbourhood.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I want to introduce Julie Woodyer, campaign director for Zoocheck Canada. She is here in the members' gallery representing thousands of Ontario residents who support my private member's bill which I'll introduce later on today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ARBITRATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for members' statements. The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Addington.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm going to get some cue cards, Speaker, if you don't mind, next time, and we'll have the four of them up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's the longest string of names for a riding, but the member may proceed.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. In a few moments I will be tabling a private member's bill entitled the Trust in Arbitration Act. For several years now we Conservatives, along with countless others, have told this Liberal government that Ontario's arbitration system needs to be fixed for the broader public service, or, in light of our recent and poor economic performance, Ontario's broader public hindrance. These requests go unheeded and ignored. The McGuinty government

continues to hide behind its broken arbitration system and all its flaws while doling out exorbitant raises to Ontario's broader public hindrance. They have refused time and time again to amend the dispute resolution mechanism. They refuse to include clauses that reflect the employer's ability to pay.

The Trust in Arbitration Act will provide real action to fix Ontario's broken arbitration system, action the Liberals' own hand-picked economist, Don Drummond, recommended, yet they conveniently ignored it.

This bill will establish an independent commission of arbitrators who must abide by the legislative mandate, and not treat it solely as a guideline. We Conservatives have a clear, concise plan to rein in government over-spending. Clearly the government is out of ideas. However, they're free to use ours any time.

BANKING FEES

Ms. Cindy Forster: A constituent contacted my Welland office recently to raise an issue that seems to be escalating out of control, and that is banking fees. Banks may be federally regulated, but they are answerable to their customers.

Lucy Labenski is a retired TD Canada Trust employee and not happy with her former employer at all. She recently received a letter from TD indicating that the rates for renting a safety deposit box are going up 40%, a lost key fee is increasing by 1,000% and a drilling fee is going up 96%. I guess their fourth-quarter profit, reported in November, of \$1.7 billion, or a 60% increase over the previous year, is not enough.

Lucy knows well that the maintenance on these boxes is very low. The lost keys and drilling are rare events. They want \$50 to replace a lost key. Gaston Godbout of Avenue Locksmith in Welland says his replacement charge to TD Canada Trust is five bucks.

Canada's five big banks made a record combined profit of \$22.4 billion last year and still feel the need to nickel-and-dime their customers with fees for everything. Lucy says these are a blatant money grab.

It would be nice if the government could ensure consumer protection from these escalating bank fees, but giving them corporate tax breaks seems to be a priority for the McGuinty government.

TABLE HOCKEY

Mr. Bob Delaney: In the early 1970s, I was one of the grandfathers of organized table hockey, along with organizers Rick Sorci in Chicago, Sidney Stutz in Detroit and Bob Stampleman in New York. We established and ran the World Table Hockey Association.

Table hockey went into hibernation with the advent of video games in the 1980s. Recently, we're seeing a North American revival of table hockey, and it's my pleasure today to congratulate the organizers of the recently held Canadian Table Hockey Championships, which took place at the Ricoh Coliseum in Toronto.

I'd like to recognize the hard work of David Kraehling of Mississauga, Mark Sokolski of Petawawa and Sid Kloosterman of Peterborough, who have once again brought together the table hockey fraternity and organized table hockey tournaments.

Sid drives to every tournament, does the website and keeps track of statistics. Mark has developed a tournament model and partnered with Big Brothers, Big Sisters, on whose behalf the tournament raised money. David handles promotion and player relations.

I saw some familiar faces from the 1970s there as well, and I say a special hello to old friends Ron Marsik of Chicago, Lou Marinoff of New York and Mike Pope of Toronto. Welcome back and welcome home, table hockey.

AWARDS IN MILTON

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm very pleased to rise today and talk about the Milton Chamber of Commerce Awards.

Businesses and residents of Milton add vibrancy, uniqueness and prosperity to our town of Milton. On April 13, the Milton Chamber of Commerce acknowledged the work of some of Milton's outstanding businesses and citizens. Since 1981, the chamber's annual community awards gala has celebrated exceptional citizens of Milton, acknowledging their contributions to the town.

I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the following people and businesses who were presented with awards this year.

Brad Clements received the Lifetime Achievement Award, and given the time and effort that he has put into so many community events around town, a very well-deserved award.

Wendy Schau received the Citizen of the Year Award. Of course, Wendy was a former councillor, a community activist, and she's worked on a tremendous number of projects in the town of Milton.

Destination Campbellville Community Association-Campbellville Pond Park received the Citizen Improvement Award. Again, this is a very active association which works on a tremendous number of projects around the town.

Joyce Hagevik received the Volunteer of the Year Award. Unfortunately, Joyce received this posthumously. She's somebody who will be sadly missed in the town of Milton.

MinMaxx Realty received the Business of the Year Award for businesses with 99 employees and less. I think it speaks well of any business that wins an award. It speaks to their integrity, it speaks to their hard work and it speaks to the service that they give to their customers.

Mattamy Homes received the Business of the Year Award for businesses of 100 employees or more, again speaking to integrity and service.

Lesley Mansfield from Prosperity ONE Community Banking and Financial Services received the Business Person of the Year Award.

Thank you all for making Milton the prosperous kind of community that it is.

1510

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Two weeks ago, this government announced that it will be closing tourist information centres in the border communities of Fort Frances, Rainy River and Kenora, despite our region's unique role in importing hundreds of millions of dollars into our economy from other provinces and the United States.

The minister says that this decision will allow the province to focus on online marketing and travel apps for phones. The minister ignores the fact that needed infrastructure is not in place in our region. Many communities still rely on dial-up technology, while much of the region is a dead zone for cellular technology, rendering these apps useless.

The minister says that the numbers show a reduction in visits to the centres, yet his department has been delaying the release of these numbers, citing the need to collect the data as the reason. This begs the question: How can the minister make a decision of this magnitude without knowing the numbers? Through other channels, we have obtained some of the numbers, and they contradict what the minister is saying.

Since the announcement, my office has collected thousands of signatures from around the riding and from other regions across the north, including as far away as Sault Ste. Marie. I have been presenting them daily and will continue to do so, and they continue to pour in.

Speaker, our tourism industry has thrived despite poor marketing decisions made by this ministry in southern Ontario. Once again, we see a decision made by bureaucrats who simply do not understand our region or its needs. This decision needs to be reversed.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Mr. Joe Dickson: This past Friday, the sparks were flying at my Ajax-Pickering constituency office. My wife and I were part of an electrifying Volt presentation by our good friends Jason Easton and Phillip Petsinis from General Motors. The Volt is a lithium-ion battery-powered electric-drive vehicle with a range of 40 to 80 kilometres and an engine generator providing up to 500 additional kilometres. Chevrolet put the pedal to the metal and started shipping the Volt to customers last September, and it is currently available at some dealers in Durham region.

I'm glad to see that our government is supporting the electric car. The province is offering incentives to encourage Ontarians to purchase plug-in cars. Rebates starting at \$5,000 and going up to \$8,500 have been available to those who purchased hybrid and battery electric vehicles after July 1, 2010, and green licence plates are now available to drivers of such electric vehicles to use carpool lanes, even if there's only one person in the vehicle.

The province's vision is to have one out of 20 cars in Ontario electrically powered by 2020. For every 10,000 electric vehicles on the road, it is estimated that there will be 40,000 tonnes less of CO₂ polluting the air annually, which is like taking 8,500 gasoline-fuelled cars off the road.

In light of Earth Day on April 22, Ajax Environmental Affairs Week and the town of Ajax green days, I welcome the Chevrolet Volt, and I certainly welcome its positive effect on our green energy economy and the air we breathe, thanks to the province of Ontario's support.

HOCKEY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm proud to say that Huron–Bruce is rich in hockey talent, including 1972 summit series hero Paul Henderson, Stanley Cup winner Boyd Devereaux and Carolina Hurricanes goaltender Justin Peters. There are many other provincial champion high school, OMHA, and ladies' teams as well.

This past weekend marked the provincial ladies' championships in Toronto, and once again in the finals, two teams from Huron–Bruce squared off in the Bantam B championship game: South Huron and Walkerton. Having made that same trip many times before with Deidra, the youngest in our family, representing the Belmore and Teeswater teams, I would like to recognize the importance of the support needed to get to this level of hockey and the commitment that generates memories that last a lifetime. I thank the parents and the coaches from South Huron and Walkerton for their commitment to their children. Congratulations to the Walkerton Capitals for winning the provincial B championships.

I want to share with you that there was a particular player that many of you will know. Alli Meyer was a member of the Walkerton Capitals, and Alli was also a page in the first session of this Parliament in the fall. She also celebrated her birthday with this championship win.

As this is National Volunteer Week, a special recognition goes out to all those who volunteer their time and talent to keep the spirit of sport alive in our communities.

DAVID WEATHERHEAD

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It is with great sadness today that I announce the death of David Bennington Weatherhead. On March 25 of this year, David passed away peacefully at the age of 84.

David was first elected as a member of Parliament for Scarborough West in 1968 and was re-elected in 1980. During his time in office, David served as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs and later to the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

David grew up in Toronto, where he attended North Toronto Collegiate. He went on to graduate from the University of Toronto in 1950, then went to Osgoode Hall Law School in 1954, before joining his father's law firm, where he practised for 57 years.

David was a passionate father, grandfather, public servant, Maple Leafs and Blue Jays fan. The loving father

of five children and grandfather of six grandchildren, David also leaves behind his sister and two brothers.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the exceptional staff at the Houses of Providence for helping to take care of David during the latter years of his life.

A celebration of David's life will be held next Saturday, April 28, at Mount Pleasant Cemetery, where his family and friends will have the opportunity to reminisce about the life and times of a remarkable public servant and a proud Canadian.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Peter Shurman: I rise today to commemorate Yom ha-Shoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yom ha-Shoah takes place every year on the 27th day of the Jewish month of Nisan; this year, that day is today. It is a day dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust—a day of great significance, especially in my riding of Thornhill, which is home to the largest Jewish community in Ontario.

We know that the Holocaust was the largest mass genocide in the 20th century, and sadly it was neither the only nor the last genocide the world has experienced since that time. This is another important reason why we must take the time each year to remember the victims of that atrocity. Especially as the years go by and the number of Holocaust survivors diminishes, it falls to all of us to keep the memory of the victims alive.

That's why in 1998 my PC colleague Ted Chudleigh introduced a private member's bill to annually recognize Yom ha-Shoah. That's why today Ontario schools and post-secondary institutions are holding assemblies, lectures and ceremonies dedicated to those who suffered the horrors of that tragedy. That's why many of us will attend events in our own ridings, or others, to mark this day of remembrance tonight.

Each year, Yom ha-Shoah helps us to pass the memory of Holocaust victims on to future generations, so that they learn the lessons of history; so that they guard against the hatred, fear and intolerance that fuelled the Nazi attempts to annihilate the Jews, gypsies and minorities of Europe; so that the world never forgets.

It is the very least that we can do to honour the memories of those who perished in the single greatest man-made tragedy the modern world has ever witnessed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT (TREATING SPOUSES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES (TRAITEMENT DES CONJOINTS)

Mr. Clark moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

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. Steve Clark: Again, I want to thank the ODA for their guidance on this matter.

This bill amends the Health Professions Procedural Code, which is a schedule to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

Currently, subsection 51(1) of the code provides that a disciplinary panel of a health profession must find that a member has committed professional misconduct if he or she has sexually abused a patient. Subsection 51(5) of the code requires the panel to reprimand the member and, in certain cases, revoke the member's certificate of registration.

The new subsection 51(5).1 of the code provides that the panel is not required to reprimand the member or revoke his or her certificate of registration if the patient was the member's spouse at the relevant time.

Thank you, Speaker.

1520

ELEPHANT PROTECTION ACT, 2012 LOI DE 2012 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLÉPHANTS

Mr. Berardinetti moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act to protect elephants / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario afin de protéger les éléphants.

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. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just rise to explain the bill. It amends the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The amendments provide that the use of an electronic prod, a bull hook, an ankus, a pole or similar implement or device on an elephant be prohibited. The amendments also prohibit the use of chains, ropes or similar devices to restrain an elephant. These prohibitions are subject to certain exceptions. Basically, we're trying to remove these items because items like a bull hook become weapons and harm animals such as elephants.

TRUST IN ARBITRATION ACT, 2012 LOI DE 2012 SUR LA CONFIANCE DANS L'ARBITRAGE

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act to provide for a trustworthy resolution of disputes during collective bargaining in certain sectors / Projet de loi 70, Loi prévoyant un règlement fiable des différends lors des négociations collectives dans certains secteurs.

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. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. From the explanatory note, the Trust in Arbitration Act, 2012, creates the independent arbitrator's commission and provides that certain collective bargaining disputes in the public sector shall be resolved by the commission. In particular, the act specifies that disputes between parties respecting matters for which a conciliation officer has been unable to effect a collective agreement under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, the Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act, the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006, or the Police Services Act shall be resolved by the commission.

Power is given to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to prescribe other disputes that are to be resolved by the commission. When the commission is required to resolve a dispute, the chief commissioner will choose a commissioner or panel and type of panel to resolve the dispute and will also choose the method of dispute resolution to be used. The dispute must be resolved within 60 days after the chief commissioner chooses the method of dispute resolution.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Hon. Charles Sousa: Sundown tonight will mark the beginning of Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. It is a day to remember the innocent victims of the Holocaust and honour the survivors. It's also a day to reflect on and learn from those years of unspeakable horror.

Six million Jewish men, women and children were murdered under a state-sponsored genocide. On Yom ha-Shoah, we pause to remember them.

In the shadow of all that was lost, those who survived built new lives for themselves. They raised thriving families and forged new communities.

For some, their journey out of the nightmare led them to Canada and Ontario. Pursuing the dream of a new life, these remarkable people worked hard, made sacrifices and prospered. And our province is the richer for their invaluable contributions. Their lives are remarkable stories of courage, resilience and unbreakable spirit.

One of the great lessons of the Holocaust is that constant vigilance is needed to protect the values we treasure. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it has been said that all

that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. So today, let us count ourselves among the vigilant. Let us have zero tolerance for anti-Semitism, violence, racism and hatred, and let us strive for greater justice and compassion.

On this Yom ha-Shoah, we turn our hearts to the victims and pay tribute to the survivors, and we rededicate ourselves to the pledge: Never again. In so doing, let us renew our commitment to speak out as one, to protect the dignity and worth of every single individual.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Responses.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On this Holocaust Remembrance Day, I join with people across the province, and indeed across the globe, in remembering the systematic persecution and murder of more than six million Jewish people throughout the Second World War. As we remember those who lost their lives, we're forever reminded to firmly stand against all forms of discrimination, intolerance and hatred.

The legacy of the Holocaust also reminds us to be vigilant of those who stand against freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Prompted by this human tragedy, these values are now enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Adopted by the UN in 1948 and written by Canadian John Peters Humphrey, this document established clear protections for those facing the threat of genocide and implores nations to take decisive action against those who may try to perpetrate another such crime against humanity.

After nearly 70 years, the resilience and industry of survivors continues to be embodied in Ontario's thriving Jewish communities. Over 200,000 and growing, Ontario's Jewish population is the largest in the country. For these reasons, Ontario established Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah, in 1998, an effort that was led by my colleague Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh. Most recently, the federal government, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, established the Office of Religious Freedom in order to vigorously oppose all forms of religious persecution, no matter where it may take place.

The Holocaust stands alone in history as not only a heinous crime against the innocent, but a crime against the fundamental morals we hold as Canadians and as global citizens. Today, as we pay tribute to those who lost their lives, I'd ask that we not only remember these victims in our thoughts but also in our actions.

Let us speak truth to those who spread hate. Let us celebrate the strength of survivors and condemn those that preach intolerance. May we be steadfast in our defence of freedom, unwavering in our commitment to democracy and resolute in our protection of the human spirit. Never forget. Never again.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm humbled to stand here in this House and speak to the issue of the Holocaust. I grew up as a young Jewish kid in a secular family with my brothers and sister.

1530

I learned about the Holocaust mostly through children's books that my mom and dad would read to me and

to my brothers and sister, and we read those with children's eyes, with innocent eyes. We read about Anne Frank, and we knew about the absurdity of this world and the catastrophe that can happen. We also learned about Martin and Malcolm and Rosa, and we learned about Nelson Mandela and Gandhi. We learned to commit to live in this world in a way that stood up against oppression of all forms.

I'm here today to remember the victims of violence around the globe, in the Holocaust, and in the violence that happens every day in the city and in this province, and the history of violence that we need to remember here in Ontario, too; and just to recommit to deepening democracy, to standing up against the seeds of fascism when people lose hope in the democratic system, and to making sure we stand up for all oppressed communities here.

PETITIONS

IMMIGRATION POLICY

POLITIQUES D'IMMIGRATION

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled "Respect for Diverse Communities."

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

"Whereas the settlement of new Canadians to the province of Ontario remains a joint responsibility of the federal and provincial governments;

"Whereas the settlement of new Canadians to the province of Ontario remains a function of the departments of citizenship and immigration at both the federal and provincial levels;

"Whereas Ontario still remains the destination of choice for new Canadians in our federation;

"We, the undersigned, ask that the province contact its federal counterpart, including but not limited to the Honourable Jason Kenney and his department, and notify them:

"That the proposed reduction in the number of centres in the GTA authorized to perform immigration medical exams, the IMM 1017, is ill-advised;

"That the reduction in number of centres in the GTA where services are offered in French is ill-advised;

"Que la réduction du nombre de centres dans la région du grand Toronto où les services sont offerts en français est mal avisée;

"That the virtual elimination of centres where services are offered in the GTA in the languages of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Farsi, Tamil and Arabic is ill-advised, and that it not only will inflict undue hardship on those cultural communities but is generally discordant with the Canadian values of openness, pluralism and diversity."

I most certainly support this petition, Speaker, will affix my signature and send it to you via page Noah.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and provincially sensitive wetlands; and

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

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

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Minister of the Environment," Mr. Bradley, "to initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the greenbelt until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent contamination of the greenbelt."

I recommend that this be carried forward in the review of the Aggregate Resources Act before a standing committee. I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and present it to Georgia.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here from some people in the Dryden—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here from some people in the Dryden area.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me. Everyone was quiet when you read your petition. I would appreciate it if you wouldn't be standing there, shouting across the floor when someone else is trying to read theirs.

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No point of order. Thank you very much.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas tourism is a vital contributor to the economy of northwestern Ontario, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars into the province's economy from other provinces and the United States, unlike other regions in the prov-

ince whose target demographic is people who already reside in Ontario;

"Whereas northwestern Ontario's tourist economy has been under attack by government policies such as the cancellation of the spring bear hunt," the HST, "the strong Canadian dollar and difficulties passing through the Canada/United States border; and

"Whereas studies have shown that tourism in the northwest nets significantly more money per stay than other regions of the province, in part due to visitors frequenting historical sites, parks and roadside attractions that they learn about through travel information centres;

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

"To keep the travel information centres in Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River open permanently to ensure that northwestern Ontario maximizes the benefit of our tourist economy."

I am pleased to support this, and I will give this to page Safa to bring to the table.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which states:

"Whereas creating a safe and positive learning environment is an essential part of helping students succeed in school;

"Whereas bullying, homophobia and gender-based violence are unacceptable;

"Whereas we need to do more than just tell bullied kids it gets better—we need to work together to make it better now;

"Whereas the Accepting Schools Act would, if passed, help to end bullying in our schools;

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

"That the elected members of all parties help make our schools safer and more inclusive by supporting the Accepting Schools Act."

I certainly support this petition. I'm going to affix my signature and send it with page Ranbir.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario's horse racing and breeding industry...;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG...;

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

“Call on the government of Ontario to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

I'm happy to attach my name to this petition.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's so good to have you in the chair.

I submit the petition on behalf of the horse racing and breeding industry in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

“Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario's horse racing and breeding industry;

“Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

“Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

“Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion per year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

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

“Call on the government of Ontario to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

I will affix my name, as I have with all other petitions, and submit it with Sabrina.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

POLITIQUES D'IMMIGRATION

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I have here a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Respect for Diverse Communities

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

“Whereas the settlement of new Canadians to the province of Ontario remains a joint responsibility of the federal and provincial governments;

“Whereas the settlement of new Canadians to the province of Ontario remains a function of the depart-

ments of citizenship and immigration at both the federal and provincial levels;

“Whereas Ontario still remains the destination of choice for new Canadians in our federation;

“We, the undersigned, ask that the province contact its federal counterpart, including but not limited to the Honourable Jason Kenney and his department, and notify them:

“That the proposed reduction in the number of centres in the GTA authorized to perform immigration medical exams, the IMM 1017, is ill-advised;

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“That the reduction in number of centres in the GTA where services are offered in French is ill-advised;

“Que la réduction du nombre de centres dans la région du grand Toronto où les services sont offerts en français est mal avisée;

“That the virtual elimination of centres where services are offered in the GTA in the languages of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Farsi, Tamil and Arabic is ill-advised, and that it not only will inflict undue hardship on those cultural communities but is generally discordant with the Canadian values of openness, pluralism and diversity.”

I certainly support this petition, will affix my signature and send it to you via page Dia.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bailey: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government has announced that the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. will end its Hiawatha racetrack slots operations in Sarnia on March 31, 2013, even though the current agreement does not expire until 2018;

“Whereas the end of this program will cost the city of Sarnia 140 jobs immediately and \$1.5 million a year in gaming revenues, not to mention potentially 60,000 jobs across the province if the program is scrapped entirely;”

There was “no consultation with the community, employees or owner/operator of the local facility;

“Whereas the McGuinty government continues to put more and more Ontarians out of work due to its ill-conceived, ad hoc decisions, including, in Sarnia, the loss of 80 jobs at the local jail, 100 jobs at Lambton generating station and numerous others due to high energy costs on businesses;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the McGuinty government stop risking thousands of jobs in Ontario and \$1.5 billion in potential revenue by mismanaging the racetrack slots program.”

I agree with this petition and will sign it.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Michael Mantha: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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, the 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 will present it to page Carley. I am in full agreement with this petition.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“Grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children’s aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this petition on behalf of all the citizens of Ontario who have signed it.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were having bets back here, and you’ll understand why pretty soon.

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

“Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario’s horse racing and breeding industry;

“Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

“Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

“Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion per year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario “to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which states:

“Whereas a progressive Ontario budget calls for bold and decisive deficit reduction action to ensure that Ontario remains the most attractive and competitive place in North America to set up or relocate a business, raise a family or build a career; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has introduced a budget that sets out a five-year deficit reduction, leading to a balanced budget by fiscal year 2017-18, while preserving Ontario’s progress in infrastructure, health care and education; and

“Whereas the 2012-13 Ontario budget proposes \$4 of expense reduction for every dollar raised in new revenues, with such expense reduction including implementation of key recommendations in the Drummond report, eliminating overlap and duplication, and compensation restraint in the Ontario broader public sector;

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

“That the elected members of all parties support the comprehensive set of financial measures and expense reductions proposed in the 2012-13 Ontario budget to enable Ontario to balance its budget on schedule; enhance its world-leading position; and attract, build and retain the people, careers and companies to build a strong Ontario for generations to come.”

I certainly support this petition, will affix my signature and send it to page Constantine.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2012 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2012

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 2, 2012, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In the week since we last debated the proposed budget, a lot has changed. But for New Democrats the same fundamental problems remain. This is a budget that leaves everyday people falling behind, and I, along with this amazing team of New Democrats that I have the very distinct honour to serve with, had to make a big decision.

Now, for us the first step was really quite a simple one: We decided to talk to people. We asked the people of Ontario to tell us what they thought, and they responded. Nous avons écouté; nous avons entendu. We heard from tens of thousands of people. A lot of people simply don't want an election, but many, many people think it's worth having one over this budget.

Some people are worried about the lack of a jobs plan. Some are worried about the impact of cuts on health care. Some feel that they're being asked to take yet another hit to the family budget, while those who can most afford to pay keep getting the breaks. But two things were very, very consistent: They felt they had not been heard and they worried that the budget would leave them falling further and further behind.

Now, the second step was a little bit harder. We could either roll up our sleeves and work hard to try to get some real results for folks, or we could throw up our hands and simply walk away. Speaker, the path of easy, simple opposition to everything can be very tempting. It frees you of having any new ideas and it frees you from defending those ideas. Trust me, I know many people want us to take that route. But it's exactly what's turning people off of politics and making them cynical about the possibility for real change.

You know, we've seen all of the chest-thumping from both the government side and the opposition benches: the blame games, the phony bravado, the focus on ourselves. And people, the people who sent us here, Speaker, those are the people who get lost in the shuffle.

We're trying something harder. We're showing the people of this province that we're willing to make minority work. But we can't do it alone, Speaker. We need to work together to make that happen. We're ready to do that, because New Democrats have a plan to make this province a better place. Our plan is about a fairer Ontario. It's no secret that the difference between the very rich and the rest of us—that gap—continues to grow in our province. Incomes right now are as concentrated as they were in the 1920s. After inflation is taken into account, the average hourly wage for working people in

Ontario hasn't changed since 1991. Most people are getting by with less.

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But of course, there are always the exceptions. Canada's CEOs are doing better than at any other time in our history. In fact, by 3 p.m. on January 1, they'd already collected more in pay than the average person earns in an entire year. There's growing evidence that in a society where people at the top have thousands and thousands of times more wealth than those people at the bottom, it doesn't just hurt those at the bottom. It hurts everyone, even the people at the top. It's the wrong direction for our province, yet for well over a decade it's where we've been going. It's where this government has been heading us and where governments before it have sent us.

While those at the top have benefited from corporate tax giveaways, from capital tax cuts and boutique tax measures, everyday families pay higher bills for private power; they pay user fees in classrooms and hospitals; they pay unfair regressive taxes like the HST. There's no wonder the gap is growing. The decisions government makes have made that gap grow.

New Democrats believe that we can do better than that, and that's why we're proposing that this budget take a simple step towards fairness, with a modest tax increase on people making more than \$500,000 a year. Most people actually agree that if you earn more in a year than most people earn in a decade, you can afford to pay a little bit more, especially if that helps people who are struggling to keep up on disability support, for example, or the working mom who needs a child care space, or families stuck waiting in waiting rooms or struggling to pay their heating bill. We think that people who make half a million dollars a year can afford to pay a little more, and people who make less need a bit of a break. That's a debate that this province desperately needs, and it's a debate that we have to have. Are we protecting tax rates for millionaires or working parents who need daycares? We think that it's a simple step to improve this budget and build a better Ontario by changing our priorities.

A better Ontario would have a stronger health care system. Fifty years ago, Tommy Douglas and the pioneers of medicare dreamed of a medical system where people didn't just receive treatments when they were ill, but they received support so that they wouldn't even fall ill in the first place. When we fast-forward to today, we see that the quality of people's health still depends on the size of their wallet.

For over a decade, we've been promised the revolution in long-term care and home care that Roy Romanow mapped out in his groundbreaking report. Instead, what do we have? Instead, we have mostly a private system where millions—I'd actually hazard a guess billions—are being pulled out for profit every year, and people providing front-line care are often living below the poverty line.

One personal support worker told me a story of her own situation. She told me that she, as a personal support

worker, intended on quitting that job so she could work part-time at Tim Hortons, because she would be making more money working part-time at Tim Hortons than she earned working 10 hours a day in the home care sector. There's something wrong with that picture, Speaker.

It's no surprise that our senior citizens in this province are stuck in hospital rooms, unable to get out. Sadly, a public health care system that should be focused on providing reliable and affordable care is leaving patients feeling squeezed and with no options. That's all the more frustrating when we see that the money being poured into this system is diverted to private profits and massive paycheques of the CEOs at the top.

The proposed budget will lead to hospital closures in communities across Ontario. This is something we're very, very concerned about. The fact is, closing local hospitals will mean that people who need critical care are going to end up travelling farther and farther to get it. Instead of being closer to critical care, these people are going to be farther away. Patients and their families have made it clear that this is not where we should start cutting in Ontario. The scandal at Ornge has taught us that there are too many people who see our health care system as a way to make money instead of a way to help people.

New Democrats think that we can do better.

Ontarians told us that they were tired of executive salaries in the public sector shooting through the roof. So we're proposing a cap on CEO salaries, effective immediately. All new executive hires should see their salaries capped at twice the pay of the Premier.

Ontarians told us that they want health care to be stable and they want it to be there for them when they need it. So we're proposing to invest the savings from capping CEO salaries and revenue from a modest tax for the super-wealthy into local hospitals.

Ontarians said that they were also disgusted by scandal after scandal after scandal in this government. So we're proposing stronger whistle-blower protection so that it extends to things like Ornge and eHealth, so that workers can speak up and tip off the Ombudsman so that he can investigate when these things are happening. This is a debate that this province desperately needs to have. Are investments helping the patient in the waiting room or the CEO in the boardroom? We think it's very, very clear that it's time to put in some simple steps that help patients and their families, not CEOs in the backrooms.

We also have some simple proposals to create and protect jobs in this province. It was amazing to most of us when we saw the budget and didn't see any focus whatsoever on job creation. So we have some proposals in that regard.

Since the recession, the governments in Ottawa and Queen's Park have been offering the same old, tired solution: more corporate tax giveaways. They say that if we cut taxes for business, business is going to create jobs. Well, they're wrong, and it's obvious that they're wrong. Businesses might create jobs. They might cut jobs. They can do whatever they want with the money that we've handed them because there are no strings

attached, and any CEO is going to tell you that if they don't have an incentive to create jobs, they're certainly not going to do it out of the goodness of their hearts. That's why we need to work with businesses to create jobs, not simply hand blank cheques to companies to do with as they please. That's why we need to reward the companies that are willing to make job-creating investments here in Ontario instead of protecting those that take jobs and resources out of the province. That's why we need affordable, reliable services and infrastructure, because if we're going to build an economy that works, companies will need affordable electricity; they'll need reliable health care and good schools and training programs.

The proposed budget takes some very, very small steps towards these goals. The government has finally stopped their reckless strategy of year-after-year corporate tax giveaways, and they've proposed a jobs and prosperity fund which could be used to make smart investments, but we have to make sure that that fund is not just another source of unaccountable giveaways.

1600

This is what this government has favoured for a long time—not only no-strings-attached tax cuts but no-strings-attached giveaways. If the jobs and prosperity fund is only going to be used for more of the same, dispatching of these giveaways without any consideration for creating good jobs or building our economy, then it will be a useless fund. If we're going to be serious about getting Ontario going, we need to do much, much better than what this government has proposed.

People have told us they want to reward job creators. They think that's a really good idea. That's why we proposed a job creator tax credit, to ensure that government money goes to the companies that are actually creating new jobs and not the ones that simply ship jobs away.

People also told us that electricity costs are too high. They know they're too high on their own household bills, but they also know that those high costs are causing a problem in terms of our ability to create jobs and create new investment in Ontario. That's why we had proposed that the review of the electricity sector in this province take place. But we also want to make sure that that review looks at real change in a sector that's become an alphabet soup of agencies and a toxic mix of private power deals.

Today the government made an announcement, and they're very proud of it—the measures are long overdue. An acknowledgement is needed of the announcement that was made today. But the commitment to keeping an electricity system market that just doesn't work and the private power deals that go with it shows that we have a heck of a long way to go when it comes to making sure that this government does the right thing by the electricity sector.

If we're going to get electricity prices under control, we can't stick with that confusing status quo that leaves rates rising every single year. New Democrats believe

that it is time for affordable, reliable public power in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: God, even Al Spacek agrees with that.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Al Spacek was the Conservative who ran against you in the election.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And he agrees with that.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You talk to any northerner and they'll agree with it, particularly where they are able to produce the cleanest power we possibly have at the very lowest prices. And yet, companies, forestry industry companies, mills and those kinds of industries are moving out of the north. Well, they've been moving out of the north for almost a decade now. Why? Because even though they generate power at very, very low prices, you can't simply use that power at the low price. The Ontario-wide price is used, and it's not competitive with a forestry industry that's operating in our two adjacent provinces and others as well. Manitoba and Quebec are selling power at half or less than what Ontario sells power for. So it's very uncompetitive for wood processors and mills to operate in this province.

Anyway, people have told us also, particularly people from the north—but it's interesting, because when we talk to folks, it's not only northerners who believe this, but in fact people from all across Ontario believe that shipping raw resources away hurts our province and kills good jobs, and yet that's another path that this province has been on for far too long. That's why we propose to make it the law that resources aren't shipped away if they can be processed right here in Ontario by Ontario workers.

Speaker, that's another debate that this province needs to have. Are we going to work with companies that create jobs, or are we going to hand billions and billions of dollars to companies that simply ship jobs away? Are we going to allow our natural resources to be pulled out of the ground and shipped somewhere else for processing, or are we going to make sure that we're putting Ontario people back to work by making sure those resources are processed right here in Ontario?

These ideas are designed to provoke some discussion, and the ideas that we put on the table in engaging the government in a conversation about their unfair budget were designed to provoke a discussion, and I have to say, the discussion is one that's ongoing. It's a very, very serious discussion, because the government put together a budget without any real input from ourselves or the other opposition party, and that is very disappointing, when a minority government is elected and they don't open the doors to communication with the other two political parties. It smacks of an arrogance that's more akin to a majority government. Okay, granted that's what they were used to—they had two majorities—but the people told them quite clearly that they didn't want them to have a majority government anymore. They wanted to curb that Liberal arrogance. They wanted to reduce that “my way or the highway” approach that they had watched for eight years as the government continued to

undertake initiatives that people weren't happy with, but the government simply ignored them.

In October, the people of this province said, “No more ‘my way or the highway.’ We want politics to be done differently in Ontario. We want the political parties to work together to make Ontario a better place for all Ontarians.”

Now, I don't think the government quite understood that those were the marching orders that we were given. We understood it very clearly, and that's why, from day one, we started rolling up our sleeves, and that's why, from day one, I personally made an effort to connect with both the Liberals and the Conservatives about how we move forward in this minority situation.

Of course, not much was done in those early days. In those first couple of weeks last year when we sat here, there wasn't very much done at all in terms of taking us up on the offer of working together. And then, of course, the government decided to put together a budget. Not only did they not consult with us over their budget; they didn't even consult with the people of Ontario over their budget. We didn't even have public hearings on the budget this time around, which is really a shameful and pitiful thing. The people of Ontario deserve much, much better than that.

So what we did when we saw the result of the government's singular and cocooned way of doing things, we decided that we needed to take that result out to the public and get a sense of what they felt, and as I said at the beginning of my speech, people very clearly felt that this budget came up short and missed the mark in a number of areas. Overall, it wasn't balanced. Overall, it asked everyday families once again to feel the pain, to take the hit, while others were not asked to do the same.

It completely missed the mark on job creation, one of the biggest issues that people are concerned about. There's no jobs plan. In fact, I was quite worried about that, because the government's own guru, Mr. Don Drummond, was quite clear that that's something that the government shouldn't do—that they shouldn't bother with job creation; they should focus elsewhere with cuts. I thought that was the wrong thing to do, and then I found that in fact the government decided to take his advice.

The comments that we put forward to the government were ones that were designed to provoke a good discussion, and I have to say that I look forward to the debate in the coming days, not only here in the chamber, but I look forward to the discussion that's happening around the table with the government. And I urge all of us, everyone in this room, to put aside the arrogance, to stop the chest-thumping, the “my way or the highway” attitude, and to work on solutions that work for the people who sent us here. After all, they should be our most important light as we seek some finality in this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the time that you've given me to speak on this budget motion.

I appreciate the speech made by the leader of the third party, and I appreciate the sentiment she presented, that it is a time that we all work together. It is necessary that we all come together as members of this Legislature to ensure that we find and develop a budget which, at the end of the day, helps Ontarians, helps grow our economy and of course helps eliminate the deficit as well. That is the nature of the minority government, and our government, of course, will continue to work.

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It's unfortunate to see that the official opposition decided not to be part of that conversation and pulled itself out of that debate right from the beginning, which was not helpful to the conversation. At least we are in conversations with the New Democratic Party and looking at ideas which, at the end of the day, I'm sure will result in a better document that is going to help all Ontarians.

This is an important budget, Speaker. All budgets are important, but I think in the time and the place that we're standing right now, in terms of our economy in Ontario, in terms of the economy of Canada and the global instability that exists in the economic prospect, it is an important budget because it's a budget that sets a direction for the future. It's a budget that ensures that we have financial, fiscal and economic sustainability in our province and that allows us, of course, to strengthen public services that are extremely important to Ontarians, to our community, especially those who are vulnerable in our community.

This budget takes strong action for Ontario. The aim is to ensure that we have a plan in place that will ensure that we are growing as a province. So we are making choices. We're making the right choices as we work on this budget, choices which, at the end of the day, are fair, responsible and balanced, because that's the nature of the plan that is presented.

Now, what does this budget do? I think if you really distill it down, this budget focuses on three things. One is to present a balanced budget, to present a deficit-elimination plan that will ensure that over the next five years we are able to eliminate the deficit that currently exists, \$15.3 billion. That is a very big aspect of this budget. In order for us to grow our economy, in order to ensure that we have a strong, sustainable foundation to the future of our province, we must eliminate the deficit. That is a key focus of this particular budget. What it does is it presents a five-year plan to eliminate the deficit, taking it from \$15.3 billion, where it stands right now, to zero by 2017-18.

We have spoken a lot as to where the deficit came from, and I think we have established in the debate that is taking place that we have gone through quite a tumultuous period in our economy. The recession, commonly known now as the great recession, that hit the globe, essentially—all major economies around the world—starting in 2008 and 2009, had a devastating impact not only on Ontario but other provinces and Canada as well. And there was a concerted effort that was made by all

governments. There was a general consensus that was made at the international level that we need to fight the recession in 2009 by stimulating the economy, by making sure that we are making investments in our infrastructure, that we are making investments in our communities so that we can create jobs and fight the recession.

As a result, of course, Canada was part and parcel of that conversation, that the government of Canada and other provinces, including Ontario, even borrowed money to help save our economy. We saw the federal government going into a massive deficit. As a result, their spending went up about 65%, and so did Ontario's. In fact, Ontario and Canada worked together, hand in hand, be it bailing out companies like General Motors and Chrysler and protecting 400,000 jobs in Ontario, or investing in roads and bridges and community centres and recreation centres in our communities.

I think every single riding got to work on projects that were very much needed, that happened as a result of the contribution that was made by both the federal government, which is of a different political stripe, a Conservative government, and the provincial government here in Ontario, which is of a Liberal stripe. The idea was to ensure that we help build our economy. That's why both levels of government in other provinces as well had to borrow money, hence the deficit.

So now, we have been able to shore up our economy. We have been able to ensure that we have come out of the worst part of the recession. We're starting to create jobs and recover a lot of those positions, and now is the time that we start a plan to pay off that deficit. A big aspect of this particular budget is a balanced budget: a deficit elimination plan over the next five years, which is outlined in quite a bit of detail.

The second aspect of the purpose behind this budget is to create jobs. We need to make sure that our economy is strong. We need to make sure that we are able to bring down the unemployment rate, that we are able to create jobs in our economy. Especially after the recession, where so many were laid off, we have to ensure that we are creating jobs, and there are steps that are outlined in this budget that ensure that. We have our green energy strategy, which we are continuing, that is on track to create 50,000 jobs in our economy. We are also creating a jobs and prosperity council through this budget, and a jobs and prosperity fund that will focus on supporting productivity and job creation.

In addition to that, we are focusing on regional economies. I think that's very important. We have the northern Ontario heritage fund, which will continue to build on the success of supporting 4,400 projects already, leveraging \$2.4 billion in additional contributions to the northern economy and creating or sustaining 17,800 direct jobs in the north. The proposed extension of the eastern Ontario development fund has also benefitted over 100 businesses and regional projects in eastern Ontario. It leveraged about \$488 million of additional investment and created 1,900 direct jobs since 2008. The other thing we're doing, Speaker, as you may know, is

that we have proposed a new southwestern Ontario development fund, very similar to the eastern Ontario development fund, which would help communities attract new investment and create jobs in southwest Ontario.

All these activities are very specific, and they're part of this budget, to ensure that we are creating jobs, which is very important.

We've already seen that all the actions the McGuinty government has taken have resulted in the unemployment rate declining from a recessionary high of 9.4% to 7.6% now. We just recently had the job numbers for March, and we saw that just in Ontario alone, 40,000 new jobs were created. That was more than half of the overall Canadian share. More than half of the new jobs that were created in the month of March were in the province of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We've got a couple of loud sidebars going on. If you'd like to go outside, I'd appreciate it. I'm trying to listen to the speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I was talking about the jobs that were created in March alone, and that was 40,000. In excess of 50% of the new jobs that were created in March in all of Canada were taking place in Ontario.

Essentially, what we are looking at is that in 2011, more than 121,000 jobs were created in Ontario, virtually all of them full-time. That's very significant and really speaks to the policies we have put in place. As we are rebuilding our economy, as the economy is recovering, we are starting to see these jobs being created, and they are being created across the province. Of course, more needs to be done, no ifs, ands or buts about it, because there is still an unemployment rate, and we need to make sure we continue to reduce that. But we're going in the right direction.

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The third aspect of this budget that I want to talk about—the leader of the third party spoke about it as well—which I think is extremely important, because this is what our communities and neighbours and members of our families and friends rely on, is to protect the gains we have made in health care and education. Health care and education are two of the largest responsibilities of the provincial government. These are two of the most important services that people rely on and expect from provincial government. Between health care and education, if you look at total program spending, the percentage of money that is being spent by the government through the authority of this Legislature, we're looking at roughly about 65% to 75%. Health, obviously, is the biggest chunk at over 40%, and then roughly close to 25% is investments in education. So these are very important services. These are very important investments that we make in our communities, and we need to make sure that we protect the gains that we've made in health care and education and, of course, we build on it.

In a nutshell, one of the things we are doing, for example, in this budget in health care is taking very

important steps in transforming health care, in making sure that our health care continues to get better. We already do have the shortest wait times in Ontario when compared to all other provinces in Canada. That's as a result of the investments the government has been making over the last eight years. But we of course have to do more. Most recently, the Minister of Health issued Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care to create a sustainable and high-quality health care system. There are a few things that the minister has undertaken, which are outlined and funded for within the budget; for example, transforming health care to reduce the rate of growth of spending to an average of 2.1% annually over the next three years. Of course, we have to take those steps as part of deficit elimination.

Most importantly, through the action plan, what the government is doing is enhancing community-based care to treat patients in alternative settings such as non-profit clinics and at home instead of in hospitals, where appropriate. I think people have all these examples in all our communities. When you speak to the seniors in our communities, when you speak to those who may have certain disabilities, and you ask them, "Where would you like to get care?", especially for chronic conditions, they will always tell you that they would like to get it right in their community, as close to their homes as possible. If they can get the care, as a senior, at home, that is the best place for them to get it. That's the kind of thing we need to do. Through the action plan, what the government and Minister of Health are suggesting is that we move a lot of those health care services to the community level where people live.

I had the great benefit to sit on the Centretown community health centre board, where I saw first-hand the great care that is provided to members of my community, because it's done right at the community level. It's done right where people live. It gives you the opportunity to tailor the service to better provide the full range of services that are needed when a patient requires them, as opposed to just going to the hospital, which is a bigger setting. It has its place, of course, in the health care system, but when it comes to chronic conditions, when it comes to care for seniors, the best place is the community and, even better, home.

There is a lot of work going on to ensure that we have more health care and more health care providers, like personal support workers, who do the good work of providing that to seniors at home—that we've got services available within the community setting from non-profit providers.

A very good example, something that I think the community has been asking for for some time, is the creation of birthing centres. The minister recently announced that she will be helping to fund two birthing centres in the province. I'm really hopeful that one of them is going to be in my community in Ottawa—hopefully, specifically in Ottawa Centre, because we've got a lot of good midwives who are interested in creating that particular centre. But here's a great example of providing a service

which doesn't need to be, especially in non-complicated, non-risky type of birth situations, in a hospital setting, which is far more expensive—to be provided in a community setting through birthing centres. So I'm looking forward to the evolution of that particular initiative and how it's going to work out. Again, I hope one of those centres is located in my community in Ottawa.

The other big aspect is moving to patient-centred funding models to improve the value and quality of care. I think the minister has spoken to a lot of that to ensure that we are providing not only care in the community setting, but that the funding is attached to the patient. So instead of going to institutions like large hospitals, no matter how many patients they see, the funding actually follows the patient so they can get the service, they can get the care they need. That allows for better modification, better tailoring of the services that that patient may need, especially with chronic care, and I think a better delivery of health care. So that work is spoken of and is allowed for in this particular budget.

Let's talk about another very important issue, which is education. Speaker, as you know, our government has been very much focused on improving education, making extensive investments in our schools, our kindergartens, our elementary and secondary schools, our post-secondary education, like universities and colleges. I see the schools in my community. I see the colleges and universities in Ottawa. They're all thriving. Graduation rates are going up. Class sizes are down. These are incredible things that we have done in our education system, and the result is that we rank in the top five in the world.

I had a great experience the other day looking at the New York Times. There was a full-page ad talking about, "Why is the United States of America in 17th place under the international education ranking and how are we going to solve that problem?" I was so happy to see—and the graphic was interesting because they used the maps of those particular countries which ranked in the top 20, and here was Canada. Actually, we know, looking at the studies, that Ontario's right there in the top five. That's the company we sit in right now because of the investments we've been able to make in the education system over the last eight years.

Our government is very much committed to continuing with those investments, because I can tell you, Speaker—and we all recall—that eight years ago we were not ranked in the top five in the world. In fact, eight years ago we had some significant challenges in our education system in terms of the confidence of our teachers, in terms of their ability to give a good education, which they are trained so well for.

There are some very specific choices we're making in this budget, choices that are important to our families, choices that are important to the future well-being of our province. What are those choices?

We are continuing with the full implementation of the full-day kindergarten program by September 2014. Everywhere I go and speak to young parents in my community, they want the full-day kindergarten program

to continue. It's a good program, and we have already seen some good pedagogical results coming out that show that kids who are in full-day kindergarten programs do far better than those who are in half-day programs.

We're keeping the cap on class sizes in the early grades.

We remain committed to the 30% off Ontario tuition grants for eligible undergraduate university and college students.

Also through this budget, we are further integrating training programs across government to make them more responsive to today's job market.

All these steps will result in the world's best-educated workforce to ensure future prosperity in the knowledge-based economy that we live in.

At the end of the day, Speaker, I'll come to the theme that I started with, and that's the prism or the spectrum we need to look at, and that is what kind of economy we're building. We live in a globalized world. We do not just compete with the remaining nine provinces in the country or just with the United States or Mexico in North America. We actually compete at a global level with Europeans, Asians, Africans and South Americans, and we need to make sure that we are creating a workforce right here in this province that can do so. It's not just about today. It is about the future, and that is why the passage of this budget is that much more important. We need to reduce. We need to eliminate our deficit. We need to make sure that we're creating a sustainable economy and protecting the gains in health care and education. I hope all members will support this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: In response to the infomercial from the member from Ottawa Centre—and we know it was an infomercial. For 20 minutes he spoke about the budget but not once did we hear a figure or a fact. All we heard were platitudes and rhetoric from—I guess we should call him "Yasir in Wonderland" instead of the member from Ottawa Centre, I believe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member knows we don't say things like that. Withdraw.

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Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

But, Speaker, 20 minutes of a budget debate and not once did he mention a fact or figure in it. He didn't mention that our deficit now is three times greater than all other provinces combined. He didn't mention that, even though we're in this austerity budget, they're spending \$2 billion more this year than last year. He didn't bother mentioning that the deficit will actually increase by \$100 million over last year to this year. Those are important facts and figures for the people of Ontario to hear, to understand, and to know that what is being said by this Liberal government is a total falsehood. It's inappropriate that this budget comes out and the debate that is used is an infomercial by the member from Ottawa Centre.

Let's get to the facts—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that there was unparliamentary language in that last little gambit. I just ask you to rule on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe that he was on the borderline. If he had used the word that starts with “L,” I might have had a problem. It’s close. He’s on the borderline. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Do we get to reset the clock from those inappropriate interjections?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Continue.

Questions and comments? The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m coming to worry a little bit about you. You don’t seem to be looking down my way too often, but, you know, you did it, so I’ll be thankful for that.

It was rather interesting to listen to the member talk about the budget. He certainly left out some big parts of what’s also in the budget. But even what he did talk about, when he talked about transferring some services into the community—the province of Ontario is a wide province. If you look at the areas that I represent, if you look at the northeast, we have 34 small, rural northern hospitals. They’re in the northeast. When you look at their needs, they are not there, you know? To think that a small, rural hospital will do just fine with a 0% increase is ludicrous, Mr. Speaker. It just can’t work.

When I hear him talk about, “We will shift services that are presently inside of our hospitals out into the community,” well, that could work in a big centre like Ottawa, but you know what, Mr. Speaker? We’re here to represent the entire province of Ontario, and we don’t all live in Ottawa or Toronto. We live everywhere in Ontario, and in many, many of those places, this makes no sense.

For the small and rural hospital, they are it. Right now, the way we are treating them, they’re at risk of self-imploding. Less and less services are available to them. We’re not getting services that are closer to home. We’re creating those big centres in big areas and asking everybody in northern and rural Ontario to travel to those big centres. This is a step backward, not a step forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, and I would just like to remind the member from Nickel Belt that I did look her way for petitions. Methinks thou protest too much.

The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I’m pleased to have a couple of minutes to respond to the comments of the member from Ottawa Centre. I look forward in about 45 minutes from now, about 5:15, to having an opportunity of about 20 minutes to speak on the budget motion that’s before us today.

What hasn’t been spoken about—and I have a lot that I’m looking forward to saying in about 45 minutes. But what hasn’t been spoken about today, I think, is a lot of

the things that will be placed at risk that our budget that we tabled here on March 27 has to a large degree protected, those being the gains and the investments that we have made as a Liberal government over the course of the last eight, going on nine, years.

Now, I would understand why the opposition parties, the Conservatives and the NDP, would not want to speak to that. But I would say, quite frankly, to the people of my riding in Thunder Bay–Atikokan and to the people of Ontario, that should we go to the polls next week, and we’ll know that in a very few short days, there is a great deal of gain and success that we have already made in this province that will be placed at risk. The member from Ottawa Centre spoke to some of that when he spoke briefly. Twenty minutes goes by in a hurry, but he has spoken very clearly about some of the gains that we have made in health care and in education.

We all know in this province that when you poll the people of Ontario, they will tell you that their first two priorities are almost always health care and education—the economy from time to time finds its way into the top two or three, when you poll them, when it comes to their priorities. So far, in this budget we have protected incredible gains that we have made in those two policy areas. When I speak in about 40 minutes, I’ll speak in more detail about what some of those gains are.

I do want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for highlighting those two pieces as well as the other things that he touched on.

We’ll know, Speaker, as I said, in a very few short days if the Conservatives and the NDP will decide to force an election on the people of the province of Ontario at a cost of about \$100 million, putting at risk many of those gains.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What the Liberals will talk about is fictitious game playing with numbers, that is not backed by factual evidence at all. When you talk to people in the province and ask them if they feel better off, the answer is no.

One number that is not debatable is that when Dalton McGuinty became Premier, until 2014—the estimate is 2014, if these people carry on. By 2014, he will have doubled the debt of this province in those few short years. That’s not a debatable point. The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan may want to try, when he gets to speak—but that’s not a debatable point.

Why can’t we support this budget, Mr. Speaker? It does nothing to address the financial crisis that Dalton McGuinty and his gang have put this province in. In fact, when the people were ready for a truly austere budget, spending is actually up in this budget. Shame on this gang for actually raising spending in a budget that was supposed to be a budget based on austerity. The deficit for next year is down about 1% from this year, but spending is actually up. The debt continues to rise. So when they talk about balancing this budget by 2017-18,

at the present rate it would take them 100 years to balance this budget at 1% reduction in the deficit a year.

You cannot believe a word these people say. They're talking about \$17 billion in savings in this document. Well, that's like if you go into the store planning to spend \$1,000 and you only spend \$500. Because things changed, you walk out and say, "I saved \$500"? No, you still spent \$500. They don't seem to understand, but the people in Ontario understand.

They've played all kind of games with numbers, but the reality is, spending is up, the deficit is up, there's no credible jobs plan, and there's no credible job to get Ontario out of this fiscal crisis that McGuinty and his gang have created.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Ottawa Centre has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thanks to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, the member from Nickel Belt, the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan and the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke for listening to my comments and providing some commentary on them.

This is an important budget, Speaker. There's a lot in this budget, and it is very difficult to get through it in 20 minutes. The essence of the budget is that we are working hard to ensure that we find a way to grow and strengthen our economy, to ensure that we eliminate the deficit over the next five years and we do so in a manner that is not on the backs of the people who need services like health care and education.

If my friends in the Conservative Party have their way, they will be back to the Mike Harris days of slash and burn. We know, Mr. Speaker, those ways were rejected long ago. It's really easy—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): All right. I think we've got a little bit of overpowering comments coming here.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I didn't realize you were standing; I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, you ignored me when I was standing up.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I accept your apology. I would suggest we tone it down a bit because the Speaker does not want to name someone. Thank you.

Further debate.

Mr. Peter Shurman: There's been a fair amount of rhetoric on this budget, outside of the scope of what the budget itself represents. I think we've said a lot about why our party has taken a position of voting no on this budget and being unshakable on that.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: You haven't read it.

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Mr. Peter Shurman: I just heard somebody say, "You haven't read it," and I heard Minister Wynne a couple of minutes ago say that we haven't read it. Let me correct a number of things, and I want to correct these

things so that they get on the record, and this is the unvarnished truth.

I walked into the budget lock-up myself with my leader, Tim Hudak, on budget day. We had had about three hours of study by approximately 20 of our people. They divided the thing up by chapter, as is usually done, made the appropriate notes, prepared briefing materials for us. We spent about three hours being thoroughly briefed on the budget, and it didn't meet any of the exigencies that we had set out to support the budget, so we took a position at that point. We made it firm in the media scrum, in the budget lock-up, that we weren't going to vote for it, that we were all going to be here, that there wasn't going to be any 24-hour flu. It's got nothing to do with not reading the budget. We've read it probably more thoroughly than most of the people on the other side, so we stand by that position.

I also want to get into the Hansard the issue of what we've been putting up with in this House, frankly, for the last three weeks, which is an exercise on the part of the Liberal government in what I would call election branding. This has not been, particularly in question period, an issue of whether or not we're going to vote for the budget, why there may or may not have been collaboration, and I'll get to that. This has been an exercise on the part of Premier McGuinty and Minister Duncan particularly on the issue of whether or not our position is meant to evoke an election. I can say categorically, for the people who are watching us at home, for the media who are listening, and for the Liberals who care to pay attention: The last thing that we want is an election.

We think, potentially if there's an election coming next week, it will be because you don't want to listen to what the third party has to say. They feel willing to engage, and, frankly, we do not—and we do not for a very good reason. During the fall period, after October 6, when we had an election that resulted in a minority government in this province, there was a period during which time we saw what seemed to be a more collaborative approach on the part of the ministerial people on that side, where if something happened in labour, my office might get a call from Minister Jeffrey, and it seemed fine. We indicated and our leader indicated that we were willing to work together and collaborate.

I didn't get any call from my opposite number, the Minister of Finance. I'm the finance critic. Oh, I called his office. I had my executive assistant call his office, probably within two or three weeks of the election, and ask for a meeting. The Minister of Finance had his people call back and say, "Why does Mr. Shurman want a meeting?" The explanation was simple: "Want to get to know the minister better, want to develop a working relationship, want to talk about what we might be able to do, now that there's this new spirit of collaboration." It took a while, but I believe that it was in November we had our first meeting. His parliamentary assistant, the member from Ottawa Centre, knows very well, because he attended that meeting and I attended that meeting.

The reason I'm talking about it today and putting it into the Hansard record is because the first phrase out of

Minister Duncan's mouth that day, as we sat in his boardroom at the building that houses the Ministry of Finance, was, "Ground rules. Ground rules are, we're going to have this meeting but it's off the record. We're not going to go out and we're not going to talk about it. Is that clear?" I readily agreed and, frankly, until today, kept with that agreement. That was the first meeting that we had, and I say again, at my behest, not at the minister's.

So we had a discussion. We talked about some ideas that our party had put out there, both during and after the election. They were rejected out of hand. We talked about the wage freeze, for example, and heard a fair amount about British Columbia's Supreme Court ruling and so forth.

Time marched on, as it always does. As we got closer to budget time—and now I'll put it at February—we were contacted by the Minister of Finance's department again, asking for another meeting. By the time that meeting was held—and he was holding meetings simultaneously with myself and with my opposite number in the NDP—it was mid-February. Now, I find it more than strange that we should be talking about what we might or might not want to collaborate on from a budget perspective in mid-February, when we know we're going to have a budget tabled in the third or fourth week of March, because by the time you get to mid-February, most of that budget is put to bed. You're almost to the point where you're going to translation and to print. So there's no way that there was any real wish to collaborate. Our conclusion was, they're going to do what they want to do.

There was a third meeting called by me and that was at the end of February. There was no urgency on the part of Minister Duncan to do anything before that. I said to him categorically, "Minister, I don't think that we can really collaborate at this point. You're going to print, and it's your show. You want this budget. Put it on the table. We'll debate it. We'll discuss it, and we'll vote on it."

That's the unvarnished truth. That's what I wanted to get on the record.

So the minister, who set the ground rules about not talking outside of meetings, then proceeded to go to the media at every opportunity and say he'd been meeting with the finance critic of the Progressive Conservative Party, the critic of the NDP. Indeed he had, but he didn't talk with all candour about what had transpired in those meetings, and frankly, I don't believe that those meetings were meant to really evoke anything from us.

So now, in a last-ditch attempt, there are apparently some kind of secret talks going on between those two parties, and we'll see what happens next week. But I've got to say, for all who are listening, whether you're media, whether you're watching me on television at home or in your offices, whether you're a Liberal sitting on the other side of this House, if there is an election next week because that budget is defeated, it's not because any Progressive Conservative, from Tim Hudak right through 37 people in this caucus—not because any one of us ever wanted to evoke it.

Our position on the budget is founded entirely on principle, and our principles are very clear. We have said before the election, during the election, since the election—in fact, I'll take it back almost three years to the election of our leader, Tim Hudak. In his acceptance speech at that leadership convention, he talked about the fact that we needed a solid path to creating jobs in the province of Ontario, we had to cut spending in the province of Ontario, and those are the two tenets that we live by as Progressive Conservatives. Whether Liberals or NDP like those things or not, that's what we're about. We don't see any sign of that in this budget, and that and that alone, Speaker, is our reason for taking the position that we've taken of voting absolutely no.

The last comment that I want to make before I actually get to the notes on the budget speech is about this concept that was advanced by Premier McGuinty, whether it was yesterday or the day before I can't recall, during question period, about the fact that because we have not collaborated—as far as he's concerned, we haven't collaborated—we have therefore forfeited our right to speak about this budget. That is patent nonsense.

We were elected—37 of us were elected—in duly conducted elections in the ridings that we represent to come to this place and represent the people of those ridings. That government, as a minority, has a duty—even if they weren't a minority, but they are—to listen to what we have to say because we speak for people. The NDP speaks for people.

As I've said in question period, contrary to the arrogance that is displayed on a constant basis by this Minister of Finance and by this Premier, they are not royalty. Premier McGuinty is not the king of Ontario. And contrary to what the Minister of Finance may think, he's more like the court jester than he is like any kind of prince.

So I don't want to hear—

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Mr. Speaker, with great respect, I think the member is using remarks that are unparliamentary, calling the finance minister a court jester.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member from Thornhill to remove the one word, in particular.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I withdraw.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: So I'll finish up that aspect of this one-way conversation in response to the conversation that's been coming from that side by saying, contrary to what they say, we stand for Ontario every bit as much as they do.

When there's a suggestion from the other side that we've somehow forfeited our right to speak on this budget, when there's a suggestion from the other side to the effect that somehow or other we, because we don't support that budget, are not for Ontario, that we don't

stand up for Ontario, that, too, Speaker, is absolutely nonsensical. We represent Ontarians every bit as much as any Liberal member represents Ontarians, and the sooner they understand that respect is a mutual thing, and the sooner they understand that collaboration is an act of many, not an act of the few, the sooner we'll get along in this House.

1650

Now, I'll get to a few of these notes that my staff have duly prepared because I want to speak a little bit about Ontario. I want to speak about Ontario because it's the essence of why we all come to this place and why we do what we do every day in the Legislative Assembly.

This is a province that has, in days past, led Canada economically—40% of the population and, as too many people have said, but it's true, the engine of Canada. We were a centre of industry. We were the hub of innovation and, most significantly, a place where entrepreneurs from all over the world sought to establish their new ventures and grow new businesses and contribute to the prosperity that we enjoyed, and it's a place where Ontarians with Canadian roots dating back so many hundreds of years worked side by side with new Canadians who chose this province as the place to build new lives for their families.

I remember moving to my own riding of Thornhill back in 1983 with my family from Montreal. I remember the enthusiasm of knowing that there were countless opportunities for success here in Ontario, and later, when I moved from the corporate sector, I took advantage of those opportunities to set up small businesses of my own. Ontario was indeed a place of opportunity, where anyone willing to put in the hard work to do so could actually succeed. Like many Ontarians, I built a life in this province, and my wife and I look very much forward to our two sons doing the same.

So fast-forward now to the Ontario we have today, after eight years of Dalton McGuinty and the Dalton McGuinty government. Contrary to what they say, our potential indeed does remain great. Not even eight years of the McGuinty government could stifle that. I really detest the suggestion that we in the Progressive Conservative ranks, in the opposition ranks, feel at any time otherwise. We are so pro-Ontarian that we come here and we fight the good fight every single day in fact because we do feel that way.

Significant natural resources, the rule of law, a well-educated population, a diverse population—that, combined with the inherent entrepreneurial spirit of Ontarians, makes us a force to be potentially reckoned with globally and makes companies around the world take notice and consider Ontario.

Unfortunately, under Dalton McGuinty, far too often these companies that consider investing in Ontario make a decision against it. Why? Why do they do that? If you look at the budget that was presented just a few short weeks ago, it is all too clear. We live in a province of record debt and record deficit; a province that's on the watch list of institutions like Moody's; a province that is taxing its citizens at every possible turn without pro-

viding them the quality of services that that level of taxation should guarantee; a province that is spending more on paying the interest on its debt than it is on education; a province that is stifling business potential and growth with bureaucratic red tape; a province with a government that broke yet another commitment and backed down from reducing taxes so that companies could create good new jobs for Ontarians; and, most alarmingly, a province with a government that has shown absolutely no indication of changing its disastrous course.

There can be no doubt that, under the McGuinty government, the province has continued to slip, to fall further behind. All you have to do is look at 63 straight months of unemployment figures, showing us trailing every other province and territory in Canada.

The fundamentals that we have always been proud of as Ontarians are in jeopardy. The government is spending more on paying interest on the debt that they created than they are on education. Imagine that. In these circumstances, how much longer will we be able to sustain that education system? How long before we will no longer be able to say that we have the best-educated workforce? With a deficit of \$15.3 billion, up \$1.3 billion from just two years ago, how long can we maintain our health care system? With 600,000 people out of work, how can we talk about a future of prosperity? With a record debt and a deficit that is three times higher than those of all of Canada's other provinces combined, how can we move forward on providing the infrastructure that Ontario needs to drive its economy?

These numbers that we're talking about—deficit, interest, unemployment etc.—are not just numbers. They tell a story. They paint a picture, the picture of an Ontario that is bleak, that shouldn't be bleak, because—you're right and we're right—it's a great province that deserves our attention. That's what we need to do.

Those numbers do paint a fairly bleak picture of Ontario's current status, and they tell a story of a government, the McGuinty government, that has yet to come to terms with the fact that they are the problem. And as we've seen here over the past number of weeks, they're problems that are not entirely financial; they're problems of governance. I look, for example, at the fact that they, as a minority—or as they call it, a major minority—do not want to listen to the will of the House.

Speaker, I give you by way of example the majority of this House voting in favour of a select committee to look into the Ornge scandal and them not being willing to do so. For that reason, Speaker, I must move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Shurman has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will say "yea."

All those against will say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1656 to 1726.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Members, take your seats.

Mr. Shurman has moved adjournment of debate. All those in favour will please stand and be recorded by the clerks.

Those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 19; the nays are 36.

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

Further debate? The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you very much, Speaker. I will continue with my remarks concerning the budget motion—speaking to the budget as I am, obviously out of synch with the Premier, who says that somehow or other this party has forfeited its right to debate, which I've discussed previously.

Look, governments are elected by the people. They're entrusted by the people with the responsibility to lead them through the good, the bad and the ugly. It was, and is, this government's responsibility to manage Ontario's finances through the global economic downturn, just as it is this government's responsibility to manage everything about the governance of Ontario. They have failed, and they have failed miserably, even while other jurisdictions succeeded—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Folks, it's a little loud in here, and we certainly have someone speaking. Just because the motion failed doesn't mean that everybody starts talking. A little silence, please.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaker, we've heard this Premier blame everything and everybody from Greece to China, from the high value of the dollar to what has gone on in the United States with their mortgage problems. I think he might have even blamed the weather once or twice. But what they've never done is review their own decisions, look inward and examine their own actions. They have never once taken their partisanship out of this picture.

Looking at this government's track record over the past eight years, in good times and in bad, one cannot help but think that in the Liberal version of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, the answer to the question of the universe would be, "Spend," regardless of what the question actually is.

Fourteen out of 24 ministries—14 out of 24—will be spending more in this budget, despite the clear need for restraint. Two billion additional dollars in spending, \$600 million in additional interest, and this is supposed to be a strong budget of restraint. I don't think so.

Beyond that, they toss money away like so many pieces of used Kleenex.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This will be the last warning to the government side. I've asked for quiet. Let's do it.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm just so disappointed in this government, the arrogant attitude of this government as evidenced by the fact that notwithstanding a majority vote in this House for a select committee to examine the goings-on at Ornge, another example of how the fiscal aspects of the province and the control aspects of the province have gotten away on them, they've said no. They stood fast on that, so for that reason I have to move adjournment of the House.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Before that, member from Thornhill, there's a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I think the tone and the language were bordering on unparliamentary and inappropriate. I would really—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I think my friend from Nipissing–Pembroke—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will sit down now. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Everyone will sit down. The member from Renfrew, we can do without those comments when I'm talking and I'm standing.

The member, I don't find it a point of order, but your point is well taken.

The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'll simply re-move my motion, so I move adjournment of the House.

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

All in favour will say "aye."

Opposed?

The nays have it.

I believe we will call in the members and have another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1732 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Members, take your seats.

Mr. Shurman has moved adjournment of the House. All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

Opposed?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 40; the nays are 3.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The motion carries. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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| MacLeod, Lisa (PC) | Nepean–Carleton | |
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| Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC) | Oshawa | |
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| Piruzza, Teresa (LIB) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | |
| Prue, Michael (NDP) | Beaches–East York | |
| Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | |
| Sandals, Liz (LIB) | Guelph | |
| Schein, Jonah (NDP) | Davenport | |
| Scott, Laurie (PC) | Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock | |
| Sergio, Mario (LIB) | York West / York-Ouest | |
| Shurman, Peter (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Singh, Jagmeet (NDP) | Bramalea–Gore–Malton | |
| Smith, Todd (PC) | Prince Edward–Hastings | |
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