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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
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Tuesday 1 May 2012

Mardi 1^{er} mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION
ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Duguid, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Debate?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the members for Etobicoke Centre and Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I'm just checking behind me to make sure they're here, and they are.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill, of course. It's the bill that follows the budget, a budget that indeed protects education and health care, while at the same time getting our deficit in balance by 2017-18. It's the single most important thing we can do to create jobs in Ontario, to build a strong economy and to attract investment to our province.

Our economy is responding well to our economic plan. We've seen thousands of jobs created in the last number of months—in fact, 46,000 last month alone. One of four jobs in Canada and the US is created here in Ontario, which is good news for our economy. We're confident with this budget, with the plan that we've put before the people of Ontario, that working together with all of our partners, we'll be able to ensure that we get the books balanced, keep Ontario's economy growing and become a global leader in this post-global-recession economy.

I don't want to speak any further. My colleagues have a lot to say on this, so I'm going to pass it over to them, and I thank you for the time.

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

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to stand today in the House for second reading of Bill 55, the Strong Action for Ontario Act, 2012.

The McGuinty government recognizes that serious action is required for a very serious time. That's why the Strong Action for Ontario Act, 2012, lays out a comprehensive five-year plan to keep Ontario on track to balance the budget by 2017-18. Let there be no mistake: When I say this bill is comprehensive, it's actually 355 pages in length. It has 69 different schedules. It's actually so comprehensive that it required special binding from the Queen's Printer.

The fiscal challenges of this bill are why it's so comprehensive, because today Ontario faces an enormous challenge. Before the recession, our government balanced three budgets in a row and eliminated the hidden deficit we inherited in 2003. We're committed to getting Ontario back to balance, and we're committed to continuing to build on our past successes. While we have a deficit because of the global recession, the stimulus our government injected into the economy during the recession to create and preserve jobs because of slow economic growth and global economic uncertainty was a necessary requirement. Governments of all political stripes have run deficits, significant deficits, to respond to the global recession. The federal government, for example, in growth in spending over the last few years, has been very similar to Ontario.

The single most important step that we can take to grow the economy, to protect our jobs and to help keep education and health strong is to balance the budget. Balancing the budget means keeping teachers in our classrooms and keeping doctors and nurses in our emergency rooms. Today, the cost to service the debt is approximately \$10 billion, our third-largest expenditure. In fact, we spend more on interest payments each year than we spend on colleges and universities. If we take no action, we will be spending almost as much to service the debt in 2017-18 as we spend today on education. So it's absolutely paramount that we move forward.

If strong action is not taken, the deficit will increase. That would hurt Ontario's ability to continue to focus on its priorities, and our priorities are health, education and smart investments to create jobs. If strong action is not taken, it would also mean unsuitable levels of debt. If strong action is not taken, Ontario's ability to set and to control its own priorities, its own choices and actions, will be impaired. Strong action is required to ensure that this government achieves its goal of eliminating the deficit by 2017-18, a goal we remain on track to achieve.

For the third year in a row, we have beaten our deficit forecasts. As a result of the proposed changes to the budget, Ontario's deficit in 2011-12 is now projected to be \$15 billion, which is a \$1.3-billion improvement from the deficit forecast in last year's budget, and an improvement of \$0.3 billion compared to the projection outlined in the 2012 budget.

In the medium term, the government is now projecting lower deficits than originally outlined in the 2012 budget, which did project those deficits of \$14.8 billion in 2012-13, \$12.8 billion in 2013-14, and \$10.1 billion in 2014-15. And last, but certainly not least, the government is now projecting a \$0.5-billion surplus in 2017-18.

I would like to add that the proposed changes to the 2012 budget include no new net spending. As a result, the province's expense outlook remains unchanged for the 2012 budget. Yet there is so much more to do. We choose to ensure that everyone in Ontario plays their part in returning the budget to balance. Shared sacrifice will ultimately mean shared prosperity for all Ontarians. That, of course, means leading by example. For those of us who are fortunate enough to serve in Ontario's Legislature, we are proposing to extend the pay freeze to MPPs by a further two years. That would make for a total of five years. We are also continuing to take action to manage compensation costs by extending the pay freeze for executives at our hospitals, colleges, universities, school boards and agencies for another two years, for a total of four years. We're asking Ontario businesses to do their part as well. For example, we are proposing a freeze on further reductions of the general corporate income tax rate and education rates for businesses, until the budget is balanced.

The actions of the McGuinty government over the past eight years have turned Ontario into one of the most competitive places for business to invest and create jobs. In total, we have reduced taxes for Ontario businesses by more than \$8 billion a year. Let me be clear: These measures would not increase tax rates for businesses.

0910

Further, we are proposing that Ontario user fees recover more of the cost of providing a service. The Auditor General has told us that when Ontario charges a fee for a service, the fee should recover the full cost of providing the service, and that we are proposing as well. We are proposing to make modest fee increases in some of these areas, some of which have not seen an increase for more than 15 years, and we will also find savings in many other areas.

We're proposing to cap the Ontario clean energy benefit at 3,000 kilowatt hours per month, which would allow almost all Ontario families to continue to receive the full 10% benefit on electricity, while creating more than \$500 million in savings over four years.

We will change the Ontario Drug Benefit program so that about 5% of senior Ontario Drug Benefit recipients—those with the highest incomes—pay more of their prescription drug costs, while ensuring that these costs do not impose an unreasonable burden. These changes will

not increase drug costs for seniors with incomes below \$100,000 for single seniors or \$160,000 for senior couples who already get the drug benefits.

We're also proposing to delay and/or cancel some infrastructure projects to reduce our borrowing by more than \$3 billion, but we will, however, focus infrastructure expenditures on the most critical areas, such as transportation networks, hospitals and post-secondary institutions, to maximize our return on investments. These are the best investments that will strengthen Ontario's economy for future growth and prosperity and support the government's priorities in health care and in education.

Madam Speaker, Ontarians want a strong and growing economy that creates well-paid jobs, yet the new global economic reality presents its challenges to Ontario. Increased competition from emerging economies has resulted in Ontario losing some of its share in its key export market, particularly the United States. Higher oil prices have driven up the costs of doing business in Ontario, and at the same time, the rise in oil prices has led to a higher Canadian dollar, which further diminishes the competitiveness of Ontario's businesses in a global market.

Given these challenges, Ontario's continued prosperity will—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me a moment. I'd ask those who are carrying on side conversations to take them outside. It's difficult to hear the speaker. Thank you.

Please continue.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's nice to have an attentive audience. I appreciate that.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, and I'm listening to every word.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you.

Let me repeat, then: Given these challenges, Ontario's continued prosperity will be strongly linked to its ability to achieve higher rates of productivity growth. Currently, the government delivers about \$2 billion in business supports, including targeted business tax expenditures through more than 40 programs across at least seven ministries. Many of these programs will be consolidated into the jobs and prosperity fund.

To help build a strong and diversified Ontario that enables businesses to invest in innovation, improve productivity and become more globally competitive, we are proposing the following measures: consolidating those many business support programs into a jobs and prosperity fund, which will focus on productivity growth and job creation while creating an overall savings of \$250 million by 2014-15.

Also by 2014-15, the government will have created an unprecedented fund of up to \$1.2 billion for businesses. The businesses will also require a highly skilled workforce, and the government expects to expend approximately \$1.3 billion on employment and training pro-

grams in 2014-15. Together, these two funds represent an investment of \$2.5 billion in jobs and the economy.

Establishing a multi-stakeholder jobs and prosperity council to advise the government on a plan to boost Ontario's productivity is one of our priorities. It will lead a research agenda on Ontario's productivity and innovative challenges.

We will also diversify Ontario's exports to emerging economies by streamlining and coordinating the trade promotion activities of all relevant ministries.

The jobs and prosperity fund will transform the way the government currently delivers supports to businesses. It will also encourage Ontario businesses to be more productive and innovative, creating long-term prosperity and sustainability. It will target at least 25% in administrative savings and the winding down of non-productivity-focused programs.

The government recognizes that regional economies have distinct requirements. As a result, the following funds will be maintained—of course, at the pleasure of the Legislature, as it is now before the House: the proposed new southwestern Ontario development fund, the eastern Ontario development fund and the program administered by the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. in the north.

Keeping the regional funds outside of the jobs and prosperity fund will make it possible to address specific regional needs. For example, northern Ontario's economic development needs are quite different from those in the GTA or eastern Ontario. These funds will benefit from the productivity focus and innovative approach to program design developed for the jobs and prosperity fund. It's very important to recognize the diversity in our province and that the regions are unique unto themselves. We must be able to adapt their needs to what our needs are, so that we can provide the support for them.

Together, Madam Speaker, these actions will help Ontario companies make more efficient and innovative use of labour, capital, energy and raw materials to produce those goods and services that we need. Higher productivity growth leads to higher wages and helps businesses expand globally, resulting in the creation of new jobs and an improved standard of living for all Ontarians.

The McGuinty government has been and remains committed to increasing access to quality care for all Ontarians. In fact, between 2003-04 and 2011-12, health sector funding increased at an average rate of 6.1% annually, for a total increase of \$17.9 billion. These investments reflect the government's commitment to increased quality care for all Ontarians. As a result of the current fiscal challenge, funding for the health care system cannot continue to grow at these rates. Transforming Ontario's health care system is essential to managing down the rate of health care spending growth to meet the government's commitment to balance the budget.

Madam Speaker, the strategies in this budget will help maintain excellent health care for Ontarians while slow-

ing overall growth in health spending in Ontario to an average of 2.1% annually over the next three years. We will maintain total physician compensation at current levels through the next physician services agreement with the Ontario Medical Association, and at the same time improve patient access to primary care providers, rather than going directly to hospital emergency rooms, by expanding same-day and next-day appointments and after-hours care.

These investments have improved health care in Ontario, after years of neglect, and produced meaningful improvements for families. But with the current fiscal challenge, we recognize that funding for the health care system, as I said, cannot continue to grow at past rates. Additionally, health care drivers, such as demographic factors, demands for service and technology changes continue to exert pressure on the fiscal plan. The delivery of health care has to be transformed to continue providing the high-quality health care services that Ontarians need and respect. That is why the McGuinty government is working with its health care partners to bring about a transformation to a more sustainable and higher-quality health care system. We are focusing on better value for money and creating a system that delivers health care in a smarter and more efficient way that will lead to better outcomes for Ontarians.

The McGuinty government plan is based on three key strategies to realize better value for money: shifting investments to where they have the greatest value and health care benefit; preventing illness and helping Ontarians stay healthy and active by focusing on health promotion, including reducing childhood obesity and smoking rates; and providing better access to primary care, home care and community care, so patients can receive the care that they need where they need it and when they need it.

These strategies and the additional actions announced in the 2012 budget will help maintain excellent health care for Ontarians while slowing the overall growth in health spending.

0920

Transforming Ontario's health care system is essential to managing, as I said, the rate of health care spending growth to meet the government's commitment to balance the budget. The health care system is being transformed through these strategies under way, but also including drug reform, Excellent Care for All legislation and primary care reform.

With these actions and more, our government's plan includes \$17.7 billion worth of spending over three years of savings and actions to contain cost increases compared to what it would have been otherwise.

The deficit for 2011-12 is projected to be \$15 billion; \$1.3 billion lower than forecasted in the 2011 budget. Without the measures we are proposing, Ontario's deficit would approach \$25 billion in 2014-15, but now it is expected and projected to be \$10.1 billion that fiscal year.

Our government will continue to focus on its priorities to further strengthen the economy and to also spur job creation. We've made some very difficult choices, but they are the right choices. We choose to protect and we choose to build on Ontario's achievements while returning to balance by 2017-18. We choose to transform the public and broader public service sectors and, in doing so, how they serve Ontarians. We choose to reshape public services to ensure that everything that is done is done more effectively and more efficiently.

In conclusion, the McGuinty government will continue to make the right choices and to build on its plan to have the world's best-educated workforce to ensure future prosperity in the knowledge-based economy. We will do so by making the right choices, as I said, and by choosing to fully implement, for example, full-day kindergarten by September 2014; by choosing to keep a cap on class sizes in the early grades; by choosing to remain committed to the 30%-off Ontario tuition grant for eligible full-time undergraduate university and college students; and by choosing to integrate training programs across government to make them more responsive to today's job market.

Ontario offers a range of employment and training supports through dozens of programs across 11 ministries, each targeting different client groups and using a variety of different delivery systems and networks. Integrating these supports into a single network with a single customer window will allow the government to improve client outcomes and to also better meet the needs of employers, thereby supporting a key government objective of increasing jobs and growth. Better coordination would also improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of programs, therefore enhancing the value of government investments.

Despite the challenging fiscal situation, the government is continuing to boost its support also for post-secondary education, as I indicated. That's to support that knowledge-based economy that we know we need. The government's investments have resulted in significant achievements in this sector, including Ontario's post-secondary attainment rate being the highest in any OECD country. The budget reaffirms the continuation of the new 30%-off Ontario tuition grant which was introduced in January 2012 to help low- and middle-class families access post-secondary education. More than 300,000 students, Madam Speaker, are eligible for this new grant.

Most importantly, we are choosing to continue with our plan to balance this budget. Yet, with the return to balanced budgets as a key fiscal objective, it is not in itself an end—it's a means to an end: ensuring that Ontario families will continue to receive the greatest value through the best education and health care system in the world and a strong economy that creates jobs. In fact, even before the budget achieves balance, the measures we're proposing will help to support the province in improving fiscal health and sustainability, which will provide that strong foundation for the longer-term sus-

tainability of core services, such as education and health care.

The Strong Action for Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2012, is a series of smart choices to ensure a strong economy while protecting the gains we have made together in our education, health care and public service. That's why I'm asking for support in the House in passing this act.

I also would like to share with you that the demographics in my community are an aging demographic. One of the things that I've learned over the 24 years that I've been involved in politics in this particular riding is that they say to me, "You get our money through taxes. What we ask you to do is spend it wisely and spend it well, ensuring that we protect both the young—our children—through education, and also our health, as we're an aging population."

It's very difficult for someone to think in billions of dollars, so when you talk about a \$25-billion deficit or a \$15-billion deficit, it's not where the rubber hits the road for them. Where the rubber hits the road is in their community and involved with them on a day-to-day basis. Are we ensuring that the children are well educated, to be able to provide for the seniors as they get older? Are we ensuring that we have good, sound fiscal management of the dollars that they give us? Are we ensuring that in fact there is health care for them when it's needed, and that, as I said, in an aging society, we're dealing with those diseases, such as with the bill I introduced on Alzheimer's and dementia?

Those are the conversations that take place. They entrust us in this House to do the very best we can to ensure that their future is based on a solid foundation. This budget bill provides for that foundation. As I said earlier, it's not the only thing; it's the beginning of the things we're able to do. But I also think it's incumbent upon all of us working together in this House to find the most effective way to move forward, on behalf of the people we serve, so that they know and have a comfort level that their future is secure.

The crisis we all went through was the greatest since the recession back in the 1930s. It hit virtually every country in the world. We're not immune to that, and we have to deal with it. That does mean making some very difficult choices, but they're based on a solid priority of the things we need to ensure for that foundation to be continued to be built, so that in the future we can all share in the prosperity that comes as a result of it.

I think it's particularly important for all of us to work together to ensure that as we move forward, we remember who we're moving forward on behalf of, and that's the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I'm pleased this morning to have an opportunity to provide some remarks on the budget bill today and follow up on the remarks from the member from Etobicoke Centre. I want to thank her for her time this morning as well.

It is Tuesday, May 1, today: relevant, I think, because we find ourselves fully one week since the budget motion vote last week. I think it's important to note that the tone and the tenor of the place here this week, at least for me, seems to be a little quieter, a little softer and, I think it's fair to say, perhaps lacking some of the drama that was dripping down the walls here last week. But that's the nature of it when you are in a minority Parliament.

I think all of us on this side of the House want to thank the NDP for their support of our Liberal budget last week. We very much appreciated that. We think it was the right choice by the NDP to support our budget. I don't think that there are many, if any, people in the province—certainly there are probably a few, but I don't think very many—who would have felt it was appropriate for the Conservatives and the NDP to vote jointly and defeat the budget and send the electorate of Ontario into an election a short six months since the last one. So I want to thank them for the support.

I think there are people in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan who are a little unsure, to be fair, as to the strategy entertained by the official opposition, the members of the Conservatives, in terms of their approach to appearing unwilling to consult, given that it is a minority Parliament, with our Liberal government in terms of what amendments were possible to bring to the table to get them onside. But they took the approach—and many say they hadn't even read the budget, and it certainly was a quick announcement, I would say, so you'd have to believe there was not a lot of time, if any, spent going through the document before the decision was made by the Conservative caucus that they would not be voting for the budget. Such was the approach, and we all live with that. But again, I'll thank the NDP for their support in us getting this particular budget through.

We'll probably find ourselves, quite possibly, in a similar situation in six months or a year from now, which would only put us one year or a year and a half out from the October 6, 2011, election. I would suggest to people that the conversation will be very much the same. I'm not sure that people will be interested in an election one year from now or six months from now—putting us one year since the election—than they were just last week, but that is yet to be told.

0930

I find the minority situation very interesting. I must say, there is a part of me that likes it. Obviously, we'd love the majority, but it's interesting to watch the gymnastics that now need to go on on the opposition benches. Of course, when you have a majority, the opposition parties, Conservative or NDP, as it has been for the last two terms, can simply criticize with no consequence. They can, as is their role, hold the feet of the government to the fire. That's their job, and we respect that and we understand that. I would suggest, though, that it is much easier for them to do that when the government is in a majority position because, quite clearly and quite honestly, there is no consequence for the way they vote.

In a minority situation, of course, it's different. There is a very significant consequence, because if the Conservatives and the NDP choose to vote together, then the government falls on a confidence vote and we would find ourselves in an election. That didn't happen last week on the budget motion, which was a confidence vote. As I have said, they did not vote together, so the government still stands and we continue to do our work. But I think it is quite interesting, Speaker, that in a minority situation, there are suddenly consequences for the way you vote.

I would offer, before I move on to my remarks more specifically on the budget, two examples. We have seen in the Legislative Assembly, in the course of the last month or so, two private members' bills introduced here in the chamber, both by Conservative members. What we found was that the NDP voted against the Conservatives and voted with the Liberals on items that—before those private members' bills were introduced, the NDP would roundly and soundly criticize our Liberal government for those pieces of legislation.

The first one—and this is relevant to me, Speaker, as a northern member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan—was the Far North Act. We heard at length, over the last three years or so, criticism from the NDP caucus on the Far North Act. It was interesting to listen to the criticism, because I think, as a caucus, they were very conflicted on it. Truth be known, I firmly believe they are very supportive of it. In the past, however, they were able to criticize because there was no consequence. There was no impact in terms of voting against us on the Far North Act because they knew that we had a majority and in all likelihood the bill would pass. And of course, that's what transpired. But it was always my belief that the NDP caucus was very supportive of the Far North Act. In fact, when the private member's bill was introduced by a member of the Conservative official opposition, it was no surprise to me that the NDP voted with the Liberals to maintain the Far North Act and to not repeal that piece of legislation. I think it's important to note that, Speaker, because when you want some power, when you want some juice around this place and then you get it, all of a sudden there are consequences.

The other one I would mention is the Green Energy Act. There was a private member's bill introduced by a Conservative member. I think the intent of that was to repeal, as well, although I can't recall for sure the detail of the Green Energy Act private member's bill. Again, the NDP members voted in concert with the Liberals to maintain the Green Energy Act.

I just mention that in the context of the minority Parliament that we found ourselves in last week. The ground has now shifted a little bit, obviously, since the resignation of the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. Things are slightly different but still in a state of flux, I would suggest.

Speaker, the budget—I would like to just give a little bit of how we found ourselves here today. When we were elected in 2003, we listed, I think quite rightly, three different deficits that we felt we had inherited from the

previous administration: an infrastructure deficit, a services deficit and a financial deficit. People will remember that when we arrived in 2003, we had a \$5.5-billion deficit. Interestingly enough, it was actually hidden going into the election. Many will remember that there was a denial that there was any deficit at all. Of course, it was later confirmed by the Auditor General and led us to invoke new legislation that will not allow that to happen again. It will require the Auditor General to review the books and the state of the finances in the province of Ontario and give a snapshot of those six months or so before any election, so that we will never again see that situation reoccur.

But we inherited a \$5.5-billion deficit in 2003. We took, I think, two years to retire that deficit and bring us back into a balanced position, which took us to about 2005. Then we ran three consecutive balanced budgets. Speaker, that took us to 2007-08. Of course, we all know what occurred in 2008: the greatest recession since the Great Depression. Thirty million to 40 million jobs worldwide were lost. I think it's important to mention that. Sometimes here, and certainly in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, where the forestry situation was obvious to all of us, in terms of how it was directly affected by the global recession—but it was global. I think it's important to remember that: 30 million to 40 million people, give or take, lost their jobs in 2008-09.

Ontario, of course, was affected on a scale, I would say, relative to most jurisdictions in Canada. At that time, Ontario represented about 40% of the economy, and a big chunk of that total of 100% of our economy was related to the manufacturing sector. Of course, the manufacturing sector was more impacted, I would say, by the recession than other sectors, for a variety of reasons, one being that the manufacturing sector exports most of its products into the United States. With the rise in the Canadian dollar and with the recession and the collapse of the American economy, obviously the markets for those products were disappearing, and they were disappearing very quickly. So here in Ontario we had a very significant challenge—I would say perhaps more impactful here in Ontario than some other jurisdictions—given the largesse of our economy that was dedicated to the manufacturing sector.

In my neck of the woods in northern Ontario, the forestry sector was very much affected, as I've mentioned already. All forestry jurisdictions, however, in Canada, the major ones—and there are primarily three, those being BC, Quebec and Ontario—were affected almost in similar numbers. In fact, BC and Quebec lost jobs slightly higher than Ontario did in forestry, anywhere from 10,000 to 12,000 jobs, but the decimation of the industry was huge. It was not cyclical, as has been the past history; it was fundamental. We all know we've seen a shift in demand for products like newsprint. It's just not the same as it used to be, with the electronic age. We're not sure if that particular product will ever see the days or the demand that it had in the past.

Nevertheless, the industry has survived, and on the sawmilling side I would suggest that the collapse of the housing industry in the United States was the single biggest factor, as well as the appreciation of the Canadian dollar. The sawmills up in my neck of the woods, 90% to 95% of their product was exported into the American market—90% to 95%. That market simply collapsed. There's a really interesting statistic—and we all have too many statistics in our head—that there are more houses for sale in the United States still today than there are houses existing in all of Canada. We all remember the subprime mortgage crisis, the collapse of the economy in the US. Obviously these factors directly impact the ability of a sawmill to have somebody who would buy their product. That's a bit of the history. That's a bit of how we got here. Of course, through 2008 and 2009 we began to invest heavily, especially through our infrastructure programs.

This is an austerity budget. The member who spoke before me mentioned, and I think it bears repeating, that as members of the Legislature we have tried to lead by example. I don't know how many people are aware, but we had, as MPPs, frozen our wages for three years, going back three years from today, and we have extended that freeze for a further two years. By the time that wraps up, it will mean that the MPPs in the province of Ontario—and I've never heard one person complain about that; I think that's a good sign. By the time this concludes, it will have been five years that the MPPs in the province of Ontario have taken a wage freeze. I think it's something we should mention.

I would mention as well, Speaker, that one of the biggest misconceptions in Ontario—and I think all members can relate to this—is that MPPs in Ontario don't have a pension plan. People seem to think we do, and that's neither here nor there. But given the context that we're in, I would just mention it. We always get mixed up; the feds have it, of course, I think after six years. Is it after six years that—

0940

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: After six years.

Mr. Bill Mauro: You become eligible immediately after six years if you're a federal member. In Ontario, we do not have a pension plan. But that's just a small point.

Speaker, what I would like to talk a bit about today as well is this is an austerity budget. I think it's important to highlight some of what we have protected.

Since 2003, health care and education have remained the two main priorities of our government, and I think if you polled Ontarians just at any point in time, health care and education would either be in the top two only, or you might see them in the top three from time to time. Obviously, the economy finds its way into that mix, but health care and education are always two of the highest priorities of most people in the province.

I want to just run down a few numbers. I won't give too many numbers, but it really is remarkable. People wonder, "Where does your money go? What do you spend your money on?" These are big numbers. Here's

an example of where they go. I think some of these numbers are very relevant, given that we are in negotiations with the education sector and we are in negotiations with the Ontario Medical Association. These are difficult times. I think some of these numbers will put a little bit of context on where we've come from and where we're trying to go in the future.

In health care today, there are 3,400 more doctors working in Ontario than when we came to government in 2003. That's a lot of money; that's a big investment. There are over 12,000 more nurses working today than there were in 2003, when we came to government. Some 2.1 million more people in Ontario have access to a primary care provider than was the case when we came to government in 2003. I want to speak just a bit about that one. For me, as a northern member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, that's important, and I want to underscore that point. Northern communities like mine, rural communities, not just in Ontario but all across Canada, have chronically had an issue and a challenge maintaining a large enough complement of primary care providers in their communities. This is a decades-long challenge; this is not something that occurred just when we arrived in government in 2003. In my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, there were high numbers of what were described as orphan patients, those being people who did not have access to a primary care provider.

In 2003, when you used the words “primary care provider,” that meant simply a physician. Some 2.1 million people today have access to a primary care provider that they did not in 2003. This is a huge move forward. In my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, while there are still people who do not have that access, there are thousands and thousands more who do. We've accomplished that in a few ways. The creation of nurse-practitioner-led clinics, a new model of care: We've revamped and expanded the scope of practice for nurse practitioners, and that model of care is providing access to a primary care provider for thousands of those orphan patients. About two blocks away from my constituency office in Thunder Bay, there exists a nurse practitioner clinic that has 3,200 people rostered at that particular clinic—3,200 people who, before that clinic opened, did not have access to a primary care provider.

Our family health team model: I have two or three of them in my riding alone. My colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North has two or three in his, as well as a nurse practitioner clinic. The combination of that model with the NP clinics, with the addition of all of these additional doctors, has made a huge impact in terms of making sure we have access to primary care. And the physicians, I would say, and the health care professionals, love the family health team model.

Some 2.1 million people, 3,400 doctors, 12,000 nurses: That's a lot of money. People wonder where your money goes. Well, that's where it's going, a lot of it, and that's because we see, as a government, health care is certainly our number one priority.

A couple of small things in my riding, specific to my riding, of investments in health care: an angioplasty program in Thunder Bay that is seeing thousands of people now get that life-saving procedure done locally and not having to fly to southern Ontario; and a small piece that I'm very proud of is vans that we have funded to the NorWest Community Health Centre and the staffing that goes with those vans, allowing them to distribute and provide care and access in my rural communities like out in Shebandowan or Kakabeka, where the van actually now will make a monthly or bimonthly visit, out into the rural areas 30, 60, 80 miles away. Many of those people would not have been able to or found the capacity to come into the city of Thunder Bay for that care—just small examples, those ones being smaller examples, of investments in health care that are providing better care for people.

On the education side, Speaker, I mentioned how we've maintained our investments in the education sector through this budget—13,700 more support staff working in our schools. Anywhere from 8,500 to 10,000, and I'm not sure about this number; some people tell me it's even higher—but up to 10,000 more teachers working in the province of Ontario today than was the case when we came to government in 2003. This is a huge investment in education; and 200,000 more post-secondary spaces in our colleges and universities today than there was in 2003. I'm told that each of those spaces has a cost of about \$10,000. You wonder where your money is going? In Thunder Bay, a new law school will be coming.

I want to go back to those teaching positions, though, and make one point, again, understanding that there are some sensitivities around this issue as the negotiations are going on with our education partners. Out of the 10,000 new teaching positions, I would suggest that many of those are very young, newly graduated teachers. They are people who've probably only been teaching for three to five years. Many of them are probably 24, 26 or 30 years of age. I would suggest that they are the people who are represented in this 10,000 number. Where do they come from? Well, they came primarily from two places: one, our commitment to smaller class sizes. It is important to note that the Drummond report recommended that we eliminate the cap; we maintained the cap, which exhibits our continuing commitment to education. We maintained the cap, which maintains those teaching positions, and we maintained, as well, full-day kindergarten and the commitment to roll it out and fully implement it across the province of Ontario.

I would say to the younger teachers and to their parents, aunts, uncles and neighbours: Those younger teachers, many of them in that 10,000 number, are working today because of our commitment to education more broadly, but more specifically our commitment to smaller class sizes and to full-day kindergarten. I would say that it was interesting to note that some of the criticisms of the budget that were coming from members of the official opposition were around full-day kindergarten. I say it was interesting because, only six months earlier, in

the election of 2011, the Conservatives were very much committed, apparently, to maintaining and rolling out full-day kindergarten, and then just six months later, suddenly that commitment had vanished, the context being that in the election of 2011, their commitment was the same as ours in terms of the timeline to achieve a balanced budget position in the province of Ontario, that being 2017-18. So I'm not sure how that flows.

The last two pieces on our commitment to education that I would mention—30% off the tuition grant. Some 30,000 post-secondary students will be eligible for this. We just had a little announcement yesterday reminding those graduating from high school who are going directly into a college or university to ensure they're aware of this program and make sure they do what's necessary to make themselves eligible and receive this grant.

The second piece in education is something that I think is easy to forget about: our Second Career program that we brought forward after the recession hit. Some 55,000 people have accessed that particular program. I can think of a number of circumstances where I've been in the company of people who were laid-off workers, some of them who had not been in school for 20 or 30 years and who, through the capacity that was created with the Second Career program, were able to financially find their way back into school and come out of it on the other end with a job. Many of them in my neck of the woods of Thunder Bay–Atikokan are finding themselves working, making good money in the mining sector, which is really getting ready to roll. In fact, I would suggest that it already has begun to really roll.

A few things that I would mention as well—an austerity budget that we have managed to maintain, specific to northern Ontario.

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Right now, in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I would say the lowest or one of the lowest unemployment rates in the province—5.2%, the last number announced. Our number has consistently been one of the lowest for the last three years. I have felt it. I've known it. I've been a little bit reluctant to talk about it because as a politician, you don't want to sound too Pollyannaish—people dismiss you sometimes. But people in the community are now starting to feel that they're getting it on their own—5.2%.

The northern Ontario heritage fund: When we came in 2003, I was tasked at that time by the minister of the day to travel across the province. We revamped that entire program; we made it more focused on private sector job creation. We've taken the fund from \$60 million up to \$100 million. That started in 2007. That represents an additional \$100 million, not total dollars, from 2007 to 2011 that we invested in northern Ontario through that one program—100 million additional dollars by going from \$60 million to \$100 million. That's on top of the \$240 million—\$60 million per year times four years—plus an extra \$100 million just through one program. That's \$340 million invested in northern Ontario, through the northern Ontario heritage fund—a commitment that

we made as a Liberal government to the needs of northern Ontario. I thank all members of our northern caucus, who worked very hard to ask for and get those—not only maintaining the northern Ontario heritage fund, but increasing it, as I've said, from \$60 million to \$100 million through recessionary times. It would have been very easy to take that money and stick it into the general revenue fund like occurred under the third party in the early 1990s.

Also, we have seen record investments through our Northern Highways Program over the course of the last number of years. Up to 2003, when we formed government, the single highest year of financial investment in northern highways was about \$230 million or \$250 million. That was the single highest year. In 2009 or 2010, our Northern Highways Program topped out at about \$770 million. Last year, I believe we were somewhere in the \$680-million range. That's northern highways money only. The people in the ridings of Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Thunder Bay–Superior North are very clear that they are seeing at least one project move forward that they've been asking for for about 30 years, and that's the four-laning of the Trans-Canada Highway between Thunder Bay and Nipigon, made possible by these huge investments in our Northern Highways Program.

I was up at NOMA in Kenora last week, and I've since met and talked with a few people who have driven back from Kenora to Thunder Bay, and they remarked to me how surprised they were to see how many additional passing lanes there were and the condition of the highway that exists between Kenora and Thunder Bay. That speaks very directly and tangibly to the investments that we've been making in northern highways in Ontario since we came to government in 2003.

One of the other pieces that we protected in this budget was what I refer to as the NIER program, the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate program. That is providing huge subsidies for our largest energy users in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Resolute Forest Products, formerly AbitibiBowater, is receiving this particular program. As a northern Liberal caucus, we fought very hard for this particular program. This budget maintained the program. Again, it's another example of a program that the Drummond report recommended should be removed. He did not think it was a good idea.

The Ontario clean energy benefit—another example of a recommendation by Mr. Drummond that it should be removed. Our northern Liberal caucus worked very hard to get that. That's the 10% reduction off your energy bills on a monthly basis, right off the bottom line—again, maintained in this budget during difficult times, a commitment to northern Ontario.

As I mentioned just a second ago, last week I was in Kenora. I flew up on Friday. NOMA, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, held their conference. It was a pleasure to be there. I hadn't been to Kenora for a little while. We had three ministers there, as well as myself representing the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. It was a great day.

One of the things I want to talk about that is top of mind not only for those municipal reps, but all people in northern Ontario, certainly in my neck of the woods, is mining, and a bit more specifically, the Ring of Fire. We have come in for some criticism insofar as people are not seeing a public display or a public acknowledgement, at least not to their satisfaction, of the work that's going on related to the Ring of Fire.

I've mentioned a number of times in the media, when I've spoken to the media about this, a concern that there wasn't enough in the budget about it. I tell them, quite frankly, "Look, the budget is not the place where you are going to see details relative to negotiations that are going on with any company about any specific project." I think it's as simple as that. However, there is a great deal of anxiety and excitement about the potential for what exists, not only in the Ring of Fire area but in mining generally.

Now, you would have seen, and I reminded my friends at NOMA, that our budget spoke to a belief that we will see anywhere from eight to 10 new mines opened in northern Ontario over the course of the next 10 years, and when I had the opportunity to talk at NOMA, I referenced at least four of those. Of course, in the mining industry, nothing is ever guaranteed; I'm not standing here today saying for certain these mines are going to open. But all signs point very clearly to a strong possibility that this is going to happen. The people in northern Ontario are very aware of those.

The other point I made to people when it came to the mining sector is that there is a bit of an unfortunate assumption that the employment only comes when the mine opens, but I can tell you, Speaker, in my riding right now of Thunder Bay–Atikokan—I would say all of Thunder Bay and northern Ontario—there's probably right now in our city anywhere from 300, 500, 700 more jobs today that weren't there three and four years ago, related directly to the mining industry—that weren't there three or four years ago—and that's without any new mines having opened in the last three or four years, the point being that there's a tremendous amount of work going on.

If you go to our engineering firms in Thunder Bay, they are bursting at the seams, and a lot of the work that they're doing is related to the mining industry. If you talk to consultants, you will see there's a lot of consulting work going on related to the mining industry. There are drilling companies that I've had the pleasure of meeting that have 50, 60, 70 people working for them, and these young people who are working on these drills are making a lot of money. They're making a very good living. They're adding to the total—the geologists, the prospectors. It's all there, and so it is a very good thing indeed.

I'll tell you, Speaker, one of the things that does come up from time to time specifically related to the Ring of Fire is a policy piece that was in the NDP platform in the last election. It raised the ire of a couple of them when I spoke to this last week, but it was there, and I'm looking for some clarity from them on this particular piece. In

there, on a website of their environmental critic, there was a point that said there would be no development north of 51, which would effectively shut down the Ring of Fire or any development north of 51.

When my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North put out a press release related to that issue during the last election, for the first time in two or three years, within two or three days, that particular piece was removed from the website. So this comes up. People in northern Ontario are aware of that particular policy piece that at least existed then with the NDP, and they are very concerned about the official position of that today. I think it's fair to ask for some clarification on it.

The other thing that I mentioned to the people at NOMA when we were talking specifically about the Ring of Fire—much of the conversation is about the cost of electricity in the province of Ontario. I've reminded them and used as an example what I spoke to earlier, the NIER program, the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate program. That's still there. It speaks very clearly to our willingness to work with our large industrial partners to make sure that the work happens in Ontario, that the business investment comes to Ontario.

But I spoke to them further, and I said, "Please don't view the Ring of Fire development only in the context of one policy piece." I talked to them. Remember as well that when a company like Cliffs or other large industrial companies, whoever they may be, are looking about potential investment in the province of Ontario, they don't just think about one thing. They're also thinking about our corporate taxation rates. I remind people about our province, in Ontario, given what we have done over the course of the last three or four years bringing forward a very competitive corporate tax structure. Large industrials think about that.

I reminded them about the HST, which came in with some great difficulty, which the Conservatives used to support, but then they didn't, and the NDP, in their platform, confirmed they would keep. I reminded people that in the mining sector, people like Cliffs are aware of the HST and they view corporate taxation, the HST policy, as pieces that also infuse their decision in terms of where they're going to invest.

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The third piece that I talked about with them when I talked about the Ring of Fire, and mining specifically, is infrastructure. I said right off the top, at the very beginning of my comments, that when we came into government in 2003, we talked at length about three deficits that we were facing, the infrastructure deficit being one of them. I don't think there's a member in this place who hasn't seen large infrastructure investments flow to their municipalities since 2003, and that's because, after identifying infrastructure as a deficit in Ontario in 2003, we went forward and, over the course of seven, maybe eight years, we invested \$60 billion in infrastructure in the province of Ontario. That money went a long way to significant job creation in all of the ridings represented here in this Legislative Assembly and, I would say, made

many communities more ready to attract investment than previously was the case.

What did we do in 2011? We further built upon those investments by confirming a further commitment to infrastructure, going forward for three years, of \$30 billion or \$31 billion—I forget the number exactly—that we are further committing, that we will invest in infrastructure over the course of the next three years.

Now, again, given that this is an austerity budget, the \$30 billion or \$31 billion over the next three years is committed, maintained and conserved in this particular budget. I'm tying that back, of course, to what I'm discussing here, being the Ring of Fire. When Cliffs and others communities are looking at where they're going to invest, they know very clearly that this is a government that is willing to come to the table with help on the infrastructure front.

When we talk about the Ring of Fire specifically, I remind my friends about our energy policies. I remind my friends about our corporate taxation policies. I remind my friends about the HST policy that large industrials find very attractive. I also remind them very much about our infrastructure investments over the last eight years and those investments that will still be coming forward over the course of the next three years, guaranteed, conserved in this budget.

Speaker, I see that my time is up. I want to thank you for your time this morning. I appreciate the opportunity.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened carefully to the one hour on this, shared by the Minister of Economic Development and the members from Etobicoke Centre and Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

It's important to note that the minister hasn't actually responded to this, but this is the document here, a pretty onerous document here—it's 327 pages. The devil usually is in the detail. Look, there are 69 different schedules here. All of the schedules provide a framework structure for creating more regulations and red tape. If you look at the language, it's important to note that much of the language in the bill itself was not discussed by the members, who were talking about how they see the world.

Almost every section in each schedule starts with the provision "The minister may make regulations that apply" in specific cases, so there's a lot of power that's not actually in the bill; it's in the regulations. That's what happens when you have these omnibus bills that are putting in place things—and if you really want some detail here, look at schedule 19. I've had complaints on that from my riding. These are people that specifically work in that sector. Schedule 19 deals with the Endangered Species Act, and it gives exemptions. That whole section is donated to giving Dalton McGuinty exemptions in dealing with endangered species. So the devil is in the detail, for sure.

Somebody that's listening this morning would have gotten a lot of the prepared notes that were prepared for the three speakers—who read the notes very well, I might

say; hardly a slip in the wording—sticking on the message of Dalton McGuinty that everything is okay; don't worry, be happy. In fact, everything is quite the opposite to what he says. It's almost like a contradiction. We are in serious trouble. This thing here is another kind of an open book on a new set of rules for the economy of Ontario. Just read it. There are 69 different schedules.

In fact, in my terse review of the thing—because I like to spend some detail—it amends 50 pieces of legislation. In other words, you can't read this without having 50 statutes beside you that are being amended. This is a shell game, and I think it's—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was actually quite interested in the discussion from the government side about their austerity program. Actually, it's almost laughable. We have Ornge and eHealth. If we did a forensic audit of every ministry in the government, we wouldn't need an austerity program, with all the money they've wasted on consultants and all these scams that have gone on.

Then the member from Thunder Bay talks about how great it is up there. Why would you be closing a railway or attacking a railway that services the north, will service the Ring of Fire, will bring raw materials out of the Ring of Fire? Are they going to put them on a plane? I don't think so.

Let's talk about hydro. The member is well aware that the hydro costs in the north are three times that of Manitoba and three times that of Quebec.

They also attacked the forest industry. There are 11 communities that have shut down. He said he visited Kenora. I wonder if he went to the paper mills that used to be in Kenora until this government devastated it with their hydro costs. People in Kenora are sitting on their front porch watching logs roll by to be processed in Manitoba.

When he says everything's great and this government does a great program, it is almost laughable, because it isn't. It's a disaster in the waiting, and it's going to continue until they start lowering hydro costs, they stop attacking transportation in the north and they start putting people back to work.

He said something about the NDP, a little clause or something he'd read; he'd dug real deep and found something that was negative about the NDP going after the Ring of Fire. We are well aware that the Ring of Fire will provide jobs for northerners. We're 100% behind that.

So when I have to sit here and listen to this "deflect, deflect" nonsense, it really is irritating, because they're not being honest with the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen very carefully to the introductory remarks of the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation and the members for Etobicoke Centre and Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

I always take the time, sometimes, above the partisan debate. I follow Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, very closely. He is beyond politics—a highly respected person here in Canada and, indeed, around the world. I recommend that all members of the House get a copy of his speech that he delivered April 2, 2012, to the 125th anniversary of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. In that speech, he provided a detailed analysis of Canada exporting in the post-crisis world.

One of the things that he talked about—and it was mentioned by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan. He said in his speech, “Between 2000 and 2007, Canada’s unit labour costs rose 80% relative to our trading partners” because of the rapid appreciation of our currency. He said that never before has any economy experienced such a rapid appreciation of their currency in such a short period of time. In his analysis, he said that that had put tremendous pressure on Canada and Ontario’s economy.

You don’t have to take my word for it. In his analysis, he said, “Our labour market has bounced back too. All of the 430,000 jobs lost through the recession had been recovered as of early last year, and a further 180,000 jobs have been added since then. Most of the jobs created have been in the private sector and in industries paying above-average wages.”

The wisdom of us delaying the next round of our corporate income tax cut: On page 9 of his speech, he said, “Canadian corporate balance sheets are extremely healthy, with record low leverage and very high levels of liquidity.”

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

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It’s interesting to sit on this side and listen to some of the spin. I had the opportunity, being a new mayor in 2003, just after this government took over, and sitting at ROMA and seeing the amount of money that they went and spent that was unbudgeted that year: a total of about \$3 billion. When they talk about the \$4.5 billion that they inherited, they don’t talk about the \$3 billion that they added to it.

I’m not sure what they added between the month of October and the month of March, but I imagine it was considerable if they added \$3 billion in two weeks.

I remember our then member of Parliament saying that he was so busy making announcements, he was going to have to carry them over into April, but the money was flowing so it counted in last year’s budget. It was just an example of the truth that we don’t expect out of this government anymore.

We talk about hydro rates. We’re at a point where we have the highest in North America, but they’ve got a solution: They’re going to take the big companies and they’re going to reduce it for them, and the rest of the province will pay the difference. It’s like nobody has to pay these bills.

I mean, their own consultant came out and warned them about their spending. Our leader, Tim Hudak, met

with them before the budget, with the Premier, and laid out what we needed to support this budget. Of course, they refuse to admit that he did meet, but he did meet and actually followed up with a letter saying that we needed a couple of things: control the spending and jobs. That’s all we asked for and we got a document that has nothing, none of these.

It’s a spin when you go through this. They take credit for some of the new mining jobs in Thunder Bay. Well, it’s great. The price of gold has gone up 10 times. I would hope there would be a lot more jobs in these areas. We’re not talking about \$300 an ounce; we’re talking about something well over \$1,000. This is the spin we get every day, and it’s time—

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, I’d like to thank the members from Durham, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Peterborough and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

When we talk about the deficit, I always like to just put a bit of context around it, because, of course, those who will criticize us will talk about and explain out to the people who they’re speaking to as if Ontario is the only jurisdiction in the world that had some challenges when it came to the recession and maintaining balanced-budget positions. The person and the government that I always like to compare us to is Stephen Harper and the federal Conservative government of Canada.

Mr. Harper, as I like to describe him, is probably—and this isn’t critical; this is just my view of him—the most right-wing ideologue in the history of Canada who we’ve ever had as a Prime Minister. I mean, he was from the Reform Party, and then they became the Conservative Party, and he became Prime Minister. I congratulate him for that. But we do know that as a Conservative and as a former Reformer, there has probably never been anybody who has been more ideologically predisposed against taking on deficits and debt than Mr. Harper and the federal Conservative government. Well, guess what happened to them during the recession, right? Just guess what happened to them.

Never mind Greece, never mind Spain, never mind France, never mind Ireland, never mind the United States, never mind all these other major democracies and capitalist countries around the planet who went into major deficit during the course of the recession; just compare yourself to the federal Conservative government with the most right-wing, ideologically opposed economist Prime Minister who we’ve ever had in our history, who took on a very, very large deficit. So if you need any information or education around the challenge that came to all governments during the course of the recession, I don’t think you have to look too far for comparisons. Thank you very much, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being close to—this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to introduce Jana Smith from Barrie, also a law student at the University of Windsor, and welcome her to the chamber this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? The member for—

Mr. Frank Klees: Newmarket–Aurora.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, no. I was looking behind you, and the gentleman now has sat, so I will recognize the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to extend a welcome to Mr. Farid Wassef from Whitchurch-Stouffville. Farid, no doubt, is well known to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham as well. He is a very highly respected pharmacist from Whitchurch-Stouffville. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am very pleased to welcome, from the Asthma Plan of Action's work-related asthma committee, Dr. Gary Liss; the director of respiratory health programs at the Ontario Lung Association, Carole Madeley; the provincial manager of government relations at the Ontario Lung Association, Elizabeth Harvey; and Kait Wallace, public affairs coordinator at the Ontario Lung Association.

Speaker, I have other people I'd like to welcome. Can I keep going? I will, yes. I'm very pleased that SEIU's, the Service Employees International Union's, registered practical nurse day is today. And of course, today is the OMA thank-a-doctor day, and I know we all want to thank our doctors today.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I want to welcome to the west members' gallery the family of Thornhill page Andrew Mohan: his sister Veronica is here; his brother Christopher; and his mother, Deborah. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On April 24, 2012, the member from Burlington, Mrs. McKenna, rose on a point of privilege concerning the impact of automated telephone calls on her ability to carry out her MPP duties. The government House leader, Mr. Milloy, the member for Parkdale–High Park, Ms DiNovo, the member for Simcoe–Grey, Mr. Wilson, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Mr. Yakabuski, and the member for Cambridge, Mr. Leone, also spoke to this matter.

Having had an opportunity to review the Hansard for that day, the information provided to me in the notice and the relevant procedural authorities, I am now prepared to rule on the matter.

The member's point of privilege relates to automated telephone calls sent to thousands of constituents in her riding. The calls, which she claims are sponsored by the Ontario Liberal Party, indicate that the member was, at the behest of her party, planning to vote against the forthcoming budget motion, thereby forcing an expensive, unwanted election and jeopardizing funding for a local

hospital. The calls, which indicated that the member needed to put families first, allowed constituents to share their concerns with her by pressing number 3 on their telephone keypad; this action would automatically connect them to the phone number of the member's office. The member's office was inundated with over 1,500 telephone calls that swamped its telephone line and voice mail system.

According to the member, this resulted in the following: Some constituents could not reach the member; the member had to deal with the telephone calls generated by the automated calls, instead of telephone calls from other constituents; and there were service complaints that unjustly damaged her reputation with her constituents.

The member was of the view that the automated calls obstructed and interfered with her parliamentary duties and therefore established a prima facie case of privilege.

Before determining whether there is a prima facie case on the basis of obstruction, let me first say that I will not assess the veracity or the tone of the allegations or the opinions made in the automated calls. It is not for the Speaker to say that they are misleading, inaccurate, false or inflammatory. Given the political nature of their workplace, members are often exposed to criticisms for their actions or, indeed, intended actions. Dealing with allegations, opinions and criticisms is part of the job of an MPP.

That being said, there can be no doubt that obstruction or interference with the member in respect of his or her parliamentary duties can be a matter of privilege. Many of the relevant authorities on the nature of obstruction were mentioned by the members who spoke to the matter on Tuesday last. I will not refer to them in this ruling. However, what needs to be said is that a member's constituency casework and other constituency responsibilities, while important, are by their very nature distinct from the member's parliamentary responsibilities.

As Speaker Carr indicated on page 30 of the Journals for April 26, 2001, "Speakers have consistently found—supported by the procedural authorities in a multitude of precedents—that privilege attaches only to a member's parliamentary duties, and not subsidiary duties away from Parliament."

Furthermore, citation 92 in the sixth edition of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms states as follows: "A valid claim of privilege in respect to interference with a member must relate to the member's parliamentary duties and not to the work the member does in relation to that member's constituency."

The privilege that protects the members in respect of what he or she says and does in this House and its committees is known as parliamentary privilege. A privilege known as constituency privilege does not exist in Ontario or any other jurisdiction that subscribes to the Westminster model of Parliament. To those who would claim that this demarcation relegates members' constituency responsibilities to a courtesy or an inferior status, I would say that parliamentary privilege provides members with a set of legal rights and exemptions that more than 13

million other Ontarians do not have. The glass is half-full, not half-empty.

The member for Burlington states that her reputation has been damaged because of the numerous service-related complaints that were made after the automated calls interfered with her office's usual routine. I would agree with the member that damage to a member's reputation can amount to obstruction if the member is prevented from carrying out his or her parliamentary functions.

I would make the following observations about the application of this proposition to the facts in the case at hand: First, the member did not indicate how the remarks in and the unwelcome consequences of the automated calls prevented her from carrying out parliamentary duties. For example, the member did not claim that the automated calls prevented her from speaking in the House on the budget motion or from voting on the motion. The calls only appear to have affected her non-parliamentary duties, which, as I've already indicated, are not protected by parliamentary privilege. The best that can be said is that the impact on the member's parliamentary duties has been indirect or tangential, which is not enough to make a case for obstruction based on damage to the member's reputation.

Second, many of the rulings mentioned in the House of Commons Procedure and Practice that are authority for the proposition that damage to a member's reputation can amount to obstruction deal with MPs' use of Commons mailing privileges to send misleading information to another MP's constituents. In the case at hand, however, there is no indication that assembly resources were used to produce or disseminate the automated calls.

Third, the member for Burlington refers to a remark made in a 1985 ruling of Speaker Bosley of the Canadian House of Commons. That ruling is about an advertisement that identified a former MP as an MP. This is not the situation in the case at hand.

Fourth, I have reviewed the December 13, 2011, Canadian House of Commons ruling involving an incident where an MP's constituents were the subject of an organized telephone campaign survey that, in the view of the MP, negatively affected his reputation. I have also reviewed the March 6, 2012, Canadian House of Commons ruling dealing with an incident in which an MP's office was inundated with telephone calls, emails and faxes that, in the view of the MP, hindered him and his staff from serving his constituents and that prevented constituents from contacting him in a timely matter. In both cases, Speaker Scheer ruled that a prima facie case of privilege was not established because the MP had been able to perform his parliamentary duties.

For these reasons, a prima facie case of privilege has not been established.

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That being said, I have considerable sympathy for the difficult spot that the member for Burlington found herself in last week. Like other members, I have no doubt that she strives to serve her constituents to the best of her

abilities, regardless of how they contact her. Although I cannot prevent an outside organization from using automated technology to facilitate constituents' contact with their member, I would encourage members and parties to disassociate themselves from any technologically based communication that is inspired by political calculus that detracts from civil discourse on public business, just as I would discourage any member from crossing into another member's riding by any means, for the purpose expressly to discredit that member. In other words, take the high road. Reach for the top, not the bottom.

I thank the member for Burlington, the government House leader, the member from Parkdale-High Park, the member from Simcoe-Grey, the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and the member for Cambridge for speaking to this matter.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Last week's credit rating action by S&P and credit rating downgrade by Moody's were a scathing indictment of this government's managerial competence. But sadly, your managerial incompetence reaches much further than that. Exhibit A: Ornge. Despite warning after warning from this side of the House, stakeholders and whistle-blowers at Ornge, you let Ornge carry on, business as usual.

Premier, you're either implicated or incompetent. Which is it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always a pleasure to receive these uplifting questions, Speaker. It must take a lot of energy every day to get up and be in a bad mood and to wish for rain. I say to my honourable colleagues in the official opposition, to twist a phrase a little bit: Into every life a little sunshine must fall.

I say to my honourable colleague that they, of course, have a different interpretation of the credit rating agencies. I thought they were very clear in saying that we have done a very good job in terms of the assumptions that we have made, in terms of the targets that we have set. They have expressed some concerns about our capacity as a minority government to deliver on our plan, which is again why I extend the hand of co-operation to the official opposition to work with us to ensure that together we can deliver on our plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Premier, just like the scandals that happened on your watch at eHealth, OLG, Cancer Care Ontario, the Niagara Parks Commission and the LHINs, the Ornge scandal demonstrates that you've lost all ability to oversee government agencies.

The scandals at eHealth, OLG and the LHINs were blown out by freedom-of-information requests initiated by the Ontario PC caucus. We dragged the details of

these scandals to light while you kicked, screamed and fought us at every step.

Is the reason your new air ambulance legislation blocks freedom-of-information requests because you know you don't have the managerial competence to keep an eye on Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, my honourable colleague, on behalf of his party, claims that they have a genuine interest in enhancing oversight and transparency associated with Ornge. Yet we have a bill before this very Legislature, we would like to move forward with debate, but on both occasions that we've done that, they've chosen instead to ring the bells, to act in an obstructionist way and to prevent us from engaging in a positive, constructive debate and working together. Sadly, it's not just on the matter of Ornge; it's on so many other bills as well.

I say to my honourable colleagues that there is an additional responsibility that they bear in the context of a minority government, and it is to find a way to work with the government, to do the people's business. Let's move that particular bill forward, and let's move the so many others forward that Ontarians want us to get forward.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: I'm glad, Premier, you mentioned ringing the bells, because for months, the PC and NDP caucuses have been calling for an all-party select committee to investigate Ornge, to find out what happened and to ensure it never happens again. At every step of the way, the Premier, the government House leader, the Minister of Health and the Liberal members on the public accounts committee have stood in the way.

Is the reason you won't call an all-party select committee to investigate Ornge because you don't want us to find out the true cost of your managerial incompetence?

Applause.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We witness yet another standing no, Speaker.

My honourable colleague will know that the committee has already held four days of hearings, they've heard from 22 witnesses, they've received so far 15 hours of testimony and I expect that that committee will continue its work for some time to come.

But on the matter of being obstructionist, I want again to draw to your attention the fact that on the Accepting Schools Act, the official opposition has decided to ring the bells 10 times. When it comes to a bill that would better manage the rent increases in Ontario to better protect millions of tenants, they've rung the bells 10 times. On the Family Caregiver Leave Act, something we'd like to move ahead with on behalf of all of our families, they have rung the bells six times.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. All members come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will now identify individuals.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Last, but hardly least, on the matter of our air ambulance act, those important amendments we'd like to introduce, they've rung the bells twice, Speaker. Again I say to my honourable colleagues, if you were a little less obstructionist and a little bit more constructive, we'd do a lot of work together.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. At its April 25 hearing into the Ornge scandal, the public accounts committee heard from Lynne Golding, a partner and director of the health law practice group with Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP. Ms. Golding testified under oath that she was one of a team of lawyers who provided advice to Ornge on a range of significant matters, including the 2005 performance agreement and its federal incorporation. Does the minister have any reason to believe that Ms. Golding would be anything but truthful in her sworn testimony?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier indicated, the public accounts committee proceeds—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton and the member from Leeds—Grenville, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —with the matter of Ornge. There are hearings going on; they're hearing from witnesses. But if the honourable member wishes to conduct hearings on the floor of this Legislature during question period, if he wants to talk about what Lynne Golding spoke about at committee, then let's talk about Lynne Golding and the work that she did with Guy Giorno—two of the most prominent Conservative lawyers in Canada. Here is the advice—

Interjections.

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

Hon. John Milloy: —provided to Chris Mazza. They said that it was fine to refuse putting his \$1.4-million salary on the sunshine list, and he followed that advice and hid that salary. They told him that he didn't have to co-operate with the Auditor General, and he did not. They told him how to create the web of for-profit entities and he followed it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The government House leader fails to tell the total truth. The fact is—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: The fact of the matter is that Ms. Golding also advised Ornge—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You must stand and withdraw.

Mr. Frank Klees: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Frank Klees: The fact of the matter is that Ms. Golding, if the House leader was willing to go just a bit further in reading those transcripts, also said that they advised Ornge to disclose those salaries.

I would like to know this: According to Ms. Golding, it was very clear that the federal incorporation in no way interfered with the Minister of Health intervening at Ornge. In fact, she told the committee that five public hospitals in Ontario did the identical federal incorporation. Why did the minister not act? Is it because she didn't know the truth or that she was misled by her civil servants?

Hon. John Milloy: As I've indicated before, I will take the word of the Auditor General of Ontario, an officer of this Legislature, over that of a lawyer who told Chris Mazza how to hide his \$1.4-million salary.

What did the Auditor General have to say at his March 21 press conference? He said, "The performance agreement was weak and it was not adequate, and it needed to be significantly strengthened. The ministry has stepped in and taken concrete action."

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In the Auditor General's report itself, he says on page 12, "The performance agreement has only two specific and measurable response-time requirements relating to requests for air ambulance services.... The additional corporate entities that Ornge unilaterally created were not covered by the performance agreement...."

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General found significant weaknesses with the performance agreement, which have been addressed by the Minister of Health and are going to be addressed through Bill 50.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I really wish the House leader would attend those meetings so that he would know precisely what's going on there, because he doesn't have the full context, and he's letting people know partially what has happened there. That is not being forthright.

What we heard at that committee is that the ministry took some 10 months to negotiate that contract. It was headed up by Dennis Brown, the lead ministry negotiator. That agreement imposed some 15 pages of covenants on Ornge, on which the ministry could have acted at any time to intervene at Ornge. Those were the facts that were given to the committee.

I'd like to know from the minister: Was she aware of those 15 pages of covenants? Did she stand in this place and say that she had no authority because she really believed that, or was she misled by her own ministry?

Interjections.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, page 16 of the Auditor General's report: The performance agreement "does not allow the ministry to recover any unspent air ambulance funding...." The performance agreement "does not entitle the ministry to access the books and records of any of the entities that Ornge directly controls...."

Mr. Speaker, there were serious weaknesses in terms of the oversight of Ornge. The Minister of Health has taken action to fix it, but the final piece of the puzzle is Bill 50. And when we brought it up for debate yesterday, what did that member and his party do? They rang the bells in an irresponsible, childish manner.

It's time they stood up and joined with us to pass Bill 50 and make sure that we bring forward the types of reforms that will address the problems that have been faced by Ornge.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Today, electricity prices will rise again for Ontario's businesses and residents. Can the Premier tell us how the price of Ontario's electricity compares to the prices in provinces to our east and to our west?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my honourable colleague—and I welcome the question—in an ideal world, we would be as blessed as the provinces are to the east and the west of us when it comes to hydroelectric capacity. But we don't live in that ideal world; we live in this one.

We got to work, busily, shortly after we formed the government. We've invested billions of dollars in new transmission and in new generation. We are shutting down our coal-fired generation. We are cleaning up our air—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —that, in essence, is our plan, and I'm sure my honourable colleague supports it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yes, it's true, Speaker: We used to be blessed with a public power system in the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case.

Manitoba Hydro produced some of the price comparisons today, which tell a tough story for families and businesses in this province. A household in Winnipeg will pay \$73 for electricity this month. The same household in Montreal will pay \$68. But in Toronto, the same family will pay \$119 a month, and in Englehart, Ontario, it's \$143—twice as much.

How does the Premier explain to families that they can save \$800 a year for electricity simply by moving to another province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I draw to my honourable colleague's attention—you know those wooden hydro poles that we see? They don't last forever. Every once in a while, you've got to invest in their repair and

replacement. The same applies to our nuclear generators. It applies to the expansion that we're making at Niagara Falls, the biggest project of its kind in the world.

There are considerable dollars that have to flow in order to make investments in generation and transmission. We've put together more new transmission, in terms of either replacing it or repairing it, that would take us from here to Alaska. We're talking about thousands and thousands of kilometres of new transmission. There's a cost associated with that in order to ensure that we have access to good-quality, reliable power. I'm sure my colleague understands that as well.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For people worried about jobs and making ends meet, the record seems pretty clear: Ontario's private power boondoggles are making life more expensive for people and for businesses. Large industrial users in Toronto are paying the highest rates in the country—literally, \$3 million more a month than in other provinces. Isn't it time for the Premier to consider a different approach?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague that Hydro One and OPG are publicly owned utilities. They're owned by the people of Ontario. The 5% of our electricity bills today that we are receiving as Ontarians is connected to our feed-in tariff program. The increases that we've been experiencing are to ensure that we invested in a lot more transmission and a lot more generation.

The fact of the matter is, it's a little bit more expensive for us to move beyond coal, but we think, in speaking to our families, that that's something that is a worthwhile investment on our part. At the same time, we're creating thousands of new jobs and an exciting new clean energy sector, something that Ontarians are embracing.

ELECTRICITY RESTRUCTURING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. This government intends to move forward with a comprehensive review of the electricity sector, and it's clear that the McGuinty Liberals' private power deals need to be part of that review. Can the Premier assure us that this is going to be the case?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We are taking a look at all aspects of the energy sector to make sure that families and businesses have the power they need, when they need it, at the least possible cost.

I just want to remind all members of the House that today is World Asthma Day, a day when those, and many in this province and this country, who have serious medical illnesses look for clean air. At the heart of the approach we've taken to energy from the time we got elected, we're getting out of coal; we're cleaning up the air; we're making sure people can breathe the clean air and build an exciting new economy along with it.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nepean–Carleton, come to order.

Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: After nearly a decade of growing bureaucracy and a web of private power deals, the government is finally conceding that their plan isn't working. They took a baby step towards reform by merging the IESO and the OPA, but families are still on the hook for private power boondoggles like the mess that happened in Mississauga, where we're paying millions and millions of dollars not to build a power plant.

It's time for a change, Speaker. Is this Premier ready to actually work on fixing the mess in Ontario's electricity system, or are we just going to see more of the same?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know that the leader of the third party will support us as we look everywhere in the electricity sector to find ways to take costs out. She mentioned the two agencies that we're consolidating, and that's important. Take costs out of the system; make it work better.

The two public utilities that we have, OPG and Hydro One: We've already taken more than half a billion dollars of costs out of those, and we will continue to look for more. We have a panel looking at all of the local utilities in the province to see if they can work more effectively. We're benchmarking all of our agencies by international standards to see if we can take costs out. And, of course, we take 10% off the bottom line of every utility bill. That benefits every single family in this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Let me take a moment to remind the government what families actually see. The cost of daily life keeps climbing in this province, and they're feeling like they simply cannot keep up. The jobs that they need are being chased away by high hydro rates. The status quo is not working for them.

Is the Premier ready to actually look at change that makes their lives more affordable, or will this review just be another opportunity for the government to sell off more of our electricity assets and leave people paying the price?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's all about families and businesses and making sure that they have what they need at a price that's reasonable. The 10% clean energy benefit off the bottom line of the bill is something we proposed; the NDP was supportive of 8%. We have an energy and property tax credit, which the NDP voted against. We're taking a look at all of our agencies to take costs out.

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The fact of the matter is that job creation in this province, through a number of measures—energy, but also a reformed tax system—has been very robust; just last month, 46,000 jobs, more than any other province and the rest of the provinces in the country combined. We're very focused on making sure that families have the

job opportunities they need, and we'll continue to pursue it through energy and all other means at our disposal.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, the minister owes this House an explanation. Throughout the investigation into the corruption at Ornge, the minister has defended her mismanagement and failure of leadership by repeatedly making claims that have been one by one refuted and rejected. We've learned that not a single one of the minister's lame excuses has any legitimacy whatsoever. What's worse is that the minister has allowed the Premier and members of her caucus to repeat these fabrications on several occasions, thereby discrediting—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

So I ask the minister: Are you comfortable with having embarrassed the Premier and all of your colleagues on the Liberal side?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The action we've taken to address the problems at Ornge has been pretty significant: completely new leadership, a new performance agreement, and now we have introduced legislation that will put in law the oversight that we require. We'll be able to put in a supervisor. I did not have that power; I will, if we can get Bill 50 passed.

Speaker, the members opposite are much more interested in playing childish political games. They've spent more time ringing bells than they have at public accounts. There's something out of balance. We want to get to work for the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're tired of the excuses. They're bogus.

Let me recap: The minister claims to have fired the board—not true.

Interjections: Not true.

Mr. Todd Smith: The minister claims to have been unaware of the corporate restructuring—not true.

Interjections: Not true.

Mr. Todd Smith: The minister claims to have seen—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask that the question be put without the interventions, please.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The minister claims she wasn't responsible during the election—not true.

Interjections: Not true.

Mr. Todd Smith: The minister claims to have had no authority over Ornge—not true.

Interjections: Not true.

Mr. Todd Smith: The minister claims that since Ornge was federally incorporated, she couldn't intervene—not true.

Interjections: Not true.

Mr. Todd Smith: The minister claims—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am tempted to say "next question," but the next time it happens, I will.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you Mr. Speaker. There's just one more anyway: The minister claims her new legislation increases transparency at Ornge, and we know that's not true.

So I ask her, given that she has zero credibility, that every single one of her lame excuses has been refuted, will she finally provide the House with a straight answer? If she won't, will she resign?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Auditor General, I think, is a highly regarded individual, and I'm relying on the Auditor General to give me advice on the changes we need to make. We are making the changes that the Auditor General recommended, and that includes Bill 50, legislation that you are blocking, that the members opposite are blocking, legislation that does enhance transparency and oversight.

Speaker, they can play games all they want, but I can tell you that we are trying to get the work done that the people of Ontario expect us to do. I wish they would just put the political games aside. Just let it pass and get to committee.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, the Premier recently called Elizabeth Witmer exceptionally qualified to be the chair of the WSIB, but in opposition, this government slammed her policies on injured workers.

In May 1997, the Minister of the Environment said, "If anyone were injured on the job, they're going to find that under the provisions of Bill 99 they're going to be much worse off." The finance minister labelled those WSIB reforms as "an attack on working people" at the time.

How did this government go from calling Ms. Witmer's policies "an attack on working people" to now saying that she's exceptionally qualified for the job?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague that it was only yesterday that we came together and in one voice celebrated the remarkable career of a dedicated public servant, Elizabeth Witmer.

I would also venture to say that the news of Ms. Witmer's appointment as head of the WSIB has been well received by both employers and workers alike. There are some tremendous challenges there associated with the unfunded liability and making sure our workers

are getting the benefits to which they are entitled as a result of being injured on the job.

It's a big job, Speaker, and I can't think of anyone better than Ms. Witmer. I encourage my honourable colleague to continue to lend support to her as she takes on this important job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: There's no doubt that Ms. Witmer has a lot of experience, but we don't share her vision for the WSIB. When the government was sitting on this side of the House, they agreed with us. Here's the member for Eglinton–Lawrence in April 1997: Witmer's WSIB reform is "another attempt to download on to those who can't afford it, another hit from this government which just cares about pleasing their rich friends."

Is the Premier so desperate for a majority government that he's ready to play politics with important positions?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure why my honourable colleague is so eager to pick a fight with Ms. Witmer—he says he doesn't share her vision—because she just got the job. She hasn't even laid out some of the principles that are going to inform her actions. But I think she's a great listener. I think she is very thoughtful. She's always shown herself to be progressive and I think she's going to be very open-minded.

I believe, Speaker, she'd be eager to meet with the honourable member and receive his concerns and listen to them well. I'm sure she'll hear from employers and workers alike as she takes on her responsibility. I think what we owe her, in fairness, is at least a bit of time for her to begin her new responsibilities.

ASTHMA

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, as a physician, I know that in Ontario asthma effects almost one in five children aged zero to nine years. Approximately 8% of Ontario adults have been diagnosed with asthma. In fact, a person born in Ontario has a 34% risk of developing asthma before they reach 80 years of age, and it can be fatal.

Asthma is a significant cause of school and work absenteeism and it is also the most common reason for hospitalization of Ontario's children and places a heavy burden on emergency departments.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: Today being World Asthma Day, what is this government doing to help those in Ontario suffering from asthma?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for her question. I would like to recognize the people from the Ontario Lung Association who are here with us today and thank them for their advocacy and thank them for the work that they are doing.

We do have an exciting project. We're providing \$4.25 million this year for the Asthma Plan of Action. It's an integrated plan led by the Ontario Lung Associa-

tion to improve health outcomes and reduce the burden on our health care system.

The results are nothing short of astounding. Of those served by the primary care asthma program, asthma attacks have been decreased by almost 40%. Emergency department visits have been cut in half, as has absenteeism from work and school. Speaker, this is an exciting research project and we're very pleased with the way it's going.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Minister. I know that my constituents are pleased that this government is taking such strong action to fight asthma.

Minister, one of the single biggest causes of asthma in the province is dirty coal-fired power generation. Coal pollutes the air and makes people sick. In 2003, this government made a commitment to get out of coal-fired power generation. This is the single largest climate change initiative in North America.

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In addition, Ontario's commitment to cleaner sources of energy, like wind, solar and hydro, is ensuring that our children and grandchildren have a brighter and healthier future. This is something my constituents are very proud of.

Minister, can you please share with this House the status of Ontario's efforts to replace dirty coal-fired power generation with cleaner sources by 2014?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, to the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: A very important question by my colleague. On this World Asthma Day, all those suffering with asthma or with any breathing difficulty will be celebrating clean air. We're cleaning up the air by getting out of coal, and I'm pleased to say we'll be out of coal completely by 2014. One of the ways we're doing that is to bring on new, clean, renewable energy. Whether it's wind, solar, bio or hydro, it keeps the air clean.

What does this mean? It means hundreds of thousands fewer illnesses; it means many thousands fewer hospital admissions; it means billions of dollars saved from the health care system that can be spent on other things. But what it really means for all those suffering from asthma or any other breathing challenge is that they'll be able to take a breath of clean air, and that's what we want for all of our families.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Health. You have blocked repeated attempts to prevent the opposition from getting to the bottom of the Liberal scandal at Ornge. You neglected your duties to hold management at Ornge accountable, and patient safety was put at risk.

Your new bill does not provide for additional oversight at Ornge, nor does it enable the Ombudsman to

investigate, nor does your bill make Ornge subject to freedom of information. Minister, what are you hiding?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we have introduced Bill 50. Bill 50 takes important steps to increase oversight and transparency at Ornge. Some of the elements of Bill 50: It protects whistle-blowers. It allows us to change the performance agreement unilaterally; that was not a power we had. It also gives us the power to appoint a supervisor or an investigator, a power we have in our hospitals.

The people opposite are too busy ringing bells to actually get moving forward and pass this legislation. We welcome advice at committee. We look forward to getting this bill to committee, but we need to pass it on second reading before we can take that step.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Another end-around, Minister.

We know now, despite attempts to deflect, that the sordid Ornge story is connected to a long list of Liberal insiders: Liberal Party president Alf Apps; the Premier's right-hand man, Don Guy; senior Liberal staffer Jennifer Tracey; Warren Kinsella's squeeze, Lisa Kirbie; former chief of staff to the Minister of Health, Mary Lowe; the architect of eHealth, George Smitherman; Sandra Papatello; and even the Minister of Finance.

Minister, is your new legislation just smoke and mirrors or an attempt to hide the true depths of the Liberal scandal at Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think we all realize—

Interjection: It's a drive-by smear.

Hon. John Milloy: —how inappropriate that drive-by smear was that we just heard. There is an opportunity to have a spirited debate in front of the committee and to talk about witnesses.

But if he wants to play that game, then fine. Let's talk about Kelly Mitchell, who's in front of the public accounts committee tomorrow, along with Kelly Long, another witness that we're all interested in talking about.

Who is Kelly Mitchell? He is a prominent PC Party member. He was someone who raised thousands and thousands of dollars for the Progressive Conservative Party, and he was paid some \$400,000 by Ornge for the sole purpose of schmoozing and lobbying Progressive Conservative MPPs. Mr. Speaker, we look forward to hearing what he has to say—

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

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. The Premier has yet to answer my question about his former chief of staff and current campaign manager and confidante, Don Guy, who we learned billed Ornge \$125,000 for "professional services."

I'll ask again: When did the Premier first learn that his campaign strategist, Mr. Don Guy, was working for Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I understand that Mr. Guy will be appearing before the committee shortly. I know he's very much looking forward to that, and I'm sure that members opposite are looking forward to hearing from him.

But again, we have claims made on behalf of the opposition parties that they're interested in introducing new oversight and new measures of transparency to ensure that we can do a better job through Ornge, looking out for the interests of Ontarians.

There is a bill before this Legislature. It is Bill 50. It does present us with the opportunity to engage in debate. It does present us with the opportunity to receive potential amendments on the part of the opposition. In short, it gives us the opportunity to work together on behalf of the people of Ontario, and I would urge my honourable colleagues opposite to do just that. Let's debate the bill and let's stop ringing those bells.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Maybe the Premier forgot that I asked the question. I never rang any bells. The NDP never rang any bells. So I would appreciate it if you could answer the NDP when the NDP asks a question.

You're right, tomorrow Mr. Guy will appear in front of the committee examining Ornge. He will have to tell us under oath about the services he provided at Ornge, his relationship to you, Mr. Premier, and why he never cashed in on the last \$17,000 bill to Ornge.

The Premier has a chance right here, right now, to talk to this House before Mr. Guy does it tomorrow. Will the Premier explain whether Mr. Guy used his influence with the Premier's office in his work with Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Either it's on the line or it crosses over it, in terms of interfering with the work of the committee that's being done on behalf of all members, and I'd urge my honourable colleague to respect the work of that committee.

There is a committee. It has been sitting. I expect it will sit for several more weeks. A number of witnesses have appeared. I expect that many more will appear in the future. Again, I think we ought to respect the workings of that committee.

CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I'm proud of the progress our government has made in child welfare since taking office. I know that fewer kids are coming into care and more kids are being placed into permanent homes.

As the MPP for Don Valley East, I find it of great importance that children and youth receiving protection and support from children's aid societies in my community have every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: Can you outline the steps this government is taking to continue to improve our child protection system?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd first like to thank the member from Don Valley East for the question. A lot of members of this Legislature might not be aware of his tremendous record of community service, and I want to acknowledge and commend that, first of all.

I'd also like to thank all the incredible staff across this province that work hard each and every day on behalf of our children, particularly the most vulnerable. Their dedication helps to improve outcomes for children and youth right across this wonderful province.

This government, a number of years back, established the independent Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, which further shows our commitment to supporting a stronger and more responsive child welfare system in Ontario.

We also know that permanent homes provide kids with the best opportunities to succeed. In 2010-11, there were approximately 1,000 adoptions in the public system, an increase of 20% over the previous year. New legislation, as well, by this government means more than 7,000 crown wards—

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Minister. I'm pleased that we've made significant achievements in child welfare here in Ontario. Many of the children and youth we're talking about here today represent some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. We need to remain committed to ensuring that their well-being is a top priority.

I know that adoption is one of several ways that our government is helping children and youth find permanent, stable homes so they can reach their full potential. I ask the minister to describe how he and this government are working towards promoting a sustainable child welfare system more broadly.

1120

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I am pleased, of course, to respond to the question. In 2009, the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare was established to develop strategies that will strengthen service delivery and contribute to better outcomes for our children. We are already implementing some of the recommendations made by the commission to reduce the administrative burden on children's aid societies and make them more efficient in supporting Ontario's kids.

Together with the commission, my ministry is working towards the development of a new funding model, the establishment of new approaches to accountability and outcome management, and improvements in service delivery and financial management through implementation of the child protection information network.

Our reforms will result in a stronger, more effective system.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, today the Ontario hydro rates increased yet again all across Ontario. When you pay ultra-rich fees for wind and solar, someone has to pay the difference, and that someone is every householder, every senior and every business.

Yesterday, Minister, you denied the increase was the result of your failed renewable energy approach. Then you added a quote: "That will come on more in the future." So, Minister, if families are getting a shock today when they open their bills, just how much more can they expect, as you say, in the future?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It does give me an opportunity, on World Asthma Day, to speak to the elimination of coal, to speak to cleaning up the air, to speak of making sure that we don't burn coal to make hundreds of thousands of people sick, that we don't burn coal so we can spend billions of dollars in health care for those sick people, but that we actually make sure we get the power we need from clean sources—some hydro, some wind, some solar, some bio.

We are dedicated to making sure that every Ontarian has the air, the clean air, that they need and want to breathe, that we save billions of dollars, and that we build a good, strong, clean green energy industry in the process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My supplementary to the minister is, we both know that your purchase of wind has actually replaced clean, green, renewable water power in Ontario. Coal, which you have never closed, has been replaced by nuclear and natural gas plants. So let's please stick to the facts. Your failed energy program has sent families' hydro bills skyrocketing yet again this morning. On TVO's Agenda, Tony Keller called your energy plan "a power scheme that is as ecologically ineffective as it is economically incoherent."

Minister, what are you going to do to keep Ontario from having the highest energy bills in North America?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, a breath of fresh air is what the facts often bring. It's said that action is eloquence. My friend referred to hydroelectric power, in the same day when the Premier referred to us bringing on the largest hard-rock tunnel in the world, in Niagara Falls, so we have more hydroelectric power. At the same time, we're bringing on power through the lower Mattagami, south of James Bay, that will light up hundreds of thousands of homes, at the same time as the member himself is a secret green, having put solar panels on the roof of city hall.

We're getting out of coal for all the reasons that people who have breathing difficulties respect. It's time the member opposite admits that clean air does mean something to people in Ontario.

GENERIC DRUG INDUSTRY

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. Experts across the country are concerned that Canada's trade agreement with Europe will delay more affordable generic drugs from coming on the market, costing the province a fortune. Even the Drummond commission expressed concern, noting that the agreement "could cost Ontario dearly" and recommended that the province prevent the trade agreement from undermining its use of generics. Why is the Premier not taking an active role in keeping this costly proposal off the table?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite is correct. Ontario is at a side table at the negotiations going on with the European Union on free trade. There are a variety of issues related to access to foreign markets of Canadian-produced generic drugs.

I remind the member opposite that most generics are produced here in Ontario. They are marketed around the world. We're proud of our generic drug industry. I hope the third party are not trying to prevent the export of generic drugs and at the same time cost jobs in the generic job industry. That's not much of a jobs policy, I say with respect to my colleagues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: In February, researchers at the University of Calgary and the University of Toronto reported that if the pharmaceutical intellectual property proposals in CETA, the Canada-European trade agreement, are adopted, it could cost Ontario up to \$1.2 billion annually. This would cancel out \$550 million in savings estimated from generic drug price reductions and add \$672 million to private sector and individual drug costs.

Minister of Finance, there is no empirical evidence that extending drug patents will have any benefits for Ontarians. Why is the Premier putting brand name drug companies' profits ahead of the public good?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We've reduced the cost of generic drugs some \$600 million as a result of the good work of the Minister of Health and my colleagues on this side. Ontario obviously is striving for a fair as well as free trade deal with the European Union. That's why we are at a side table in those negotiations, as was the request of the European Union.

I would urge the member great caution with respect to generic drugs. Ontario is one of the leading producers of generic drugs in the world. We export a good portion of those. They create good-paying jobs right here in Ontario. I would not want to jeopardize those jobs—

Interjection: Union jobs.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes, they're unionized jobs. I wouldn't want to jeopardize those jobs because we have our head in the sand with respect to the importance of access to foreign markets. We will continue to negotiate in good faith to get the best deal possible for all Ontarians.

ELDER ABUSE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est pour le ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées.

My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. Minister, as you'll know, according to the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, unfortunately, something on the order of about 2% to 10% of older adults experience some form of elder abuse, even these days. I unfortunately see this in my dual capacity not only as a parliamentarian but also as a physician. I think this is a particularly alarming figure, given that it's so contradictory to our values of respect for the environment, for ourselves and, of course, for our families.

People in my riding want to know about the initiatives and the programs that our government is doing in order to protect our parents, our grandparents and our loved ones. I would ask you, Minister, to share with this House and with Ontarians what specifics our government is offering.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke North for this very important question. Elder abuse is a very serious problem that often remains hidden due to fear, shame and a lack of awareness—certainly no senior wants to talk about it—and I thank the member for bringing this important issue forward.

We want all Ontarians to know that elder abuse in any form is not acceptable, and our government is working hard to create a secure and supportive environment for our seniors. Since 2003, Ontario has invested \$6 million in elder abuse prevention. This includes an annual operating funding budget of \$900,000 to the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. And in 2011, our government supported an international forum on the abuse of older women to raise awareness of this under-reported and often silent form of elder abuse.

Our government is also supporting initiatives that give Ontario seniors the information they need to protect themselves against abuse and fraud. We met with the Bank of Canada and hosted a successful conference for seniors on financial abuse and financial awareness.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate learning more about the initiatives that our government has and the commitment that the McGuinty government has against elder abuse. It's particularly important, as I mentioned earlier, for me and my constituents in the riding of Etobicoke North that Ontarians feel safe and respected.

1130

I'll bring to your attention that while the federal government has decided to focus on punishment for individuals, as I might say is typical for that world view, we know that once assault has taken place, individuals, even though they may have been punished—it does not stop for the victim there. Can the minister please inform this House, this chamber, what supports are in place to help victims of elder abuse to actually regain their place in their own communities?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: To the Attorney General.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Our government, and I hope everyone here, has zero tolerance for elder abuse. As a government, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to protect society's most vulnerable, and they include, of course, our senior citizens.

Seniors who experience victimization or abuse have access to a number of victim services support programs. The Ontario victim response services program in my ministry works with the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat that the minister is involved in on ways to better support victims of elder abuse. As a matter of fact, we've provided 5.4 million of our common tax dollars from the victims' justice fund to support Ontario's elder abuse strategy, delivered by the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat.

We are committed to keeping our communities safe and our most vulnerable safe, and they include, of course, our senior citizens.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Minister, the Liberal government has been busy working on a carbon tax scheme since 2008, when Ontario signed on to the Western Climate Initiative. But just last November, Arizona, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Washington abandoned this agreement to find more responsible ways to reduce carbon emissions. Now even BC is waffling on implementing this job-killing agreement. But, Minister, you've remained silent, so I have to ask: Has this Liberal government decided to abandon the Western Climate Initiative, or are you just simply hiding your plans to introduce a carbon tax scheme?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, this was a trick that the Conservative Party used during the last campaign: They tried to portray something that may not have a degree of accuracy that we would accept in the House.

As the member knows, no such plans exist in the province of Ontario except in the minds of the people who write your questions for question period. That is the crew in Conservative research who dream up scenarios that simply do not exist.

I want to give the member some advice. Don't pay attention to the whiz kids in the Conservative caucus office. Think about some good questions yourself, which I know you would have, and forget about the tales that these people put into your mind.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, I seem to recall several of your colleagues in the last election musing, in fact, about a carbon tax scheme, so I'll ask you again: If your government is still committed to this carbon tax scheme, then why did you miss the January 1 start date to begin implementing it?

History has shown that the Liberal government is incapable of prudent economic management. Instead of making tough decisions and cutting spending, the Liberal government has, yet again, turned back to its tax-and-

spend playbook to find another way to take more money out of the pockets of hard-working Ontarians.

Minister, now that the Liberal government has been given a failing grade by two major credit rating agencies, how could you and your government continue to think that introducing a job-killing carbon tax scheme in Ontario is a good idea?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think the member has been reading the book *Alice in Wonderland*, because he is developing in his mind scenarios that simply do not exist.

I know that Mr. Hillier's party in Alberta—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm suspecting that the heckling will stop when I stand. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know that the member from Lanark, my good friend, does not believe in climate change, as did Wildrose in Alberta.

But I want to say to you that even the party that has your name in the province of Alberta, the party that perhaps many of your people did not support, the Progressive Conservative Party, believes that, in fact, climate change portrays a major problem in this province. I hope that you are not—

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

Interjection.

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

The member from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Cambridge is now warned.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, on April 25, I asked you if you would allow ONTC to bid on an outstanding Via Rail contract that was coming up. A company had gone bankrupt, and workers in North Bay have the skills and the shops to do it. Your response was, "Everything in ONTC is business as usual. Everything's fine."

Today, we found out your ministry had advised ONTC that it will not authorize any resources to secure any long-term work, even though three contracts are there within reach that would sustain the thousand jobs that ONTC creates, especially the jobs of the shops in North Bay.

What exactly does "business as usual" mean for you, Minister, when you're choosing to suppress jobs in North Bay instead of creating them?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker, I stand behind the comments I made at the time of divestment when I said that, as we work through divestment, it will be business as usual. I stand by the comments that I made in response to three questions from the third party with regard to “business as usual.”

It is business as usual, and as usual, we would hope that that business case provides opportunity for the ONTC, provides revenue for the ONTC. We believe that it is important that everyone along the Highway 11 corridor clearly understands that while we divest, it is business as usual.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, I'd like to make one thing clear. We disagree on one thing: They would like to sell the ONTC; we want to build.

But one thing we hopefully do agree on is that business creates jobs. The one thing—whether you want to sell the company or build it, the longer your order list is for upcoming contracts, the better it is. So once again, why did your ministry direct the ONTC that you weren't going to give any resources, spend anything to try to get those contracts? Even if you want to sell the company, you're better off with those contracts, and North Bay is certainly better off with those jobs. It's not one contract; it's three contracts worth \$120 million.

Minister, it's your choice. Do you support ONTC's bid to go after those contracts or not? If it's true that it's business as usual, is business as usual killing the ONTC?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker, I'm a little bit perplexed, because now we're in agreement on a couple of things: one, that divestment is in the best interests of a long-term transportation strategy. Secondly, we believe that if, in fact, there are lucrative contracts, it makes the opportunity to sell this particular business line much, much better—because this is not what they would say it is.

The OTNC will not be put up for a fire sale. We believe that it is a good business line. We don't believe that the business model is correct. We believe that with this type of acquisition in the future by the private sector, that will allow for a transportation system that meets the present and future needs. That ensures that there will be a stable, reliable transportation system that will not cost the government \$100 million a year.

BUILDING CODE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In the new reality of the times in which we live, conservation and energy efficiency are becoming more and more important. I understand that in keeping with this new reality there have been recent changes in the building code that came into effect at the start of the year to make Ontario a leader in energy efficiency requirements.

Minister, my constituents want to know what these changes are and why they are coming into effect now. Could you please inform the climate change deniers

across the way in the Conservative Party more about conservation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member for all that he has done to raise the profile of this issue because the new realities of energy efficiency and conservation—they really are things that we all have to wrap our minds around. The building code is one of those mechanisms that, in addition to driving efficiency and conservation, can have the added benefit of saving money for Ontarians.

One of the purposes of the Ontario building code actually is to conserve energy and water. We amended the building code in 2006 to increase energy conservation requirements for houses and larger buildings and to reduce barriers to the use of green technologies. These changes have been phased in over time.

The final energy enhancements came into effect on January 1 of this year, and these new requirements mean a couple of things. They mean that, as set out in the 2006 building code, large buildings constructed and building permits issued on or after January 1, 2012, must meet energy efficiency standards that are 25% higher than the model national energy code for buildings.

Secondly, enhanced energy efficiency requirements for houses also came into force at the start of the year, and new houses will be required to meet an energy performance level that's equal to the EnerGuide 80 performance level.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Earlier this morning in question period, a Conservative member used some, I think, not only unparliamentary language, but language that's unbecoming of being used in our society, referring to a certain individual's squeeze. I'm not going to say the names. I only ask you to review the Hansard and to come back and rule on the question. Should we be using those types of terms here in the Legislature? I just want to say, as a man, I found that extremely offensive.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member. It is not the habit of the Speaker to review Hansard to review a request being made, but it is a legitimate point of order. If there was a member that asked a question today, I obviously did not hear it because of the thrust and parry of the House. But if someone that asked a question did say something that was not in keeping with the place, I would offer them an opportunity to withdraw.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague. I withdraw my comment, and I sincerely apologize for making that statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now, that's how it's done. I thank the member for doing so.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): At this time I'm going to offer a point of order that is not a point of order: I will introduce my wife, Rosemarie. With them—to continue getting the brownie points—are the rest of that side of the family: my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Ron and Marcene Kovach—I thank you for being with us; my Aunt Ann and Uncle Andy are here, and my cousin Carolann is with us as well. I thank you for your patience. That definitely got me a few brownie points.

This House now has no deferred votes. It stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1144 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased today to rise and recognize the registered practical nurses who are here today. I appreciate the time I spent with them at noon. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Effective today, Ontario households and businesses will be zapped with another hydro rate increase.

By the end of next year, Ontario household power rates will be the highest in North America, except for Prince Edward Island. Ontario rates will continue skyward, even as they level off elsewhere. Businesses and industry will be hit by nearly \$12 billion in added costs. That means more lost jobs.

While a select few energy corporations feast on this government's seemingly endless supply of subsidies, everyone else is left to pay the bill, and they will pay. All of us will pay.

For my constituents in Stratford, today represents a double whammy. They'll be hit not only by the hydro hike but also by this government's mandatory so-called smart meters. Smart meters should be optional and not mandatory. In my recent newsletter survey, many of my constituents sent a clear message: They responded with their views that reducing energy costs should be the government's number one priority, but the McGuinty government's priority is just the opposite. Their priority is to make energy even more expensive. Their energy policies are causing hardship, unemployment, debt and decline. In Perth–Wellington and across the province, that will be the legacy of this government.

It's time we returned reliable, affordable energy to its rightful place. It's time we made it—

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

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I rise today on a solemn occasion. Workers at OLG slots around Ontario—many of them have lost their jobs as of yesterday. Yesterday was the last day of operations for three OLG slot facilities in Windsor, Sarnia and Fort Erie, which were closed abruptly and without any community consultation by Liberal government announcement.

This government did not care to consult with the hundreds of workers who lost their jobs in the Windsor area as a result of these closures. It also didn't care about the horse racing industry and the consequences that cutting revenue-sharing would have on the industry itself, horse farms and all those who provide services in rural communities.

In addition to the 217 jobs lost at Windsor Raceway, there are 1,000 jobs at risk in the area. On top of these closures, 6,000 direct jobs and almost 60,000 related jobs are at stake with the end of revenue-sharing for horse racing, yet the government did not take these numbers into consideration when it was looking for quick fixes to their budget problems.

This short-sighted move has dealt another massive blow to the already hard-hit Windsor area and rural Ontario. The closure, under the guise of the modernization of gaming in Ontario, is a slap in the face to those tracks and associations that were not consulted at all when this new plan was devised but who are the ones that have to suffer because of it. It is also a perfect example of the out-of-touch and arrogant politics this government has used when dealing with rural Ontario.

Today, we're thinking of those workers and offer our entire energy towards finding a solution to get them back to work.

NURSES

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I rise today to recognize the contribution and dedication that registered practical nurses make in Ontario each and every day. With us today for their Queen's Park day are RPNs who are members of the Service Employees International Union, Local 1—sitting in the members' gallery opposite. This group represents more than 50,000 health care workers in Ontario and provides a strong voice for RPNs in the province. I was very pleased to sponsor their event here, held today at Queen's Park.

It goes without saying that RPNs represent the front line of our health care delivery: hard-working, dedicated members of our health care system who play a vital role in improving patient health and ensuring the efficient delivery of health services in Ontario.

I've had the pleasure to get to know many of the RPNs today, as well as those from Lakeridge Health Corp.; Rouge Valley Health System, Ajax and Pickering site and Centenary site; and the Scarborough Hospital.

I encourage all members to meet with their registered practical nurses from their ridings or regions today. It's

an excellent opportunity to engage in important discussions about how we can continue to work together to strengthen health care in Ontario.

BARB KLAGES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to recognize Barb Klages of Elmwood, who was recently named the winner of the prestigious Tommy Cooper Award for 2012.

Tommy Cooper was the Grey county agricultural representative from 1920 to 1959, and he dedicated his life to agriculture. He played a major role in shaping the agricultural industry in Grey-Bruce. This annual award recognizes the person who has made an outstanding contribution to farm and rural life in the region.

Barb Klages was nominated by the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture for ongoing leadership in a campaign to ensure the viability of small abattoirs and meat plants while maintaining safe food. Her 25-year dedication to the Malcolm Women's Institute in Walkerton and other notable achievements are cited in her nomination.

After learning of the plight of local abattoirs in early 2010, Barb rallied support from provincial and national farm organizations and won the adoption of a locally written resolution supporting the cause by the Women's Institute of Ontario provincial board. Barb developed a committee, hosted public meetings, met with government officials, and continues to lobby for appropriate rules for small local abattoirs who cannot afford to meet the burden of the increased red tape created by regulations set out for the large industrial abattoirs.

Barb also has volunteered for 4H and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. In the past, I have nominated deserving individuals for this prestigious award. It's a true honour for Barb. I congratulate her for receiving it, and I thank her for her contributions to the agri-food industry and her ongoing commitment to rural organizations.

MAY DAY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: About 130 years ago in the Haymarket area in Chicago, some workers went out on strike—it was the first May Day—and they went out on a very principled stand, and that was for the eight-hour workday. I know that I'm preaching to the choir here, because very few of us just work eight hours, and, by the way, very few workers out there just work eight hours, 130 years later.

The reason I cite May Day—because it is May Day today—is that our thoughts are with the students who are—100,000 or more of them in Quebec—out on strike for reasonable tuition. When the workers on May Day went out on strike, it was considered extremely unreasonable to ask for eight hours, and already we're hearing that these students are being unreasonable because all they want is affordable tuition.

We keep in mind that in many countries in Europe, post-secondary tuition is free, so I don't think what they're doing is unreasonable, and neither do many students here on campus, who are burdened with the highest student debt in the country and the highest tuition fees in the country. So we say: Keep it non-violent—we would never support or condone violence in the New Democratic Party—but here's to celebrating May Day, both in the Occupy movement and in the students in Quebec, fighting still for very reasonable rights.

DOCTORS' DAY IN ONTARIO

Mr. Reza Moridi: Today is Doctors' Day in Ontario. In 2011, I introduced a motion that was passed unanimously in this House to recognize May 1 as Doctors' Day in Ontario. The motion recognizes the many contributions that doctors make to the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Physicians are an integral component of Ontario's health care system. Every day, Ontario's doctors treat over 400,000 patients.

Thanks to the McGuinty government's strategic investments, Ontario's doctors have helped more than 2.1 million people who previously didn't have access to a family doctor. There are over 3,400 more physicians practising in Ontario since 2003, more medical school spaces, and more physicians are choosing to become family doctors.

As a result of our expansion in medical school capacity and training positions for foreign-trained doctors, the number of doctors graduating and ready to enter practice each year is expected to double between 2003 and 2013. It goes without saying that without the remarkable work that doctors have been doing in Ontario, we wouldn't be enjoying the amazing quality of life we have in this province. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our doctors for the tremendous work they do for us every day in this province.

1510

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Mr. Randy Hillier: In the presence of water and oxygen, iron becomes rust. In the presence of restrictive labour policies and monopolies, a robust manufacturing economy can soon become a rust belt.

Since 2003, Liberal Ontario has embraced restrictive labour legislation such as the College of Trades, card-based certifications and expanded mandatory WSIB premiums, all at the behest of the unions that put them in power. And real per capita GDP growth and the productive capacity of Ontario workers has increased by a paltry 0.86%.

In those same nine years, over 300,000 manufacturing jobs have left Ontario, many going to jurisdictions like Alberta and US states. It's no coincidence that these states and provinces that are growing have less restrictive labour legislation and more choice for workers. Unlike in Ontario, workers in these jurisdictions have the right to

choose what union they want to be part of or whether to be a member at all. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, job growth in right-to-work states is double that of the restricted states.

We can stand by and do nothing as our economy and jobs rust away or take action. That is why we will be tabling legislation today to bring workers' choice to Ontario in an act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995, to protect the rights of employees in collective bargaining and the financial interests of members of trade unions.

JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Mike Colle: May marks the first-ever proclamation of Jewish Heritage Month in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, as you know, there was unanimous consent in this House to support a bill that would proclaim May as Jewish Heritage Month in Ontario. With the support of my colleague from Parkdale–High Park and my colleague from Thornhill, we were able to enact Jewish Heritage Month.

Now would be an opportunity for all of us across Ontario, from Peterborough to South Porcupine, from Brantford all the way to Brockville, to ensure that we recognize the historical contributions made by Ontarians of Jewish heritage to the music, the culture, the history and the entrepreneurship of this great province.

I think it's a wonderful opportunity to recognize and acknowledge and also to teach our young people about the important contributions our Ontarians of Jewish heritage made to the building of this province. They fought in both wars. They built much of this great province with their bare hands. They were very compassionate in fighting for civil rights, for judicial rights, for human rights and civil rights in this province.

I hope we all take time to mark Jewish Heritage Month this month. I know that next Monday we are going to mark it at Rabbi Yossi's shul at Beth Torah in my riding. We're going to have some good kosher food, some kishka; we're going to have some wonderful kosher wine. We're going to also have some music and we're also going to have some fellowship. So please celebrate Jewish Heritage Month.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Today the people and businesses of Ontario are being hit with another hydro increase: 3.3% for customers on time-of-use pricing and 5.1% for customers on tiered pricing. Today's increase means hydro prices in Ontario have now doubled since the McGuinty government took office. We all know the cause: Dalton McGuinty's expensive green energy experiments. The government simply can't continue to sign 20-year contracts to buy power at 80 cents or even 50 cents a kilowatt hour without forcing up the cost of hydro for everyone.

We support green energy but it must be competitive and affordable. We also know hydro increases impact jobs. Businesses looking to invest are going to look for a

cheaper jurisdiction, and too many of our businesses are leaving and taking their jobs with them.

Two years ago, in response to my Oxford business survey, 95% of businesses said hydro prices were having an impact on their company. Since that time, prices have continued to spiral.

Last year, the government released that rates are expected to increase 46% by 2015, and already there is evidence that this estimate may be low.

Mr. Speaker, I hear from seniors who are worried that they won't be able to stay in their homes and from families who dread receiving their bills because they don't know how they're going to make ends meet. And today, the cost of hydro goes up again.

It's clear these hydro increases are a direct result of the McGuinty government's policies and Ontario families have had enough.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. David Oraziotti: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended: Bill 8, An Act respecting Ontario One Call Ltd., the title of which is amended to read "An Act respecting an underground infrastructure notification system for Ontario."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received? Agreed? Agreed. Therefore, the bill shall be ordered for third reading.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates on the estimates selected and not selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Mr. Prue from the Standing Committee on Estimates presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 60, your committee has selected the estimates 2012-13 of the following ministries and offices for consideration: Ministry of Energy, 15 hours; Ministry of Finance, seven and a half hours; Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, seven and a half hours; Office of Francophone Affairs, seven and a half hours; Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, seven and a half hours; Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 15 hours; Ministry of Northern Development and Mines,

seven and a half hours; Ministry of Infrastructure, seven and a half hours; Ministry of the Attorney General, seven and a half hours; Ministry of the Environment, seven and a half hours.

Pursuant to standing order 61(a), the estimates 2012-20—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense.

Pursuant to standing order 61(b), the report of the committee is deemed to be received and the estimates of the ministries and the offices named therein as not being selected for consideration by the committee are deemed to be concurred in.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

DEFENDING EMPLOYEES' RIGHTS ACT (COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY TRADE UNIONS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA DÉFENSE DES DROITS DES EMPLOYÉS (NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE ET DIVULGATION DES RENSEIGNEMENTS FINANCIERS PAR LES SYNDICATS)

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 78, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to protect the rights of employees in collective bargaining and the financial interests of members of trade unions / Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail pour protéger les droits des employés à la négociation collective et les intérêts financiers des membres des syndicats.

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: From the explanatory note: This bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995. An employee in a bargaining unit where there is a collective agreement between the employer and a trade union is not required to be a member of the union. An employee who is not a member of the trade union is not affected by the collective agreement.

The bill limits regular union dues of a member of a trade union to dues that relate to collective bargaining and no other purpose, unless the member specifically authorizes the union to include amounts for such other purposes.

A provision in a collective agreement between an employer and a trade union is void if it requires any employee in the bargaining unit affected by the agree-

ment to pay the union any amount in excess of the employee's regular union dues.

The trade union is prohibited from requesting the employer to deduct from the wages of any employee who is a member of the union any amount in excess of the employee's regular union dues. The parties to a collective agreement are allowed to terminate the agreement on consent.

The bill requires a trade union that is party to a collective agreement to file a yearly statement with the minister setting out the dues that are payable to it under the agreement and particulars of its expenses incurred during the year, with a breakdown given of expenses of \$5,000 or more. The minister is required to post the statement on the ministry's website on the Internet, and the trade union is required to make a copy of the statement available to its members upon request.

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

The member for Essex on introduction of bills.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce what I would explain as an antidote to the previous bill that was just introduced.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (EQUAL RIGHTS FOR EMPLOYEES IN ONTARIO), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ÉGALITÉ DES DROITS POUR LES EMPLOYÉS DE L'ONTARIO)

Mr. Natyshak moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to provide an equal right for trade unions to have access to certification processes and to enact other measures with respect to employee rights / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail pour accorder aux syndicats un droit égal d'accès aux processus d'accréditation et pour édicter d'autres mesures concernant les droits des employés.

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. Taras Natyshak: I will read from the explanatory note, which is obviously convention. I didn't know that until yesterday.

The bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995. Major features of the bill include the following: The act currently provides that trade unions in the construction industry may elect to have applications for certification dealt with without a vote. The act is amended to extend this option to all trade unions.

The act is amended to provide that employers shall not discharge or discipline employees without just cause in certain circumstances.

Section 80 of the act currently governs reinstatement of employees when a lawful strike occurs. The bill amends the reinstatement provisions.

The act is amended to require the minister to prepare and publish a poster providing information about labour relations in Ontario. Employers are required to post the poster in conspicuous places within the workplace.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It might be educational to know—and we learn something new every day—that in the standing orders, it says, in a line for decorum, under number 20—not 23; under 20—no one is to heckle anyone when a member stands. I looked that up.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Why did I do that?

EQUAL VOICE À VOIX ÉGALES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment on a point of order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To your previous reference, if I may make reference to that, that has been superseded by convention in the Legislature in recent years, I think.

I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes on the issue of greater representation of women in the provincial Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment has sought unanimous consent for up to five minutes to speak on this issue. Do we all agree? Agreed.

Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak in support of Equal Voice today, who are here at Queen's Park.

Equal Voice is a non-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women at all levels of political office in Canada. They see the underrepresentation of women in our Parliament and in our Legislatures as a fundamental deficit in Canada's democratic institutions. Unfortunately, Canada is falling behind in women's representation. Canada has fewer women in Parliament than most of Europe and many other countries in the world.

Il nous faut plus de femmes dans la vie publique, et il nous faut travailler tous ensemble pour y parvenir.

That's why we need more women in public life and we need to work together to bring that about. We have the tools to do it. In fact, in 2008, the United Nations released a report which asserted that, "Political party reform to ensure internal democratization improves women's chances of competing for public office."

The work of Equal Voice is so important because women still encounter barriers when seeking elected office. There are often media imbalances in the treatment

of women politicians and sometimes there's a failure of political parties to encourage women candidates, to name just a few of those barriers. But we know that political will and commitment from party leaders does make a difference and can make a difference.

In 2006, Equal Voice asked all parties in this Legislature to nominate more women candidates in Ontario. They did, and the result was a 7% increase in the number of women elected in just one election cycle. Speaker, we can make a difference. In this regard, that's why I'm so proud of the leadership of our Premier. During the last provincial election, Ontario Liberals nominated a record 42 women candidates, more than any other party and more than any other time in the history of our party.

We need more women elected because women make a difference for our province. They've played key roles in introducing initiatives that benefit all women in the province, initiatives such as the Ontario child benefit, full-day kindergarten and the poverty reduction strategy. Women have helped lead social assistance reform, drug reform, the family caregiver leave, and the Accepting Schools Act, which addresses the issue of gender-based bullying.

Women have worked on vital investments in child care, the domestic violence action plan, the sexual violence action plan and so much more. But these initiatives aren't just good for women; they're good for our province. They make it better, stronger, safer, fairer and more caring for each and every Ontarian.

But as the Premier said last year, Agnes Macphail didn't get elected solely to fight for women's issues. She lobbied for progress for farmers, prisoners and seniors. She stood up for women, yes, but she stood up for everyone else as well, and so too do the women in this Legislature.

Each woman in this Legislature has her own story about how and why she made the decision to enter into public service. Perhaps she had a mentor. Perhaps she was given an encouraging tap on the shoulder. Perhaps her convictions on an issue made her put up her hand. Or maybe she was driven by the resolve of Agnes Macphail, who once said, "I want for myself what I want for other women: absolute equality."

Let's resolve today to carry on her good work and support Equal Voice by attracting more women to public life so that the laws we make here and the programs and services we provide are fully representative of who we are as a province and as a society. We have so many talented women in Ontario doing fantastic things. They're leaders, and we need more of them right here in our Legislature. We need to reach out to them with a tap on the shoulder or an encouraging word.

So thank you to Equal Voice for speaking up to ensure we all take collective action to ensure a future with more women in public life.

Merci, À voix égales, pour votre travail en assurant qu'il y a plus de femmes dans la vie publique.

Thank you for reminding us that this issue is still alive and needs political leadership in order to be accomplished. We need Equal Voice to continue to do the work that they're doing every day because we need more women's voices and life stories reflected here in the Ontario Legislature every day.

As Equal Voice says, "Be her or support her." I'm certain that that is something that each and every one of us can do.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to participate today on behalf of Tim Hudak and the PC caucus in marking the 10th anniversary of Equal Voice, promoting the election of more women to all levels of government.

This, as was stated by the minister, is a non-partisan, non-government organization that exists for the sole purpose of promoting the election of more women in Canadian politics.

When you look at the list of Equal Voices' advisory board members, it's a veritable who's who of some of the most admired women in Canadian politics in the last 25 years: Kim Campbell, Pat Carney, Sheila Copps, Janet Ecker, Judy Erola, Barbara Hall, Alexa McDonough, Audrey McLaughlin, Lyn McLeod, Anita Neville, Flora MacDonald, Lucie Pépin and Nancy Ruth.

In January 2001, the late Christina McCall invited Libby Burnham and Rosemary Speirs to a meeting to try and breathe new life into the attempt to get more women elected. On a sunny Sunday afternoon on May 6, 2001, a reception was held for the people interested in helping at Donna Dasko's house. I was fortunate enough to have been invited there by Libby Burnham.

Since that meeting I have run and won in three general elections, becoming the first woman elected from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and now stand today as the PC critic for women's issues. It's my opportunity to say happy anniversary to Equal Voice and to thank them for their mentorship towards me.

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Today, Equal Voice has active chapters across Canada. From 1919, when women in Canada got the vote, to Agnes Macphail serving as the first member of Parliament and the first Ontario MPP, through to the appointment of Ellen Fairclough in 1957 as Canada's first woman cabinet minister, the progress of women in politics has been steady. In the intervening 55 years, women have made great political progress in Ontario and across the country, with many women serving as Premiers or as senior government ministers and opposition leaders.

In addition to the government of Canada having the highest percentage of women in cabinet in Canadian history, four women serve as Premiers: Eva Aariak in Nunavut, Alison Redford in Alberta, Christy Clark in British Columbia and Kathy Dunderdale in Newfoundland. For the first time in history, we can say that there are women Premiers from coast to coast to coast.

As many of you know, I came from a political background, with my father being the member of Parliament from 1965 until 1993. So going from a registered nurse into the political field—one of the most trusted professions to one that maybe isn't so trusted—was a little bit of a different campaign. You heard the quiet mutterings on the doorsteps that some people would not vote for me because I was a woman, but you did get the other part that would vote for me because I was a woman. But I think a lot of those traditional prejudices facing women in politics, for the most part, have faded into the background, and I hope that they have done that. There is a much greater likelihood today of candidates being judged on their individual merits and the policies and leadership of their party rather than gender, and I'm very happy to see that.

Last fall, I was very pleased to be part of the largest group of female candidates in the history of the Ontario PC Party. It is a good moment. Unfortunately, in the Legislature here, we are 28% women in the Legislature. So there's more work to be done, considering we represent just over 50% of the population. On the average, in Canada as a whole, it's only 25% that we account for in the municipal councils, provincial Legislatures and the House of Commons.

Over the past 10 years, Equal Voice has performed a valuable role in promoting this agenda through its work with all political parties, its ongoing outreach with young women and encouragement of women to run for public office. I was a mentor for a young woman who went to BC to run for the Green Party, so it is a truly non-partisan group that does mentor.

But good organizations never lose sight of their goals. It's important to take time to celebrate its successes. That was certainly the case on April 25, when the leader of the third party, Andrea Horwath, was presented with Equal Voice's 2012 EVE Award, and I'd like to take the opportunity to offer my congratulations to her.

"Women in politics" certainly doesn't have the exotic ring that it once did, nor does it instill the fear in the hearts of men that it once did. However, as I said earlier, there is still work to be done in promoting the election of more women to positions in all levels of government. I know that Equal Voice has that ongoing commitment here, and we as MPPs, and even to the young female pages who are with us today, should be mentors to them and to all women so that they are encouraged that they can enter all levels of the political field.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and happy anniversary to Equal Voice.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for acknowledging that it was, in fact, our leader, Andrea Horwath, who won the EVE Award just this last week from Equal Voice. Of course, that gives me even more of an added pleasure in standing

up to commemorate this 10th anniversary of this amazing organization.

I also want to acknowledge their support in the Girls Government initiative that has now become, I think, a joint ownership of this entire assembly. It was started in Parkdale—High Park—I'm very, very proud of that—where we get girls in grade 8 to get together and to come here for a tour, to go to Ottawa for a tour, to pick a topic and to debate that topic, to come here for a press conference—to really experience what it is to be a woman in political life.

At our very first dinner that was hosted, I must say—and thank you for this, Mr. Speaker—by the Speaker, of all women from all parties, in the dining room, there was a Liberal member from Guelph who stood up and said this should be one of our first initiatives. So it's truly non-partisan, truly in the spirit of Equal Voice, truly something we can do for girls coming up through the system.

I want to say I'm also proud that federally we have 40% of our caucus—it's a very large caucus, at that—that is female, and here 40% of our caucus is female. Again, we in the New Democratic Party are extremely proud of that. But, as has been acknowledged, we have a long, long, long way to go.

Whenever I talk about women's issues, I always like to mention the fact that I am the first woman in my family to be considered under law a human person. People automatically think that maybe my mother or grandmother came from somewhere else, some other country, but no, they didn't; they came from here. It was in 1929 that we became considered human persons. Before then, we were considered the property of our husbands or our fathers, so any member here who's female whose mother was born before 1929, you are the first generation of human persons. We have come a long way.

I remember “Help wanted: female. Help wanted: male.” We're still struggling. We're still struggling with women making 71 cents to every dollar that men make. We're still struggling in this province with inadequate child care. In Quebec, they've proven a dollar into child care gets \$1.05 back in investment in the province. We're still struggling for that here.

These are the measures of women's equality and, of course, the more equal women are and the more equal access they have, the more they'll run for political office, the more will be elected and then, of course, the more we can do on women's issues.

But certainly we've made some progress here, so I just want to give a shout-out to all those amazing women at Equal Voice. I want to thank the Toronto Star and their editorial board for featuring Girls Government last week.

I want to thank Equal Voice for saying they're committed to making Girls Government not only a provincial initiative, not only one taken up—and I should mention their names—by the member from Etobicoke Centre and by the former member from Kitchener—Waterloo—the first two members of the two other parties who started

Girls Government in their own ridings. Thank you. By the way—and I see men clapping—you don't have to be a woman to do it. You can be a man and start Girls Government, and talk to me after about how you do that. We've got the template. But want I thank them for starting.

I want to thank Equal Voice and I want to thank them in particular for saying they want to make this program national. I look forward to working on that. I look forward to spreading that program around this Legislature.

I look forward to all this group of girls, who, in the words of one we met with on our Ottawa trip, Niki Ashton—twice elected, ran for leader of the party, only 30 years old and she looks like she is 19, if you've seen her. The girls, when they met with her, their summary of the meeting—I said, “What did you think? Here's a young woman who has been elected twice and ran for the leadership of her party and she's only 30 years old. What do you think?” And one of them said, “She's really cool,” but more importantly, she said, “It's a really cool job.” And I think we can all attest, we women here, that it's a really cool job, Mr. Speaker, and more girls need to be exposed to it. More women need to run; more women need to get elected. We're just thankful that Equal Voice has put the push on to do all of the above.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all the members for their statements.

PETITIONS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

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

“Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

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

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I agree with the petition, will affix my name and send it down with Carley.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and
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“Whereas dental hygienists in independent practice need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

“We, the dental hygienists in independent practice, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my signature to it and send it to the table with page Ranbir.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition and affix my name to it and give it to page Brady to give to the table.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition which 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 province 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 harmonized sales tax (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 proudly support this and will ask page Shaumik to deliver this.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

“Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their patients/clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

“We, the dental hygienists working in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients/clients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and I will ask page Jenny to bring to the clerks' table.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. John O'Toole: “Whereas Solray Energy Corp. has given notice of its proposal for a class 3 solar power facility known as Epsom Solar Farm to be located in the township of Scugog; and

“Whereas the site is on prime agricultural land that has been in production for many generations; and

“Whereas we consider productive farmland to be of vital importance to farm and rural communities by providing healthy, locally grown food and ensuring the sustainability of Canada's food supply; and

“Whereas class 1 to 5 farmland should be protected from the current proposal and similar projects that may be considered in the future; and

“Whereas other sites of less value to agriculture are better locations for solar power developments;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature not to allow large, industrial wind or solar farms on prime agricultural land, and we further express our support for giving local communities, through their elected municipal councils, the power to control and approve large-scale renewable energy developments.”

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

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition from Scarborough-Agincourt addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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 will affix my signature and send it through page Brady.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Todd Smith: This is about a dangerous stretch of highway at the north end of Belleville. After many close calls there, unfortunately two young women were killed in Corbyville just before Christmas, prompting this petition on behalf of hundreds of residents in the area. I'm happy to present it today.

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is an expressed concern among citizens of Thurlow ward in the city of Belleville that the intersection of Highway 37 and Wisser Road is a safety hazard;

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

“That ... the Ontario Legislative Assembly ... contact the Ministry of Transportation on our behalf to have a study and report completed as to safety features that should be added to the intersection, and that those recommendations be then acted upon.”

I'm happy to sign this and send it to the table with Shaumik.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time, and will eventually lead to death;

“Whereas there are an estimated 181,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

“Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates social, emotional and economic burdens on the family and friends of those suffering with the disease;

“Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020;

“We, the undersigned”—and this petition comes from London and St. Thomas—“call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish an Alzheimer's advisory council to advise the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on matters pertaining to strategy respecting research, treatment and the prevention of Alzheimer's and other related dementia.”

I will sign my name.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I bring a petition from the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. The 1,146 signatures say here:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas industrial wind turbine development on the sacred land of Mnidoo Mnis (Manitoulin Island) has disrupted our peaceful life, dividing First Nation and non-First Nation communities and families; and

“Whereas there is growing opposition to Northland Power’s McLean’s Mountain industrial wind turbine project; and

“Whereas it would be a very sad chapter in our history if we stand by and let the pursuit of money destroy this beautiful land; and

“Whereas the Manitoulin Coalition for Safe Energy Alternatives, the Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation elders, community members and youth, the North Channel Preservation Society and others stand together to preserve and protect the healthy environment along with traditional culture and heritage values which we cherish so greatly;

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“We, the undersigned, hereby oppose industrial wind farm development on Mnidoo Mnis (Manitoulin Island).”

I agree and sign my name.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely: I have a petition from the people of Avalon Public School in my riding of Ottawa–Orléans.

“To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas the current enrolment of Avalon Public School is 687 students;

“Whereas the student capacity of the school is 495 students, as determined by the Ministry of Education’s own occupancy formula;

“Whereas the issue of overcrowding and lack of space makes it impossible for Avalon Public School to offer full-day kindergarten until the overcrowding issue is addressed;

“Whereas Avalon Public School is located in a high-growth community;

“Whereas the enrolment at Avalon Public School is expected to continue rising at a rate of 10% to 15% a year for the foreseeable future;

“Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has made building a new school in Avalon a top capital priority;

“We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and Ministry of Education to provide the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board with the necessary funding to build an additional school in Avalon, to open no later than September 2014.”

I support this petition and send it forward with Manak.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Premier and Legislature of the province of Ontario:

“The city of Kawartha Lakes is the chosen home of the largest per capita population of senior citizens in the province of Ontario; and

“There is an inability to attract a sufficient number of primary caregivers to service this population, causing many to travel to the greater Toronto area to seek medical attention; and

“The city of Kawartha Lakes is the proud home of Sir Sandford Fleming College (Frost campus), which attracts students from across the province who are unable to access the provincial rail link in the city of Oshawa; and

“Students from the city of Kawartha Lakes travel across this province to various institutions of higher learning and are unable to access transportation from the city of Oshawa to the city of Kawartha Lakes (town of Lindsay); and

“A large number of citizens of the city of Kawartha Lakes are required to travel daily to the greater Toronto area to avail themselves of employment opportunities that are not available locally; and

“The province of Ontario has a stated policy to improve air quality through the reduction of traffic on provincial highways by the provision of mass transit;

“We, the undersigned citizens of the city of Kawartha Lakes, petition the Ontario government to provide, as soon as possible, a direct GO Transit link from the town of Lindsay, in the said city of Kawartha Lakes, to the city of Oshawa; and

“We ask ... Laurie Scott, MPP for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, to carry this petition on our behalf to the provincial Legislature.”

I want to thank Fred Barnes for gathering over 1,000 names on this petition, and I apply my signature.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

“Whereas dental hygienists in independent practice need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

“We, the dental hygienists in independent practice, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act

and bring it to 21st century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I fully agree with this petition, I sign it and pass it on to page Sabrina to deliver it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCEPTING SCHOOLS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 POUR DES ÉCOLES TOLÉRANTES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 26, 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 Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Oshawa, in his last remarks on Bill 13, was committed, passionate and very, very exceptional in terms of his putting two or three points on the table that I think were quite new to the debate. In fact, he pointed out, as I recall, a section that exists in the Education Act today that would have permitted the Minister of Education—you'll see I'm not false, to demonstrate that I actually listen when people speak; the section, I believe, was 306 in the bill, that would have allowed the Minister of Education today to deal with bullying.

Now, from the evidence I have from both my daughter-in-law, who is a teacher, as well as my wife, who was a teacher and now a school trustee, the issue of bullying today in schools is a problem. We all agree with that. The intent of Bill 14 of the former member from Kitchener-Waterloo—now the chair of the WSIB—was clearly not to prioritize bullying but to deal with all forms of bullying, because all of us agree it's completely inappropriate.

Now, I think Lisa MacLeod, our critic, has tried relentlessly to get some kind of consensus developed so that we could put Bill 13 and Bill 14 into committee. Let's not polarize these things. Let's try and move forward and try to find consensus; consensus, I think, would put less emphasis on certain aspects of Bill 13.

I would only say this: the member from Oshawa—I believe that if you review his remarks, and I expect out of respect that people on the other side would comment on that—was trying to make the argument in the case very clearly that under the Education Act today, there is a provision under section 306 that would allow the minister to do that.

Let's get on with it. Let's move forward together under the leadership of Tim Hudak and make Ontario a better place for all of our students.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as you are well aware, and as I imagine many are well aware, we have been very frustrated watching this process between the government and the opposition on anti-bullying. We believe that our children deserve far better. We want action on bullying. We need co-operation between these two parties to actually make things go forward. Whatever happens in this House still has to be sorted out in committee. If we don't forge co-operation, the frustration we've had in debates here will be reflected in frustration in committee.

To the Conservatives, I say: Elizabeth Witmer has gone; her bill has died. One of you—I assume Lisa MacLeod—should bring forward that bill post-haste.

To the Liberals, I say: Bill 14 and Bill 13 should both be adopted on second reading and go to committee so that we can hear both of them, so the public can come and depute, and we can resolve this.

Speaker, both parties have gone around in circles on this. We are prepared to work with both parties to get the bills into committee, to talk and to come up with a solution: no games, no use of a hammer on the Legislature; simply a movement into committee.

The Liberals have been saying that the bells are related to the anti-bullying, but even in the press conference given by Laurel Broten, she brought in a wide range of other issues. I would say that it is a question of a fight over Ornge. I say to the Conservatives: It's time to bring back your bill, it's time to put both bills into committee, time to hear from the people of Ontario and move forward on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I have a lot of time for the member for Oshawa, who I think is very thoughtful in the remarks that he brings to the Legislature and the kind of approach that he brings—I hope he doesn't put this in his next election pamphlet—but I do have a good deal of respect for him, and I thought his speech was particularly compelling on this issue.

I know I'm disappointed, as he may be privately—I can't say he is publicly—that instead of seeing the kind of debate that is helpful in a bill of this kind, we've seen bell ringing taking place.

For the public who is not aware of what bell ringing is, that is, of course, when the members of the opposition want to disrupt the House—in this case, it's the official opposition, not the New Democratic Party—or put a stick in the spokes of the bicycle; what they do is ring bells. They end up moving adjournment of the debate, and the bell rings for 30 minutes. Then they end up moving adjournment of the House, and what do we have happening then? We have, of course, another 30-minute bell.

1600

I encourage debate with members of the House. Even when I disagree with what they're saying on the other side, I like to hear that debate. We know that the children in our classrooms are counting on having this legislation in place for their return to classrooms in September. We stand by our commitment to incorporate over half of Liz Witmer's bill, which was withdrawn on her resignation, in the Accepting Schools Act, because I thought she made a good effort in this. I congratulate her on her appointment as the head of the workers' safety board. I hope that we can resolve this matter without further bell ringing.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to comment. I'll take my cue from the Minister of the Environment, who took substantial licence in his editorializing in here and did not really speak to the statement that my colleague had done the last time the bill was debated.

He has his own version on what's going on in this House, and I think I'd like to clarify that. This is about the ringing of the bells. The minister says that they want to debate. Speaker, the last time that a Liberal member rose in this House to debate Bill 13 was April 4—so, it's almost a month since a Liberal has stood in this House and debated the bill. We have been debating the bill. We have never shied way from debating the bill. We believe that every member in this Legislature should be able to exercise their right to debate this bill, and we're going to do that.

But let me make one thing crystal clear: The reason the bells are ringing in this House is because this government broke its own promise to this Legislature. The Minister of Health stood in her place repeatedly and said, "I will abide by the will of this Legislature." When, in a resolution, this Legislature voted to establish a select committee to look into the scandal at Ornge that has been perpetrated by this government, they broke their promise. This Legislature voted for it. The minister promised she would abide by the will of the Legislature, and broke that promise.

That is why this opposition party—it has nothing to do with Bill 13 or Bill 50 or Bill 16 or 2 or 19 or any other bill. It is about the absolute disrespect for the will of the Legislature displayed by this party on the other side. As long as they want to stand in their place and break promises and brag about it, this party will stand up for the rights of this Legislature to debate any bill and to cause the bells to ring when this party will continue to lie and break its word.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw, Speaker.

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

The member from Oshawa has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the members from Durham, Toronto–Danforth, St. Catharines and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke speaking in regard to my comments.

A couple of things—and I would mention to the member from St. Catharines: The minister has been around for a number of years, as have a significant number of others. He brought it to my attention that, in years gone by—and I checked Hansard, and guess what?—the bells rang for a week at one particular time. You can't believe that. He may have been privy to it at that time, or part of the entire aspect; I'm not sure. But let's talk about another member, because that's where a lot of it—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Is this about Bill 13?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I will get to that, if given the chance. I'm trying to answer the comments that came formerly.

The members of the current government actually spoke in committee for two years to delay that. You want to talk about these things? I'll be happy to bring up the stuff from Hansard that we talked about. Let's talk about the occupation of the Legislature—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Is this about Bill 13?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: —but back to Bill 13. There were specific aspects in there that I wanted to emphasize and that was where, in legislation—and this was brought forward by a well-known Canadian, Pierre Elliott Trudeau—where, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, it is stated that any time a single entity is mentioned in the legislation, there is a perception given of a higher order of rights. Essentially, by mentioning any specific entity and excluding others in legislation, there is a perception that there is a hierarchy, or a hierarchy of rights, that is established when these things come forward.

We want to make sure that—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Is this about Bill 13?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Absolutely, and if the member was listening or heard the debate, she would know exactly what it was about.

But establishing that is at the cost of others, and that's the concern of other entities that are not listed as well.

My colleague from Durham mentioned section 306, where it specifically stated that bullying was the ability of the principals, whether it was on school or off school, in any way, shape or form to address that issue.

Tuesday last, a week ago today, I had one of the parents come to me and specifically say, "We're concerned. We realize this is taking place and the only thing that's happening in the school board right now is they're moving our child from school to school to school." They're now looking at private school in order to eliminate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I just want to correct the record from yesterday's debate. I said "cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per hour." It should have been "per year," as I had in my notes. I may have stated wrongly. It's just about 1510 in the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 13, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters. I'm happy to have the opportunity to participate in this debate.

Bullying is a serious issue that is affecting our children, their ability to learn and in some cases impacting every part of their lives. Madam Speaker, we have too much bullying in schools and too many young people starting each day dreading what the bullies will do to them.

I've heard from many constituents who are concerned about bullying—from Norwich township, parents in Tillsonburg and parents in Ingersoll. In some cases, the situation is so intolerable that the parents felt that their only option was to remove their children from the school and do home-schooling.

I've written to the school board and we've tried to work with parents and schools, but clearly we need to do more. We need to give schools and school boards the tools they need to deal effectively with bullying and give children the support they need to feel safe in schools. I think that's something that all three parties would agree on.

This session, two bills were introduced that addressed this problem: Bill 13, which we are debating today, and Bill 14, which was introduced by my colleague the former member from Kitchener–Waterloo. I want to commend her for all her work on this important issue.

Bill 14 was the culmination of two years of work with educators, stakeholders and parents. The bill was intended to raise awareness and prevent bullying to make our schools a safer place for our children to learn. Although Elizabeth Witmer is no longer a member of this Legislature, we can still learn from her work on bullying and we can still look to the bill she introduced for ideas on how to improve Bill 13. This isn't about partisan politics; it's about making sure that we have the best possible legislation to help students who are being bullied.

Madam Speaker, shortly after I was elected, I had a very sad situation in my riding. A young girl was being bullied at school. She was attacked by four bullies who forced her to the ground and burned her hand with a cigarette. The bullies were charged by the law, but they were allowed to go free and to continue to attend the same school. The victim was expected to go back and sit in the same classroom with them, but she was unable to do that.

We worked with the school board to try to find a solution. After much work, we were able to separate them, but it was the victim who had to be moved to another school and it was the victim's parents who then had to drive her each morning to a location where she could catch a bus to go to the other school. We need to ensure that when bullying occurs, it is the bully rather than the victim who is punished.

But more than that, we need to address the cause of bullying to prevent situations like the tragedy where young people feel they can no longer face another day at school. That's why we need to compare the strengths and weaknesses of Bill 13 and former Bill 14 to ensure that we provide the best possible solution for our young people.

Bill 14 was a comprehensive anti-bullying bill that focused on prevention, accountability and awareness. It would have provided students, parents and educators with a strategy to raise awareness and prevent bullying as well as a process to resolve it, collect data and report to the ministry. Unfortunately, Bill 13 does not include these things and therefore does not address the root causes of bullying.

We believe in tackling bullying head on. Unlike the government bill, the bill introduced by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo did so in four critical areas: (1) reporting and investigating bullying, (2) 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 required anti-bullying lessons to be incorporated into the provincial curriculum from JK to grade 12—again, something that is missing in Bill 13.

Bill 13 limits the focus to a few groups, but that would eliminate many of the young people who need our help. In contrast, the definition in Bill 14 was more thorough and focuses on what constitutes bullying and how it affects the victim.

Just a few months ago, Amanda, a staff member in this building, had a devastating experience when her young cousin took her own life because she was bullied at school. Amanda wants what happened to her cousin to help others. This weekend, she is participating in a walk to support Kids Help Phone, and she is sharing her cousin's story to raise awareness. I want to read what Amanda wrote:

"Chalyce was an incredibly bright, talented, witty and beautiful individual—inside and out. She was in the international baccalaureate program, a community volunteer, a talented singer and photographer, and had the best sense of humour.

"Of all the admirable qualities Chalyce possessed, it was her kindness and sincere concern for others that were her strongest. Chalyce had the ability to make anyone she came in contact feel special and valued.

"On January 13, 2012, Chalyce took her life; she was 17.

"During her visitation and funeral services, our family learned that while Chalyce's own struggle with depression and bullying had turned out to be insurmountable, she had touched the lives of many other youth who were dealing with similar issues.

"More than one person shared with Chalyce's family that Chalyce had 'saved' them from a similar fate."

Madam Speaker, I want to express my sympathies to the family and thank them for sharing that story.

We need to find ways to help young people like Chalyce, but unfortunately, the government's bill would have excluded her. I hope that as we move forward, we can work together to create the strongest, most effective anti-bullying legislation possible.

Again, I want to say how pleased I was to participate in this debate today. I think it is important that we are open to amendments or looking at ways to once again put Bill 14 forward as an option.

I hope that the government really is willing to work with us on this important issue. I'd like to believe that they are. But we have to look at their record. The Minister of Health told us repeatedly in this Legislature that she would support a select committee to investigate Ornge if it was the will of the Legislature. In democracy, the government should listen to the will of the Legislature, and yet they refuse to do so. The majority of members of this Legislature voted to create a select committee of all parties to investigate Ornge, but the government still refuses to move forward with the committee. It is for that reason that I move adjournment of the debate, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Hardeman has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1613 to 1643.

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

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

All those opposed, please stand.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 21; the nays are 35.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the motion lost.

Further debate? Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again to speak to Bill 13, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters.

During this debate, many of the members in this Legislature have shared sad stories of students who were being bullied, and for them, we have a responsibility to get this legislation right. I encourage the government to look at the work that Elizabeth Witmer did and ensure that the bill—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's kind of loud in here, and we're trying to listen to Mr. Hardeman—

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I can do without the clapping, thank you.

Please take your seats, and less sidebars, please.

Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: We'd hoped that the bill would encourage the government to look at the work that Elizabeth Witmer did to ensure that the bill this Legislature passes includes the requirement for a prevention plan, puts bullying prevention in the curriculum, broadens the definition of bullying to include all people who are being victimized and includes accountability.

I also encourage them to look at the section on cyber-bullying, which is largely absent from the government's bill. Bullying doesn't always stop when the bell rings and the kids leave the playground. We need to ensure that the legislation recognizes that. Bill 14 would have been my preferred option. I hope that, working together and building on the work done by Elizabeth Witmer, we can create a bill that would truly protect our kids.

I think it's also very important that people can be held accountable for what they say. The Minister of Health said she would obey the will of the House, that if the House voted to have a select committee on Ornge to get to the bottom of the disaster that we have there, she would support that, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will ask for adjournment of the House until she appoints that committee.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

Opposed?

I believe the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1646 to 1716.

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

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

Those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 12; the nays are 41.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The motion fails.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I regularly hear—as I heard, quite frankly, the member from Willowdale mentioning—about ringing the bells. That's been a certain aspect about the debate that was, as I debated before my colleague, some of the key things—it's important that the government members realize, as we're dealing with Bill 13, that this isn't something new; that as colleagues in this Legislature we have certain opportunities to deal with aspects of legislation or the process by which this place operates, which we follow the guidelines for, as did the government members that are there now. A significant number of them that are here now would certainly recall a time during their time in opposition when they rang the bells for an entire solid week—every single day, all day long. How does that differ from what's taking place now? We'd go about that—

Interjections.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The deputy leader specifically says, “Oh, it’s about legislation.” Well, quite frankly, it’s about process and the way things operate in this Legislature.

As opposition members, we have certain aspects that deal with these things, and we will continue to use those to our best ability. Quite frankly, if you look at Hansard, you’ll see where another member of the current government at their time spoke for an entire month.

Certainly when we’re dealing with Bill 13 and trying to move other aspects forward, we have these aspects that we’re talking about, and I recall, quite frankly, one of the members from Windsor who’s no longer with us, Ms. Pupatello, who spoke in committee for two years in order to stop one single piece of legislation that came forward at that particular time. Of course, there’s the famous occupation of the Legislature. This isn’t something new, Mr. Speaker.

I want to remind these individuals here that what takes place is a process by which is established—and so long as you comply with the process and deal with what is presented before you in the fashion that you’re allowed to do it, it is all part of the parliamentary process of which we will continue to do.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: There’s a significant difference, of course, Mr. Speaker, as you would realize being an observer of this House, and that is that what we have now is a minority Parliament; that is, the government does not have the votes in the Legislature to win, and the government is at a disadvantage in committee.

This is a different circumstance. I can understand the opposition, and this opposition and other oppositions have utilized the ringing of bells in other circumstances. That was a majority government. They had no chance of winning any votes, and we weren’t in the very challenging circumstances we are in the province now. On a daily basis, members of the opposition get up and say that the world is coming to an end economically in the province of Ontario. Indeed, we’re seeing some major challenges around the world.

In the context of the very serious circumstances we face, in the context of the fact that the opposition has the majority of votes in the House, it seems to me the utilization of the ringing of bells is not an appropriate utilization on this particular bill, for instance.

I recognize that there are opponents of this bill on the other side of the House, and I think they are entitled to debate as they have determined. Members of the government have contributed previously to the debate. Our government members are satisfied, those who have spoken, with the bill and are prepared to see it go to committee. Members of the opposition may not be and may wish to continue to debate it. That is the right of the opposition, and that is the way this Legislature should work.

What we see is a totally irresponsible opposition, in my opinion. I know you don’t agree over there, and I don’t expect you’re going to—but totally irresponsible. You’re bringing the business of government to a total standstill at the present time, and you can wear it. With all the bills that are waiting at the present time to be processed by this Legislature, you can weigh that before you make your final decisions.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am so pleased that I was able to get a two-minute lecture from the Minister of the Environment on how this place works and doesn’t work. He’s certainly got his opinion. He’s been here longer than anybody here, so he’s had time to formulate those opinions.

But his view on whether or not the Parliament, based on a minority or majority, should determine how it conducts itself: You would think, given that this is a minority Parliament and the Minister of Health would have known that full well—I do believe she’s aware of the composition of the Parliament—that she would not have stood in her place repeatedly—repeatedly, I say, Mr. Speaker—and said to this Legislature, “I will abide by your will on the issue of a select committee to study the scandal that our government has brought on”—she didn’t actually say that, but I’m just throwing that part in there because it is brought on by her government. But she repeatedly said it and she followed that up with also stating it out in scums in the hall, that she would abide by the will of the Legislature.

So when the Minister of the Environment chastises us and scolds us on this side, the one thing you have in government—in Parliament, the government still holds all the cards. They are the government. The Premier sits on that side. All the ministers of the crown sit on that side. We have very few tools with which to hold this government to account, and one of them is that we can express our views in this Legislature by calling for adjournment of the debate or adjournment of the House.

It is not because we are opposed to any particular bill or piece of legislation. In fact, we have continued to debate. If this government wants, they can bring forth a closure motion on this bill any time they want. It’s up to the government.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It’s a pleasure to join the debate, and I certainly wish this isn’t the debate we’re having.

I think it’s the nature of the issue that is most concerning here. For people who are watching on TV, what is happening here right now is, you’ve got this side of the House trying to debate a motion that is going to bring anti-bullying legislation to schools in the province of Ontario.

As we speak, right now we’ve got kids who are committing suicide in schools because they’re being bullied. We’ve got kids with mental health issues who are being

bullied. We've got kids who are being bullied because of race issues and culture issues, gender identity issues.

What's happening in this House is our ability to move that forward, to do something about that as a Legislature, is being stymied because the opposition has a different opinion on an entirely different bill.

I'm suggesting that we had some great input from the member who has just left us, from Liz Witmer. I think she brought some excellent ideas. We were prepared to incorporate those ideas in this legislation that's going into the schools. Instead, games continue to be played by that side of the House. I could understand it on another bill; on this bill, you'd think we would have the fortitude to come together as a House and to get this through.

The public out there needs to be very, very clear about what's happening. We're trying to get legislation into our schools that will end the bullying that has been taking place, that has resulted in the tragedies that have cost kids their lives, and on the other side of the House, we're seeing this legislation being blocked—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Hijacked.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: —hijacked in a way that simply doesn't pay tribute to the importance of the issue.

It's an issue that, if we got beyond the partisan stuff, got beyond the party stuff, I think we'd all agree on.

We've had 17 hours of debate on this. It's time to move forward. I'm asking the opposition to allow this bill to go forward. Bring your ideas forward to committee. Let's move. The kids want us to do this.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the members from Oshawa, St. Catharines, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Oakville for their comments. I was somewhat sorry to hear that there were no comments about my presentation on Bill 13 or part of my presentation on Bill 14, because they were all talking about something else.

I just want to point out, first of all, that my presentation was about putting the two together, but I think the government is somewhat disingenuous when they say that they are trying to do that too. We remember that Bill 14 was before committee, and subcommittee refused to meet so we could actually start the process to review that bill—until this happened. I don't know whether they knew that this would be the final outcome. We tried three times, and once we had them all together—and they said they were not comfortable to hold the meeting.

The other thing I was really taken by was the comments from the Minister of the Environment when he says that there's somehow a difference between ringing the bells if you're in a minority or a majority government. There is absolutely nothing in—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister of Education.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: —which way or the other.

I would just point out that the minority government was predicated on that the voice of the whole Legislature

should count for something. When the whole Legislature voted in favour of having a select committee to get to the bottom of the mess at Ornge, the House voted in favour of that, the minister said she would adhere to that, but when the time came, Mr. Speaker, she did not adhere to that. She decided to just leave it sit there, that it was not important what the majority of the House said—and that's where the difference is between majority and minority. The majority of the House said we should have a select committee, and the government refused to have a select committee.

This has nothing to do with the bills we are debating. The bell-ringing is to get a select committee on Ornge to get to the bottom of the mess that's there. If the government would just have that select committee, we could move forward and get these bills passed, and we could get these things into legislation to help the children and prevent—

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm very pleased to join in the debate today to speak about Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, 2012. I want to say to some of my colleagues here in the opposition benches how impressed I am with some of the debate that I've seen from them so far.

As a parent, I've been touched by some incredibly moving and deeply personal stories and truly heartfelt comments that we've heard, not just from some of our members but members from all sides. I think it's clear that bullying is an issue that we all agree needs to be addressed in our schools and, I think it's important to stress, in society as well.

I, too, have heard from many of my constituents, one even this afternoon, on this issue, and I'm looking for a common theme from their emails, their letters and their phone calls. I think one theme stands out: What my constituents are telling me is that we need a comprehensive approach to the problem of bullying. They know—and I think, deep down, we all do—that there's no magic bullet. We're not going to pass Bill 13 and be able to say "Mission accomplished; problem solved," because I think we all know it's a complex issue. I think we all agree, at least we do here, that we need a comprehensive solution. Certainly, that's the approach that the PC caucus have taken right from the start of this issue. That's why I want to acknowledge the tremendous work of the former member from Kitchener–Waterloo and also the terrific advocacy our education critic, the member for Nepean–Carleton, has done on the subject.

1730

I had the opportunity to take a look at the very passionate comments that the member for Nepean–Carleton made with her leadoff remarks on March 26. I actually want to quote from some of her comments that day, because I think her comments speak to the very heart of why our caucus is simply unable to support Bill 13. I'll quote from the member of Nepean–Carleton right now, Speaker, with your indulgence:

“I think we can do better. We must remember why we are here: to make Ontario a better place for all Ontarians—not just some, but all; not just the strong, but also the weak; not just the straight, but also the gay; not just the thin, but also the smart; not just the weak in learning abilities, but also those people who are working hard; not just for the overweight; not just for the learning-disabled. We have to protect all Ontarians, regardless of why they’re being bullied. That is our job. That is why we were sent here. We cannot continue to have any more of these problems in our schools. That is the issue.”

Recently, in the town of Gananoque in my riding, Trustee John McAllister of the Upper Canada District School Board hosted a forum on bullying. More than 60 parents were in attendance, and I want to publicly commend Trustee McAllister for organizing this opportunity for people to come and express their views on the subject.

One of his messages that night to parents was to stress that school boards and schools are addressing the issue, and certainly I want to say that I believe that it’s now taken more seriously than it ever was, certainly if you look back on how it was treated when I was a student many, many years ago.

I think some of the ideas that our Ontario PC caucus have put forward on bullying would be a giant step forward in helping school boards do an even better job. I think it’s appropriate, Speaker, for me to talk about some of the flaws that I, and some of my colleagues, see in Bill 13.

Our definition—I’m using our definition in referencing the former bill from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo—of bullying would be more thorough, because we focus on what constitutes bullying and how it affects the victim. The Liberal bill, Bill 13, is a bit preoccupied with the reason for bullying, whether it’s gender, religion or race, and doesn’t place enough emphasis on the form or outcome of bullying. Bill 13’s definition, the Liberal definition, focuses on the perceived power imbalance based on the aforementioned individual factors. Our definition doesn’t require specifically stating what the individual factors are, since it is designed and written to include all conceivable reasons one may be bullied.

The PC definition includes the impact that bullying has on the school environment, the education process and

the victim’s emotional well-being. Our definition is longer, it’s more detailed and it’s more comprehensive.

As a number of my colleagues have stated in debate today and on other days, we include a section entirely devoted to the issue of cyberbullying. I know it’s an issue in my riding. I can speak to the Brockville Police Service that spent a great deal of time in the past couple of years trying to educate parents on the issue of cyberbullying, because we know that with today’s technology bullying doesn’t stop when the final bell rings at the end of the school day. The inclusion of cyberbullying is critical due to the increasing prevalence of Internet-based bullying. I think we all know, Speaker, that the Internet allows perpetrators to relentlessly bully and harass their victims 24 hours a day, often anonymously.

Again, I know that there have been a number of heckles that we’ve seen from the other side on some of the reasons why we rang the bells. Again, I want to differentiate, Speaker, if I might, why we’re raising issues in this Legislature. As I said in my lead question today in question period, we have a real issue with the way this government handled and is continuing to handle the scandal behind Ornge. For that reason, and that reason alone, Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour will say “aye.”

And all opposed, “nay.”

The nays have it—it’ll be a 30-minute bell. Call in the members.

The division bells rang from 1736 to 1806.

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

Mr. Clark has moved adjournment of the debate.

All in favour will please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

Opposed?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 49; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The motion carries.

Second reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being after 6 o’clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o’clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1807.

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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