



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 9 May 2012

Mercredi 9 mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 9 May 2012

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 9 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES
AMENDMENT ACT (RENT
INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 26, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you, Speaker, and thanks to our party's whip for telling me when to stand up. I appreciate that.

I'm happy to rise again this morning to speak briefly to Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

Our party believes that there needs to be action that results in Ontario becoming more affordable for the people who live and operate a business in this province. Under the current government, we have seen the exact opposite, Speaker. Life is getting more expensive by the day. The debt continues to grow, along with the deficit, and Ontarians continue to suffer from the mismanagement of the Dalton McGuinty government.

Under this government, hydro rates have increased eight times since 2003, by a total of 84%. If you're a family with a smart meter at your home, well, you've seen your bill go up by a staggering 150%. A sad story out of my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex last week was the announcement of the closure of a retail store in my riding. During the campaign last year, this retail store told me that their hydro bill is \$20,000 a month, and three or four years ago, it was almost half of that. There were 75 jobs lost last week in my riding of Lambton–Kent–

Middlesex—a very sad day for those families, and this government is to blame for these job losses.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Questions and comments?

Hon. John Milloy: A few minutes ago, I had a chance to call the order, as members realize. I'd just like to put on the record that according to my notes here, we have spent 14 hours and 50 minutes debating this particular order, this bill, G19. I think all of us would agree it's time to move on to committee. But instead, what we've heard from the opposition is bell-ringing over and over and over again, not just on this bill but a whole series of bills.

This bill, through the rent increase guideline, the changes that it brings in, will protect tenants. It will actually allow landlords to better manage their planning, moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, there is some urgency in getting this legislation through, which is why we, on this side of the House, would like to see it go to committee. There will be an opportunity at committee for further debate and discussion—and delegations to come forward and speak on it, presumably, if the committee decides—an opportunity to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the bill. As always, there will be an opportunity to amend the bill and send it back.

But again, this is about protecting the rights of tenants but at the same time allowing landlords to operate within an acceptable framework that everyone understands. I really have to call the opposition to task and ask them why they're not allowing this piece of legislation to move forward. As I say, if the opposition wants to oppose this piece of legislation, that's their right, but the way to oppose it is to debate it, is to propose amendments in committee, is to put forward reasoned arguments, not to ring the bells over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, 14 hours and 50 minutes—for people who are unfamiliar with the Legislature, they may not realize that is an unprecedented amount of time on a bill that is relatively straightforward, a bill which strengthens rent guidelines for tenants. Again, I ask the opposition why they won't allow this bill to move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, I'm disappointed that the government House leader would not have addressed the remarks made by the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. In fact, the bill itself, Bill 19, is basically one paragraph long. What it does, actually, is not the dispute. The dispute here today, government House leader, is

really, why will you not respond to the call of the order of this House to have a select committee on the scandalous spending at Ornge helicopter? That's what the procedure's about. You're ignoring the real essence of the debate here this morning.

I can only say that the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex laid on the table an example of what this legislation means. We're quite prepared to go to committee; we're quite prepared to make sure that this becomes law, to create certainty for both tenants and landlords. That's all it does, basically: It lays out a calendar such that the rent review guideline would be not less than 1% and not more than 2.5%.

The essence of this discussion this morning is really more importantly about the scandalous, wasteful spending and the call of this House, the unanimous agreement within this House, including the Minister of Health, that you would have a select committee. But what you've done is you've really obfuscated the whole debate about that and not dealt with that at all. You've really not allowed us to have a select committee.

I'd lay out the question, if you get a chance to respond this morning: Why won't you? Is there something you don't want to get to the discussion on the public accounts committee? The member from Oak Ridges, Mr. Klees, who has led the discussion here, has made it very clear that there's evidence by some of the expert testimonial witnesses that said clearly there's been abuses. The police are investigating. There's more to this. There are people who were making millions of dollars. There are hundreds of millions of health care dollars wasted. That's why we want a select committee. Don't try to play games in this House this morning.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to say generally that New Democrats don't have an opposition to this bill. We think, in fact, committee time would be in order, for us to be able to deal with this.

I want to make it clear for the record that New Democrats are not ringing bells. I sympathize with my Conservative counterparts in regard to their want to have a hearing on Ornge. I agree with them that, in fact, this is a scandalous situation and that we should be trying to shine the light on what has happened at Ornge so that, quite frankly, we can learn from whatever happened, whatever mistakes were made by the people who ran Ornge, so that we can plug the holes and not let that happen again.

I understand why the Conservatives are ringing bells. New Democrats aren't participating, and I want to put that on the record. When the government House leader gets up and says the opposition is ringing bells, I just want the record clearly to say that New Democrats are not ringing bells. We have said that, yes, we support the Conservatives in their bid to be able to get the Ornge committee, but we decided not to participate in the bell-ringing, and we do think this bill should go forward.

That being said, I think the government House leader should be hearing what the opposition Tories are trying

to tell him, which is that they have a serious concern, as we do, that in fact there should some form of hearing when it comes to the issue of Ornge. The government House leader will say, "Well, that's happening at public accounts." That's true for now, but it is going to come to an end in about three sessions of that committee over the next three weeks. What do we do after that? There's still the question of Mr. Mazza. Mr. Mazza has sent in a doctor's note saying he's not available until June 6. Will he send us another note? Will he refuse to appear on the Speaker's warrant?

All of those types of things are important to deal with, and I think there are still some people who need to be heard by this committee in order to explain what happened at Ornge so that we're able to learn and stop that from ever happening again.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, just to add some content in relation to Bill 19, Bill 19 does very little, if anything, to build affordable housing. We have an affordable housing problem in this province, and there is no affordable housing strategy by the Liberal government, God bless—nothing. So while this little thing caps rent increases and will help some people, there are 140,000 people overall on a waiting list to get public housing. Why? Because the majority of these people waiting have absolutely very little money—and that list is growing.

0910

I said 140,000, but I believe it's 146,000. It was 130,000 under the Conservative government. It's 146,000 under a Liberal government, because there is no housing strategy, and that's the tragedy of what we're debating. So although the Liberals make it appear as if somehow this is a big thing, it isn't. It's a tiny, little strategy in the scheme of things, and it doesn't tackle vacancy decontrol, a strategy left by the previous Conservative regime.

What does that vacancy decontrol mean? It means that when a tenant leaves, rents can be increased. And that continues as a strategy; it hasn't been dealt with. Landlords can still increase rents above the guideline if they demonstrate that they've had extraordinary increases around heating bills and other related stuff, so they could still get more. That doesn't deal with vacancy decontrol. It doesn't deal with the fact that landlords can still get more than the cap, based on other extraordinary circumstances. So they'll be okay. But the real tragedy is the lack of an affordable housing strategy that builds housing for those who are income-poor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has a two-minute reply.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the Minister of Community and Social Services and the government House leader, as well as my honourable colleague from Durham and my friends from Timmins–James Bay and Trinity–Spadina. I'd like to thank them very much for the comments. Again, it was good to rise today, I guess for my third time, on Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

I guess the point I was making was that the government is doing absolutely nothing to create the environment for economic growth in this province. As I was saying a few minutes ago, hydro bills continue to come up on a daily basis when I'm home talking to small businesses in my riding. We had 75 jobs being lost last week in my riding with the announcement of a retail store closing. Their hydro bill is between \$18,000 and \$20,000 a month, and a few years ago it was about half of that.

Really, that's the issue: This government is introducing bills that make them appear that they're doing something, but in fact life is just getting more expensive for families in this province and for businesses across the province, and in particular in southwestern Ontario, where we're seeing jobs being lost every day, because this government has no plans to get people to work and to get life more affordable for families.

They're just not addressing the issues. They continue to deal with symptoms. We've been saying on this side of the House for a long time that it's time that the government wakes up, smells the coffee, gets to work for the people of Ontario and works with the other parties in this House to get people back to work and to make life more affordable.

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

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure, as always, to stand here in the chamber and discuss something as important as house rental and the effects that has on everyone throughout the province of Ontario.

This is something that my esteemed colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex alluded to, and that's the fact that what we're seeing from the government side of the House is them entering bills, introducing bills, that actually sound good, that actually appeal; they have very nice, flowery wording to them. It makes you feel really good inside and that they're actually doing something. But the real tragedy here is the simple fact that this bill doesn't address what Ontario really needs, which is jobs. We need jobs in Ontario. This government is doing very little to create those jobs.

We've also come across a debt crisis. We're seeing the provincial deficit this year grow exponentially—within the next five years, up to \$30 billion in deficit. This is going to have an adverse effect on the services that we as a government provide to Ontarians and how we can deliver those services in a timely, efficient and well-meaning manner. So I have certain issues with this bill.

As the member from Trinity-Spadina alluded to, as did my esteemed colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, people are struggling here in the province of Ontario. They're losing their jobs. They're trying to find jobs. Housing, obviously, is something that is a necessity. It's important to have a building around you with a roof where you can actually grow as a family within a community.

This bill does not actually help the residents of the province of Ontario, and this is where I'm concerned, be-

cause as you well know, young people, the future of this province, who are not living in housing, who don't have that opportunity, are finding it very difficult. As my esteemed colleague the member from Durham also alluded to, this bill is being held up not by us but by the government, which is non-compliant with the simple fact that we are calling for a select committee because of Ornge.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Obstruction.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Obstruction. Thank you very much, Mr. Whip.

The health minister herself stood up in this chamber and said that she would comply with the will of the Legislature. My colleague friends to the left here and we, the PC caucus, voted unanimously to form a select committee. That's how democracy works: the will of the people. We are the voice of our residents, our constituents. Until the government realizes and respects that will, we are going to continue to ring bells. We are going to continue to obstruct any further legislation that comes forward, because that's all we have. The will of the people is not being adhered to, so we're fighting on behalf of our residents, our constituents who want to see progressive movement forward in job creation and a strategy to fight our deficit, which is going to reach \$30 billion.

We don't have to worry about flowery legislation like Bill 19 and rent increases when there's going to be nobody who can afford to rent or own property because this government is basically destroying the backbone of what Ontario is, what it was: the great engine of Confederation, the economic engine that our forefathers and mothers worked very hard to make, a legacy and a future for younger generations coming up, the young people.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as a former educator myself, history and English were the areas that I taught. As a historian, we have to look at the past in order to map out our future. We cannot forget the people, the individuals who came before us who laid the foundation of this great province, who had a vision of what Ontario could be, what Ontario can be, but what we are not currently. So although Bill 19 deals vaguely with the housing issue, as I alluded to earlier, there are going to be more and more individuals who are going to find it difficult, without a job, to live in a home, to find a rental property.

0920

When I was campaigning—and again, the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex alluded to this as well—one of the things I heard very, very often at the door was the exorbitant price of electricity, the skyrocketing price of utilities, and how they were struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month. More and more, it became difficult. People had to choose.

There is an elderly couple in the town of Brighton. It saddened me greatly, because here's a couple who—actually, the wife's father built the home in which they resided, in which, when they got married, grew their family; their children grew up in that residence. As I sat at their kitchen table, I felt sorry for the husband and wife, who almost broke down into tears because they had to choose between selling their home—because they

couldn't afford it on a fixed income, because their property taxes were too high and their utilities were too high. They figured that the savings that they had were being eroded under this current government and their policies.

It was a sad day for me, but I realized that I was, therefore, getting involved on their behalf. I was going to be a strong voice at Queen's Park. That day, I realized these could be my parents. They don't have a big, splashy pension; they don't have a large bank reserve. How are they going to make ends meet?

This bill, I have to say, is nothing more than window dressing. People are struggling, and if this government insists on supporting and propping up scandals like eHealth, like Ornge, and lining the wallets of their friends and inner circle—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member to stick to the script. You're wandering a little bit. Thank you.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just have to say that when the government House leader says that we don't want to work, that we're not willing to work on behalf of Ontarians, it's just the opposite. We're here to work for them. We're the strong voice for our constituents who don't have a voice. For that elderly couple in Brighton, I'm proud to say that I'm here to obstruct what this government is doing to them.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, I agree with the member from Northumberland—Quinte West on a couple of things. The two areas that he speaks about are affordability issues—because we have an affordability crisis that the Liberals haven't, of course, dealt with—and the other one is that we need to create jobs, and he's right on that. The question is how we get there, and this is where we have a disagreement with the Conservative Party.

On the issue of affordability, he's quite correct in speaking to it. Here's what I say that nobody talks about in either of the two parties, Liberal and Conservative, which is that according to the 2000 census, 45% of Ontario tenant households paid 30% or more of their household income on shelter costs. One in five, or 20%, of Ontario tenant households paid 50% or more of their household income on shelter costs. That speaks to the affordability crisis that we have in this province and in the country, and we are not dealing with that. The Liberals, should they at some point want to create jobs, could start the building of non-profit housing, co-operative housing. That would spur the economy, that would create jobs, and that would begin to deal with the fact that—and I said 146,000 people are waiting for public housing. There are 152,000, so that list is bigger than I had imagined. That is the way to create jobs, but the government has no strategy around it.

I want to make another point to the Liberals and to the Conservatives: There are exemptions to rent controls and those exemptions are in the Residential Tenancies Act, section 2, and that was passed in 1998, which means a whole lot of rental units are exempt from rent control.

That was intended to spur development in the private sector. It's not happening. We need to create housing. It would create jobs and raise revenues, and that's what the Liberals should focus their attention to.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm glad to add my comments to the conversation here. This is a routine bill, and I think we all agree that it's a necessary bill. I don't understand why the opposition has been holding it up. You're holding up the opportunity for landlords and for tenants to benefit. We're here to work for our constituents, so we should get on and get this bill to committee and continue to work and make it better, if that's the intent.

I think we all know that while the rent increase guideline formula has worked well in the past, the recent fluctuations in Ontario's consumer price index have resulted in a 2012 guideline that doesn't reflect the economic circumstances of those who rent. That's why, in response, the government has introduced this bill, Bill 19, that, if passed, is going to amend the annual rent increase guideline formula to ensure that the rent increase guideline will be capped at 2.5% and would never fall below 1%. The guideline would continue to be based on the Ontario consumer price index, and what it would mean is that by not falling below 1%, it would offer landlords some security, and by not going above 2.5%, the guideline would also offer some reassurance, stability and affordability to renters.

This is something that we need to do for our constituents who are renting. We need to move on past this stage. I would urge the opposition to sincerely consider that.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: I've spoken to this bill already on another day, but I'm happy to speak to it again.

I think the issue of real rent control is something that's extraordinarily important in my community, across the city of Toronto and across Ontario. I remember back in the 1990s when rent control was really gutted by the previous government and the real implications. It meant more people were living on the street in the city and more people couldn't feed their families. In a lot of ways, we've never recovered from that.

We do need, as my colleague from Trinity—Spadina said, to address the affordable housing situation in this city. I don't feel like we're having a debate on this. I'm not trying to hold up the debate—just to put it on the record that, as my friend from Trinity—Spadina said, this is a small bill. This goes just a tiny, tiny bit forward in what needs to be. We need to make some big steps around affordable housing in this province.

As he mentioned, the issue about vacancy—there's no rent control when there is a vacancy in this city, in this province. It's a huge problem, and it means that there are tenants who get bullied out of their accommodations so that rents can go up. We are living in a housing bubble right now, in a housing crisis. The fact that prices in this

city and across the province are going up every single year at a huge rate means that, at some point, we're going to have a huge problem here for tenants when interest rates go up, and we need to make sure that we're thinking in advance about this. We've put forward policies around building affordable housing in Ontario. In our last platform, we talked about zoning for new affordable housing, and we need to make real strides on this issue.

It's interesting that both the government and the official opposition have talked about freezing wages in this province, but they won't freeze rents. I think that's really unfortunate, that real wages are not going up but rents continue to go up in Ontario.

0930

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

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to comment on the presentation made by my colleague across the way. Again, just to pick up on the theme of this bill, this bill is about protecting tenants. It's also about making sure that landlords have the information they need, the framework they need, so that they can properly plan and that we have that equal relationship that we strive for in all our movement towards housing.

Mr. Speaker, I noted earlier that this is a very straightforward bill. It's a bill that's very important to a lot of people, yet the opposition party is not allowing it to go through. They're constantly ringing bells and engaging in delaying tactics.

I do want to put on the record, because I heard my friend the NDP House leader stand up in his questions and comments to an earlier speech, that when I talk about the opposition, I'm talking about the Progressive Conservatives. Certainly, from the New Democratic Party, we've seen a willingness to move forward with this.

As I say, this is an important piece of legislation. The opposition has every right to oppose this legislation, but the way to properly oppose it is to enter into debate, to send it to committee and there have an opportunity, if the committee desires, to hear from witnesses and to put forward the types of amendments going forward.

I hear this constant rendition from the PCs that this is about an inability to look into the Ornge situation. Again, I want to put on the record that the government shares concerns about what's happened in Ornge. That's why we've had the Auditor General look at it. We've welcomed his report. The OPP is investigating it, with the encouragement of the Minister of Health. The public accounts committee, a standing committee of this Legislature, which has all the tools and powers it needs to look into it, is in fact holding hearings into it as we speak this morning, which I suspect is why we're not having bells from the PCs. At the same time, there's another piece of legislation before this House with which, if it should pass second reading, there would be more opportunity to look at Ornge and ways to make sure that the framework is strengthened.

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

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the government pointed out there, they want things to move along. But really, again, I have to say it's all talk. It's background noise, if you will. It's not really addressing what the heart of the matter is and what we're doing.

To my NDP colleagues, the members from Davenport and Trinity–Spadina, everything is rosy over there for the NDP—God bless. But the fact of the matter is that if people had jobs, they could afford rent. This government has done nothing to create jobs and address the deficit that we're facing. It's a crisis.

Therefore, we want to introduce legislation that's going to create jobs here in Ontario. We're going to implement legislation that's going to address the debt crisis that we're facing, to get Ontario back on its feet so that people will be able to afford housing, as my NDP colleague really wants to. But it's our approach, Mr. Speaker. Only the PC caucus has the correct approach on how to get Ontario back to do that. Tim Hudak has laid out the foundation of how we're going to move forward—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Bill 19, although it talks about rental housing and how it's going to improve the lives of individuals—as I alluded to, it does nothing. Only Tim Hudak and the PC caucus have that plan. Thank you.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to join the debate today for Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act. I have to give a nod to my colleagues from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and Northumberland–Quinte West. They have been spot-on with their comments.

We all know this particular bill is the result of the HST, the largest tax grab in Ontario's history. But before we jump right into this, I want to speak to the fact that my colleague and the member from Timmins–James Bay mentioned that this bill really does very little to build affordable housing.

Much like the member from Northumberland–Quinte West alluded to, this is very much a chicken-and-egg issue. Why are people looking for affordable housing? It's because they can't afford the bills. It's because they do not have jobs. In my riding, jobs are disappearing every time you turn around. They closed the Walkerton jail. They took away the Bluewater Youth Centre, just south of Goderich. We've lost manufacturing like crazy over the last eight years due to the exorbitant costs of operating in the Liberals' Ontario as we've come to know it today—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member to stick to the bill. We're wandering a little bit. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: The fact of the matter is, because we've lost our manufacturing jobs, because we're losing jobs in our riding, people can't afford to live any longer. Mr. Speaker, this is very, very pointed. And you know what? It also speaks to a comment that was

made by the member from Trinity–Spadina. He said the government has no strategy around jobs and affordable housing and making life easier and more affordable in Ontario today, and I totally agree with that.

That actually expands over to my motivation to seek representation of the riding of Huron–Bruce. Not only does the government not have a strategy for affordable housing and making life easier in Ontario, but this government is totally void of a strategy and a vision for rural Ontario as well.

Interjection: A lack of leadership.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It proves to be a lack of leadership, as my friend here said.

It points to the fact that this bill really doesn't play into overall effectiveness in the big picture. We know that too many Ontarians, 1.3 million tenant households, are stretched to the limit trying to pay their household bills, including their rents. These bills are exorbitant.

I just can't say enough about United Way. This past winter, United Way came forward and did their job. They're a great organization. They helped people pay their bills so that they could stay in their house.

And you know what's sad? Now that the winter has come and gone, those same people can't afford to keep their lights on. My constituency offices in Kincardine and Blyth are being called on a regular basis by people who can't keep the lights on. They don't have the money. They don't have a job. Life is unaffordable.

So this issue spans beyond affordable housing; it's about affording life in today's Ontario, with the lack of leadership demonstrated by the Liberal government.

We all know that this is a problem faced by those who actually are waiting on affordable housing. There are 140,000 people on a list, and this bill isn't going to help them. Some 32% of tenants have accommodations that fail to meet standards of adequacy, suitability and affordability. These numbers are up and will continue to rise across this province as Ontario fails to deal with this economic stagnation, the loss of the industrial sector.

Mr. Speaker, I ask, because it's getting frustrating, when is our government actually going to understand what the root of this whole problem is? Over 600,000 Ontario men and women are out of work, with skyrocketing energy prices, significant increases to—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Folks, there seem to be four sidebars going rather loud. It's your member who's speaking, and two of the sidebars of the Conservative members are rather loud. I would like to hear what she's saying. If you have a problem, take it outside. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the sidebars are over the fact that this bill really does nothing to address the root cause, which is affordable housing. Bill 19, as I said, does nothing to deal with those core issues that are making life so unaffordable in Ontario.

Affordable housing: There is a crisis out there, and you don't have to stick to urban Ontario; go right across this province and there's nothing there for these people

except to wait to get into some sort of housing. We have hundreds of thousands of people without work, while the HST and soaring hydro rates, along with increased fees, are eating away at what little disposable income people have.

0940

Under Dalton McGuinty, it's important to note, hydro rates have increased eight times since 2003, for a total of 84%—totally shameful. If you're a family with a smart meter at your home, well, you've seen your hydro bill go up a staggering 150%. When I knocked on doors in my riding of Huron–Bruce during the past election, I can assure you that the top issues people wanted to talk about were jobs and the cost of living. I ask, when is this government finally going to get it?

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

You know what? Speaking about failure, I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to touch on the absolute failure of this Liberal government with regard to acknowledging the will of the people and to follow through on what the Minister of Health said she would do—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member is drifting again. We're not talking about health; we're talking about lodging.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you, Speaker. Failures are failures, and we have to take this opportunity to utilize the tools at our disposal to demonstrate the fact that this government isn't listening. We won't stop until they do the honourable thing and strike a select committee on Ornge. It is the right thing to do.

Coming back, in terms of the right thing to do, this bill that we're debating today will do nothing, absolutely nothing, to address the ongoing maintenance issues that plague social housing units. It's estimated that there's a \$3-billion repair backlog. When is that going to be addressed? Because it is indeed, again, the right thing to do. This government simply hasn't made the right investments.

But there's more when it comes from groups who wish to seek reform. I feel that this legislation is actually the result of the HST. That has had a very significant impact on people who have houses or apartment buildings. It's obviously an impact on the tenants. It's that ripple effect that flows down, and at the end of the day, the only shoulders left to carry this burden are the taxpayers'.

Let's talk about the HST. For an example, I just got the snow removal bill for my office. I was taken aback at how expensive that is getting. We've had a warm winter, yet due to the HST and the added cost of operating, those operators have to pass that expense along, so at the end of the day, it hits the end-user. This is what the real problem is.

We can talk about the tenancy act, but it's about affordability. It's about maintaining and managing the cost of living. It's about making life just a little bit easier in Ontario. The fact of the matter is, the PC caucus has warned the government about the risk of the HST and the new costs that it would impose on landlords. Again, those new costs ultimately land on the shoulders of the people who we're trying to represent here in this chamber. The McGuinty Liberals have ignored the warnings. They have pushed the new cost on landlords, leaving them, as I said, with no choice but to raise rents.

So often, it seems that this government's attitude is to let somebody else take the blame or to pick up the bill and pay for it. The Progressive Conservative caucus, led by Tim Hudak, has repeatedly warned the government of the risk of Ontario's rental housing stock deteriorating with the additional costs of the HST, on top of the risk that small landlords might get out of the business altogether. The impact of energy increases—we all know where that's going. It's leaving nothing in the pockets of ordinary Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, we have to encourage this government to develop a strategy, take the chips where they lay and understand that we need jobs, we need affordability, and they need to be doing a better job to address the real issues in this province today.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand, in the matter of the member from Huron–Bruce, and to just comment.

She's saying that the job creation would solve the issues of the rent increase here that's happening in the province. You know, the job creation that is happening in this province is part-time jobs, contract jobs, minimum wage jobs, so that's not going to help with the housing issue.

A rent increase is going to hurt everyday folks. We know that this is happening. For people in Hamilton Mountain, to get a bachelor apartment, it's currently \$510 a month, and that's cheap compared to Toronto, but a person on Ontario Works is making \$599 a month, so figure it out.

We had to beg for a 1% increase for those folks on Ontario Works, but we're allowing a 2.5% increase on the rent. This isn't working. We need affordable housing; that's where this bill has to come back to. It's not about how much we're going to allow the rent to increase; it's about what we're going to do about the big picture as a whole.

The member also mentioned the HST and how that's affecting folks with the hydro. Yes, that's why we brought forward a bill to take the HST off home heating, to make it easier for folks in their homes to be able to deal with everyday life, because it is too hard in Ontario.

Hopefully, when we get this bill to committee, we can make some amendments to make it a little better.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm looking at some of the average rent increases in between 1975 and 2012. Do you know, Speaker, under the watch of which government the rent increases have been the lowest? That would be the Liberal government. And under which government were the rental increases the highest? That would have been the NDP. So I think it's actually time to call a spade a spade here.

Among the things our government has done, not merely in this bill but in the others—you know, in the last month for which figures were available, Ontario created 46,000 net new jobs—overwhelmingly full-time, high-value jobs. And with the overhaul of Ontario's tax system, one of the other things that we're able to see, particularly in my neighbourhoods in western Mississauga, has been the renaissance of high-value manufacturing. These are the things that are helping put Ontarians back to work, and that's what we're really here to do.

One of the things that this bill offers people, besides moderate rent increases, is something that they don't get on the other side, which is hope. We're offering people hope, hope of a decent future, hope of a great job, the ability to retrain—it's hope. The rent increases in the last several years are just another manifestation of it. Starting from 2003: 2.9%, 2.9%, 1.5%, 2.1%, 2.6%—none of the increases were in the threes and the fours. It's moderate, it's reasonable and it works.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I enjoyed the address by my colleague from Huron–Bruce. Hopefully, I'm going to get a little latitude here, because the government House leader has been given quite a bit of latitude with his dissertations this morning.

I just want to explain a little bit about the standing orders of the House here, Mr. Speaker. When a bill comes before this Legislature, every member has the right to speak to that bill, and the members of the PC caucus are exercising that right that is granted to them by the standing orders of this Legislature. If the government House leader wants to put forward changes to those standing orders, let's hear about it.

But they also have the right to invoke closure or time allocation motions to any bill. They can do that to this bill, as they can with any bill, just as they did with Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act. They brought a time allocation motion to the House, and then they subsequently withdrew it because there was a deal made to speak about Bill 14 and Bill 13 at the same time. Notice I said "Bill 14 and Bill 13." You might expect me to say 13 and 14, but the reason I say Bill 14 and Bill 13 is that Bill 13 is now in committee, and the government is hearing in boxcar letters from almost every deputant that the bill they want to see brought forward is Bill 14, because it is the one that actually tackles the issue of bullying in our schools.

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To the point of the government House leader and why we continue to speak to bills, it is our right, but, yes, we

have made it absolutely crystal clear that until this government stands by its word and promises made to this House, we will continue to use what arrows we have in the quiver until they bring forth a select committee on Ornge, or at least accept a change in the terms of reference for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Thank you.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's very likely that the member from Huron–Bruce will agree with me on this: Bill 19 is so minuscule as to be almost utterly insignificant. But that's what Liberals are good for, and they are exemplary in that regard.

Here's one of the little problems: Liberals have created very little affordable housing. That's why the list of people waiting to get into affordable housing is 152,000. Liberals, in eight and a half years, have not created one single co-op—not one co-op—something that in the accord, of which the member from Mississauga–Streetsville mentioned little—in the accord of 1985 to 1987, we built a huge number of co-ops that a lot of Liberals like, I think.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough–Rouge River might want to get back in his seat if he wants to make comments.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: So not one single co-op has been built in the Liberal regime.

Secondly, vacancy decontrol as it relates to Bill 19 means the following: When a tenant moves into another building, of all the three million tenants that we've got, when they move from one to the other, the landlord can increase rent at whatever level he or she wants. So this bill has practically no effect at all, and none of the Liberals speak to it because I suspect most of you are not aware of it, to be fair—and I say this uncritically.

Thirdly, exemptions: New buildings—and the government doesn't give figures for this—are exempt from rent control. So your Bill 19 has utterly no effect on those buildings whatsoever. You don't speak to that, because I suspect most of you are not aware of that, and I don't say that critically, but you're not aware of it. So this bill has no effect on that either. It would be good to speak to that, and I wonder whether the member from Huron–Bruce agrees with me on that.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: To my colleague from Trinity–Spadina, I do agree with you that this bill really is minuscule, and at the end of the day with regard to the big picture, it really doesn't have a big impact. In terms of affordable housing, again, I talk about the fact that this is a chicken-and-egg issue. The fact is, people need affordable living. The cost of living is going through the roof. Again, when people come calling in our constituency offices in Blyth and Kincardine, it's about being able to pay the bills. That concept and that worry com-

pletely is missed by the government of the day, and that is sad.

Because of that, I totally agree with the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke as well. Because of that, because the government is totally void of a strategy and totally negligent in terms of listening to the will of the people, we do have the right to stand up and express what really matters. To that end, I find it interesting that the member from Mississauga–Streetsville spoke to the fact that in terms of what matters to him, he had to realize that the highest rent was actually realized by the NDP government. It's interesting to learn.

But what struck me most was a comment made by our colleague from Hamilton Mountain. She referenced the cost of rent. She made me think of my nephew, actually. He's a recent graduate in the film industry, and he wants to move downtown. You know, the cost of living is just exorbitant. Think of those young people who are just trying to get started. This young gentleman by the name of Kyle Detzler, from Teeswater, Ontario: His short film has been nominated to be marshalled at the Toronto International Film Festival—incredibly proud. But do you know what? Life is going to be so expensive for this young gentleman of 23 years of age. How is he ever going to get started? At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we need affordable living, and that's how he and others will get ahead.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I rise today to speak to the government's Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2012. This is a simple proposal by the minister to limit yearly rent increases for tenants across the province to between 1% and 2.5%. No matter what the consumer price index indicator is in a given year, the guideline would have a floor and a ceiling as mandated by the ministry.

This is a proposal that is both unnecessary and detrimental to the rental housing sector. I speak today against this bill, and my comments will outline why I think this bill is a bad bill that should not pass second reading.

In Carleton–Mississippi Mills, the riding I represent on the west side of Ottawa, which includes the fast-growing community of Kanata, we have many tenants. Since I was elected in October, I have worked on behalf of tenants who are constituents. The system can be very difficult for them to navigate, so I've been there to help them a bit, as I would help any constituent. Government has become too large and cumbersome, and government has too much control over the private relationship between a tenant and their landlord. I'm also in contact with landlords who have to deal with the government in the way tenants do.

There is much that can be done to improve the situation for our privately owned rental housing sector in Ontario. As I mentioned, I'm opposed to Bill 19. I cannot support the minister's proposal for the following reasons: (1) this is a bill by a government trying to give the appearance they're doing something substantial for ten-

ants at the expense of landlords; and (2) this is a bill that attempts and fails to roll back some of the negative effects of the HST on the rental housing sector in Ontario for both tenants and landlords.

Bill 19 comes at a time when the cost of living is going up for tenants. Bill 19 comes at a time when the cost of running a business is going up for landlords. Bill 19 is the wrong bill at the wrong time. I will outline later what the government could have done to improve tenant-landlord legislation.

First, this is a bill by a government trying to give the appearance that they're doing something substantial for tenants at the expense to landlords. To put a floor and a ceiling into the province's yearly rent increase guideline calculation will not help tenants. The last time the province's rent increase guideline was above 2.5% was in 2007, and for the last 18 years, it has never been over 3%. In historical context, this is very low. In the 1970s, the average increase guideline was 8%, quadruple what it has been recently.

Nowadays, a tenant's ability to pay is well protected by the fact that the guideline is now legislatively tied directly to the consumer price index. Further, Bill 19 would result in a false economy. This move proposed by this government bill would not produce substantially lower costs for tenants, only a few dollars saved per year. This government wants to appear to be on the side of tenants, however hollow the results.

In contrast to any small, positive effect a tenant may feel, the landlord would feel negative effects on a much larger scale. Running an apartment building as a business is a large-scale, costly operation, particularly if the building is older. A landlord whose cost recovery would be restricted by this bill would start to reduce his or her costs to adjust for this new law. The landlord would be tempted to postpone annual maintenance work.

Bill 19 is a proposal for more over-lawing, an extension of McGuinty's nanny state: over-regulation of a private business, over-regulation of the free market, expecting landlords to be charitable when they are running a business. It's a business, not a charity. It's the free market economy, not an extension of social housing. The market is either free or it's not. Under this government, it is not nearly as free as it should be. They habitually pass out taxpayer money to subsidize what the market doesn't support.

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The rental housing sector and its dwindling housing stock are part of our free market, regardless of the government's policies. It's a part that is particularly over-governed. The province's stock of rental housing will continue to dwindle as long as it is not a full part of a free market economy. If the market sees over-regulation and does not see reasonable profit to be made, it will not invest. Landlords provide a private service. Landlords don't provide a public service, and should not be treated as such.

Second overall, this is a bill that attempts and fails to roll back some of the negative effects of the HST on the

rental housing sector in Ontario for both tenants and landlords. The HST has increased the cost of many things by 8% that used to be only subject to the 5% GST. The Progressive Conservatives tried to steer this Liberal government clear of the HST. We told them it would hurt tenants and landlords alike. Costs have gone up for both tenants and landlords, just like we said they would. This is a government that won't listen.

This government could have helped businesses streamline their tax reporting in a way other than harmonizing sales taxes, a way that would have protected businesses and consumers from increased costs due to taxation. But they chose to continue with their spinoff scheme to reap even more taxes from you and me. The HST is nothing more than a one-size-fits-all bureaucratic measure that hits consumers where it hurts, and at the expense of business owners. People can buy fewer things if they have less money in their pocket. This government has become good at extracting after-tax dollars from our pockets. When the Liberals don't get enough from our income taxes, they slap on special taxes. This has been the story since the Liberals were elected in 2003. The HST is the latest chapter.

The overarching, overlying effect of this bill is wrong. I will not be voting for this bill, and neither will my caucus colleagues. Tampering with and hampering private business affairs should not be encouraged and, if possible, left out entirely.

Instead of Bill 19's focus, I know government could have brought forward other amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006. This bill seems to be a political move, one that is more smoke than mirrors, but one that plays well to their base of support. The government could have focused on streamlining how the Landlord and Tenant Board works by changing the administrative and legal regime and having proper recordings of the proceedings so cases could move faster and there is less room for error.

Another amendment could have been to reduce taxes on money a landlord puts into a capital reserve fund for his or her property. What about eliminating the HST for a landlord's business costs and a tenant's housing costs? These other measures would help reduce government's involvement in the privately owned rental housing sector. These measures would get government out of the way of the business of providing goods and services for a fair cost.

In closing, I remain opposed to this legislation, Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2012. It is a bad apple and should be thrown out. In support of both tenants and landlords, I add my voice against over-regulation, against false hope by false economy, and I add my voice against government interfering with the free market. I will be voting against this bill.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: What I like about the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills's speech is that it is undiluted Conservative ideology. It's clear and it's clean,

and I disagree with it completely, but at least it's clear. The point is that he supports this free market system: there ought not to be any regulations as it relates to the rental market. We disagree with that. There are times when, if we do not impose regulations on the free market system, they collapse the whole economy. They collapse countries, as we've seen in the US, with the ripple effects across the world. Free markets don't work. We cannot let them do what they want, and that's why regulations are a big part of who we are as government.

I want to say this: Rental landlords have been getting—let's not call them "caps"—the increases of 2% or 3%, whatever CPI existed, for a long, long time. It doesn't mean that landlords spent that in maintenance. I always believed that wasn't the case. If they were using those regular increases for maintenance, those buildings would be well maintained, but they don't use it for that purpose, one. Secondly is my argument—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Some may but many do not. They use that as further investment in other rental buildings or now condo buildings.

They are allowed to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for extraordinary expenses. So when you've got increases—heat, increases of this kind, hydro or heating bills—they can apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board and they probably will get those increases. The market still works for them, and the law allows them to get those regular increases.

This bill is a little bill. It doesn't do much. It's better than nothing, and we've got to do more.

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

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to just add a few comments to the speech made by the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, and I listened to him very attentively. To be honest with you, I was not surprised at his comments, because he has been very consistent since he arrived here with his tone of voice in terms of the free market and less regulation and no government. Probably, if you asked him if he supports democracy, he would probably say no.

But regardless of that, we have a bill in front of us—I've been here just over six years; every year this particular piece of legislation comes forward, and we routinely adopt it. But this year, for some reason, we're sitting here debating it, and I think we're almost close to 15 hours and we're just going in circles and circles. Our friends across the way have rang the bells consistently over the last couple of weeks, and we're not getting the job done that the public sent us to do.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The public wants an inquiry.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My friend across the hall is shouting at me that they want an inquiry. Fair ball, you want an inquiry, but why should you hold up what the public is asking us to do? We should do it.

To be honest with you, Mr. Speaker, tenants out there need this piece of legislation so that they can benefit from the actions that are being taken by this bill to limit

rent increases in our community to help those who are in need. It also helps landlords so that they know what they can expect in rent increases so that they can carry on their business. But unfortunately, we sit here and we debate this bill over and over because the opposition party is ringing the bells on a continuous basis. But you notice this morning it's Wednesday; they did not ring the bells.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to stand and speak to the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, and I do support much of what he says.

I was a child of the 1960s. When I graduated from college in 1968, I had a job to go to before I even got out of school. And I actually do remember most of the 1960s, which is something I'm very proud of. Anyway, when I graduated, I had a job to go to, which a lot of people don't have right now. We have somewhere around 600,000 people unemployed in this province, and that's the core of this problem. People need to have an income to pay their rents.

We have introduced ideas to the government, and they just flatly rejected our ideas, such as changing the apprenticeship system. We feel there are 200,000 jobs available there. We also want to change the energy policy to make it more affordable for people and businesses to flourish in this province. But again, we keep being rejected by them.

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I've been lucky all my life. I've only been unemployed I think for a total of three months in my whole lifetime. When I stopped farming and started to work with my wife in her business, we were fortunate to raise three sons, and they are all on their own and doing quite well, thank you. But there's still the 600,000 people that don't have that opportunity.

We've always taken great pride in that we've always been able to pay our rent, if we were renting, or our mortgage payments. That's what people want; they want a sense of pride in what they're doing. I think the real problem here is that the opportunity for real, meaningful work in this province has eroded—just too many people. I think that's the real crux of this problem.

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

Hon. John Milloy: I just want to put on the record again the fact that this is a very important bill for tenants, this is a very important bill for landlords, when we're talking about their ability to manage their relationship and manage as they move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I find it passing strange that we've heard from the official opposition, the Progressive Conservatives, as well as the NDP, about the brevity of the bill, about the fact that this bill just incorporates, really, a small piece of the larger puzzle. They say it over and over again, yet, according to the notes that I've been given when we began debate this morning, we have spent 14 hours and 50 minutes, nearly 15 hours, on a bill which all parties are indicating is a small piece of the puzzle. Instead, what we've been subjected to for most of that 15

hours has been constant bell-ringing and procedural tactics.

As I've said a number of times this morning, the simple fact is that members of this Legislature may oppose a piece of legislation. They have every opportunity to speak about that during debate. They have an opportunity at committee to put forward amendments, to hear from deputations if the committee decides on that. But instead, Mr. Speaker, we've been subject to this procedural wrangling. You're not seeing it—for those of you watching it at home—this morning because in fact there is a standing committee of this Legislature which is looking into the very serious Ornge situation.

So when the opposition stands up and says, "This is a minor bill," well, then I'll say, "Fine, then let's pass it; let's send it to second reading." When they say, "We want to engage in this procedural wrangling because of the need to investigate Ornge," I point out, as we speak this morning, a standing committee of the Legislature is looking into the Ornge situation, something that was agreed upon by all sides of this House.

After over 15 hours, it's time to get this bill—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I think this bill does nothing, as many people have already talked about. It's a 1% solution; it solves nothing. If we ever actually got to a point where some landlord was legislated to have a 1% rent increase, that means, compared to where we are today, where we have approximately 2% in consumer price index growth—and we're in terrible shape. We have high unemployment, huge debt, huge deficit, the worst we've ever had. If we ever actually get to 1%, that's designed failure. Can you imagine how it would be in this country? There would be higher unemployment, less reason to invest in new housing, and there would be greater need for new housing. When we have people that take money out of rent and put it towards building new houses, that's a good thing. That would be an incentive for investors to build more, which would reduce the number of people standing on the street looking for a house.

The 2.5% would be even worse, because that would indicate that when the consumer price index goes above 2.5%, when our economy starts to thrive and there are jobs and things do go up and there are profits, debts start to disappear, deficits disappear—we're going to limit that to 2.5% for a rent increase? No investor in his right mind is ever going to build a rental house again in that scenario. They would take their money and invest somewhere they could make a much higher rate of return.

I think we're up to almost 16 hours now, and I'm glad to do that because we have a government here who's not giving us an Ornge committee, and that's what we need to do. We need to fix that problem and get democracy working, and we need to have our Board of Internal Economy revisited and reworked. These things need to be done, and then we will co-operate with you. That's up to you, sir, to fix the problem.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome today Tony Doyle, joining us in the members' east gallery, from my riding of Durham. He and his wife, Sandra, must be very proud: Their son Brady, who is a page here, is captain today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased to welcome here today members of the Ontario Environment Industry Association, who are holding their annual Queen's Park day here at the Legislature. ONEIA will be holding a reception in the legislative dining room from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. this evening. I encourage all of my fellow members to attend. We welcome them to Queen's Park, and I know they'd be interested in knowing that the St. Catharines Junior B Falcons defeated Brantford to win the Sutherland Cup.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe that was out of order.

The member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It gives me great pleasure to introduce, from the Northumberland Community Counselling Centre, Patricia Hollingsworth, the executive director, and Janet Irvine, the board chair.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'd like to introduce Shelley Watt Proulx, the executive director of the Counselling Centre of East Algoma, who is here today for Family Services Day.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's my pleasure to introduce two outstanding optometrists from western Mississauga. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Sabrina Ahmed and Dr. Suleman Remtulla, who are visiting us here in the Legislature for the first time.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my great pleasure to welcome today to Queen's Park Mr. Don Pitt, the executive director of the Family Counselling Centre, from Sarnia, here to take part in Family Services Day.

Hon. John Milloy: I would like to welcome Leslie Josling and Paul Rossi from KW Counselling, along with Sue Gillespie from Mosaic Counselling. They are joining us from the beautiful riding of Kitchener Centre for Family Services Day here at Queen's Park.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Good morning. I stand today to welcome a friend and constituent of mine—I'm looking up at the gallery—Joyce Zuk, who is the executive director of Family Service Windsor-Essex, who's here for Family Services Day. Thank you for the work that you and your staff do each day, and welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Family Service Ontario is here today. Welcome to you all, specifically Alex MacDougall, the board chair; John Ellis, the executive director; Sandra Savage, the executive director from the

London Family Service Thames Valley; and Bev Noble, the board chair of Family Service Thames Valley.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Our community has a friend in the House today: Allan McQuarrie, the executive director of the Community Counselling Centre of Nipissing. Welcome, Allan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature today, for Family Services Day, from Thunder Bay and the Catholic Family Development Centre there, Carol Cline, as well as to acknowledge the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre and their executive director, Nancy Chamberlain.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to welcome Alex MacDougall, past president, and Ray Houde, the executive director, for our Family Services Day. Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to welcome guests from Peel-Dufferin Catholic Family Services, including Mark Creedon, Ehsan Khandaker, Valerie Anderson, Angelica Lopez, Carol-Ann Drinkwater, Theresa Koutzodimos and Stacey-Ann Brown.

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you for allowing me to welcome Syed Warsi, from the wonderful riding of Markham-Unionville. He's visiting his daughter and page, Safa Warsi. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to welcome friends of mine, Nancy and Steve Rastin. Steve's here today with the Ontario Trial Lawyers' Association. He runs a thriving practice, Rastin & Associates, in Barrie and Midland and—okay.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It's my pleasure to introduce Asquith Allen. He lives in the riding of York South-Weston, and he is with York University and the Ontario Young Liberals association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome Elisha Laker, Mariana Benitez and Susan Warren, from Family Services York Region, to the House today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the Speaker's gallery today, from the riding of Oxford, we have at Queen's Park today students, parents and staff from the Oxford Reformed Christian School as guests of the Speaker. The member from Oxford and I will meet on the grand staircase for a photo. Welcome to Queen's Park on your adventure in Toronto.

And other guests of mine, from the great riding of Brant—even though we didn't beat St. Catharines—we have joining us today at Queen's Park the principal of St. Leo School, Dr. Dale Petruka, and her students Hannah Puckering and Sofia DiFelice. Welcome.

On a point of order, the member from Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you very much for introducing the class from the Oxford Reformed Christian School, and I do think that they are as important that they should be introduced by the Speaker, but I do want to add my personal welcome to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a point of order, but I would expect that you would stand and say so.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, yesterday you said, "We ... must achieve 0%.... We have built those numbers into the budget." You also pointed out that it's important to freeze wages.

Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly agrees we need to freeze wages, the Premier agrees we need to freeze wages; the charter allows you to do it. In fairness to Ontarians, why won't the minister join this party and commit to an across-the-board legislated public sector wage freeze?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The charter allows it under certain conditions and meeting those conditions, which include full discussion and negotiation. I would refer the member opposite to the British Columbia Supreme Court ruling. We have a number of legal opinions that share the same point of view with respect to how we proceed.

It's not a question, as I say—your leader pointed out yesterday page 171 of the budget: \$6 billion over the next three years. We have laid out mandates with four of the agreements that are up this year, all of which contemplate, frankly, more than net zeros, but real zeros, and we want to move forward with our partners in the public and broader public sectors and avoid the constitutional traps that are there, as well as avoiding the kind of name-calling and bringing down working people the way your government did 10 years ago.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Well, both the Premier and this minister have indicated that there are constitutional impediments to a legislated wage freeze in one breath, but in the next breath they're saying they're prepared to take those steps if necessary. They can't have it both ways. Either it's one way or it isn't, and I'm sure that the minister's legal advisers have advised him that it is possible to take the step and to legislate a public sector wage freeze when there are pressing fiscal circumstances.

Clearly, we're facing a \$30-billion deficit. If there are pressing legal circumstances other than that, I can't imagine what they are. Minister, why won't you take these steps and take action right away?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The risk associated with moving in the way the opposition wants to move is quite high from a court challenge perspective. We have to rely on the best advice available to us.

The most recent example where that risk is high is British Columbia. I remind the member opposite that the federal government in fact didn't legislate a wage freeze; they legislated a 1.5% increase, but they did that after thorough discussions, and they are still before the courts. There are a number of challenges going on.

The worst thing we could do is proceed in haste and not get it right, because if we don't get it right, we will not be able to achieve the goal. There are elements of risk in this, and we have sought both internal and external

advice. We look forward to working with the official opposition as we move to achieve the wage freeze undertakings in the budget.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Well, the British Columbia case to which the minister is referring has largely been overridden by other cases, as he would know. I would refer him to the Fraser case, which indicates that where there are pressing fiscal circumstances, there are situations where governments can take action.

We're looking at a \$30-billion deficit. We've had three downgrades. We've actually had our bonds downgraded by one international credit rating agency. This is a time to take leadership on this file and to take action. It's urgent. Why won't the minister take action and legislate a public sector wage freeze now?

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First of all, just to correct the record, Ontario is not faced with a \$30-billion deficit. At a minimum, I would suggest that the member opposite speak to facts. Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, don't add after I get quiet.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The public accounts next year will show that, and we can compare what is said in here versus what reality is at that time.

So no, they're wrong. I'm not going to risk this situation based on very poor advice from the opposition. We will proceed, trying to work with our partners to achieve balance so we can continue to make the investments in education and health care that we think are very important.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question this time is to the Attorney General, and it concerns again the Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries.

Minister, in addition to the financial concerns that have been expressed with respect to this group, a legal opinion from McCarthy Tétrault regarding the group's board states that the appointment of all board members appears to be invalid. The opinion goes on to state, "This is presumably a matter of considerable interest and concern to the government, to the relevant regulatory bodies" and to the group itself. "In such circumstances, immediate administrative investigation and intervention appears to be warranted."

Minister, this is a very serious concern expressed by a well-respected law firm in 2009. Why hasn't this compelled you to investigate this group's rogue activities?

Hon. John Gerretsen: We respect the opinion of the various law firms that may be involved in this, but we respect an opinion of a court even more. If there are issues

that are to be worked out between the Mount Pleasant Group and all those people who don't agree with what they're doing right now, there is one avenue to deal with that, and that is to bring a court application so that the issues can be dealt with by a judge, as is always done in our system in any dispute that is a private dispute between individuals and an entity like this. That's where it should be dealt with.

There are many opinions out there. I respect this opinion, but there are other opinions as well that are contrary to that opinion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: With respect, it's ridiculous to expect that parties should have to go to a court when the jurisdiction to act lies with the Attorney General's office to begin with. The minister will know very clearly that the Charities Accounting Act gives you the ability to investigate, through the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, the activities of any charity.

Numerous red flags have been raised with respect to the activities of this group. You can no longer abdicate your responsibilities. Instead of telling us it's not your jurisdiction, that people should go to the courts, will you undertake your responsibility, request the financial records of the Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries, and make those records available to the public, as they should be?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, it's my understanding that the Mount Pleasant Group has just issued a statement in that regard which I've only just received. I'll have to take a look at that to see how it affects this particular situation.

But what's interesting is that there are no public funds. There are no government funds involved in this whatsoever. This was done under a statute—

Interjection.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: The corporation was set up under a statute that well precedes the existence of the province of Ontario.

Unless there are some allegations with respect to some criminal activity that would be—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order—second time, same question.

Hon. John Gerretsen:—that would appropriately be dealt with by a police investigation, there is not very much that the government of Ontario is going to get involved in this case, without it being taken to the proper authorities, which is to take the matter to court.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, with respect, the fact that this group has never received any public funding is completely irrelevant. It's like any other charity. The Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee can investigate any charity, and you well know that, Mr. Attorney General.

This is not a private dispute; this is something that involves the public. This is money that was established as a public trust for the benefit of the people of York, now the city of Toronto. They have assets of over \$1 billion under their administration. It's alleged they've made hundreds of millions of dollars, and no one knows where it's going. I cannot for the life of me understand why you do not accept that it is your responsibility to investigate this. Mr. Speaker, why won't the Attorney General do his job and look into this matter?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, the Mount Pleasant Group complies with all the requirements under the Cemeteries Act. That's number one. As far as I know, there have been no allegations of any kind of criminal activities. If there were, then the proper investigations would be taking place by the police.

The amount of money that was actually invested in 1827, the way I understand it, was \$300. A dollar was put into a kitty by 300 different individuals. It's a corporation that looks after cemeteries, not only at Mount Pleasant but in other areas as well.

There are other ways in which the private dispute between this organization and the group of individuals that don't like what's going on can be dealt with, and that proper place is the court system. The member, who's a highly respected member of the legal profession, well knows that.

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Today's announcement about Cliffs Resources proves what New Democrats have been saying for quite a while: Ontario has the skilled workforce and the ability to process natural resources and create prosperity and good jobs right here in Ontario. But there are still questions we need answered, Speaker. Can the Acting Premier tell us whether all processing will be done here in Ontario, or will Cliffs still be shipping away partially processed resources to create jobs somewhere else?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Today, Cliffs Natural Resources announced a \$3.3-billion investment in northern Ontario. You said it wouldn't happen. They announced that they're going to build a chromite mine. They're going to build a new transportation corridor and, yes, a \$1.8-billion processing facility in Capreol, near Sudbury. You said that wouldn't happen. This government is delivering for northern Ontario over your objections, over your inappropriateness. But most importantly, 1,200 aboriginal Ontarians will work in this facility as part of the deal.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Earlier today, the Minister of Northern Development said the government hasn't quite worked out the details about the processing of the materials. Over here we think that's a pretty important detail to

be worked out, and thousands of good jobs rely on that detail. If the government doesn't know today, when exactly will they know?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The leader of the third party will be aware that because of the large nature of this, because of what the economists and accountants call the material nature of this, Cliffs had to disclose their \$3.3-billion investment in northern Ontario. With processing of the natural resources happening in Ontario, with 1,200 First Nations Ontarians working at the site, Mr. Speaker, this is a big announcement for northern Ontario.

We will finalize those negotiations. Full transparency and accountability said we had to put this out, and Cliffs did. This is good news. You ought to be celebrating instead of nitpicking about something that is probably the most important announcement in northern—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, New Democrats have been very, very clear. If we're going to build a prosperous and sustainable future, we need to be smart and focus on creating those good jobs.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member for Peterborough, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario's natural resources should be used to create those good jobs and prosperity here in Ontario, not somewhere else—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —and the government support should be tied to that job guarantee. Do the McGuinty Liberals share that commitment, yes or no?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, second time.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member opposite about the mining sector in Ontario: \$3.5 billion in capital investment in 2011, the highest in Canada; over \$1 billion in mining exploration—for the first time ever, last year we hit \$1 billion; 27,000 direct jobs in metal mining; 50,000 related processing jobs; one quarter of all Canadian mining jobs.

1050

This is a great day for northern Ontario. You ought to be celebrating a good deal for northerners, for aboriginals, for all Ontarians. It's about a brighter future. It's about confidence in our economy and the confidence that the private sector has as well in the future of Canada's greatest province.

Interjections.

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

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is back to the Acting Premier. I think he needs to actually be clear

about the fact that there's not quite a deal yet. We just want to make sure it's the best deal that we can get for northern Ontario.

The support of First Nations is going to be absolutely vital if the Ring of Fire development is going to proceed, yet we learned today that yesterday, some First Nations were caught completely off guard by this announcement. Why didn't the government engage in proper consultations with First Nations, Speaker?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, 1,200 jobs for First Nations—First Nations have been involved in those discussions. I don't know where she gets her information. Let me say this, Mr. Speaker: She ought to be celebrating this. It is good news for the north. It's good news for aboriginal Ontarians. It's good news for all Ontarians.

We're getting the processing in Capreol: 450 construction jobs, 400 permanent jobs. We're processing one quarter of all the minerals found in Canada, right here in Ontario. Our mining sector is leading the way as we move back to balance in this province, as we move back to a stronger and better future for all Ontarians, most importantly aboriginal Ontarians, who have an important role to play not only here but in Mattagami, in all the great developments in the north. We pledge to continue to work with them for a better future for their children as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Earlier today the Minister of Northern Development said that First Nations must be "front and centre." Does the Acting Premier think that refusing to talk to First Nations until the day before an announcement is the definition of "front and centre"?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, that is just simply not correct. There have been numerous discussions. This is a large opportunity for all Ontarians. We're particularly proud that our aboriginal communities in the north have the opportunity to share in this enormous development, share in its prosperity. We're proud of our government's record in sharing resource revenues. I think of Mattagami, Mr. Speaker. We're proud of our record in sharing of gaming revenues. I think of the new accord we came to terms with. There are always issues to be dealt with.

Instead of celebrating this, the third party wants to denigrate the deal, undermine it. Mr. Speaker, northerners are celebrating today. They see this as a great opportunity, and they know it was this government that delivered on the commitment to jobs and investment for northern Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If we want to bring prosperity to the north, it needs to be there for everyone. If proper consultation does not happen, the jobs promised today could be lost to drawn-out disputes, and those people on that side should know that very well. They've had to deal with a lot of those drawn-out disputes. People who need the opportunity most in these situations could be the exact ones who end up falling behind.

Will the Acting Premier admit that they should have engaged First Nations from the very start? And are they ready now to roll up their sleeves and engage in meaningful consultation with First Nations to ensure their full participation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What I can say to our aboriginal brothers and sisters is this government is prepared to work with them day and night, as we have. This announcement today is great news for aboriginal Ontarians, it's great news for northerners and it's great news for all Ontarians. It's about a brighter future for their children and our children. We need no lesson from that party on dealing with our First Nations, Mr. Speaker. We are proud of the relationships we have.

We have more to do, and we'll continue to build on the success we've achieved, because there are still too many First Nations communities that don't have adequate services, still too many First Nation children who aren't getting an equal education. We pledge to continue to build on the successes we've announced today, to build a better—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You've been in government for almost a decade and you've done nothing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order.

New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. For months, we've been warning the minister about the staffing policies at Ornge that leave bases understaffed and incapable of responding to emergency calls.

It's now been four months since the minister's leadership team has been in place, and ensuring proper staffing policies surely should have been a priority. I ask the minister to listen to this transcript of a call that was monitored on the emergency frequency this morning:

"One person trapped. Extrication under way. EMS on scene, asking for air ambulance. Dispatch telling them they are unavailable until after 7:15 due to down-staffing."

The person in question had to be transferred by land ambulance. He died.

I ask the minister, if ensuring proper staffing levels was not a priority for her leadership team, what was?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The first thing, I need to acknowledge that this is a tragic vehicle accident, and my heart goes out to the loved ones of the family. I do want to take this opportunity to say thank you to the first responders, the firefighters, the police, the paramedics for all the work they do on the front lines in this case and in others.

I know that Ornge is called when there is a very serious accident, when a patient is in critical condition, and I know, Speaker, that along with all the other first responders, they work very, very hard to save lives every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, we want to express our condolences to the family as well. But this is a matter of responsibility that goes directly to the Minister of Health. She had a responsibility to ensure that her new leadership team was prioritizing patient care. She knew full well that there were far too many incidents, already 13 investigations of incidents where calls could not be properly responded to.

I ask the minister this: Why has she not been monitoring the performance of her new leadership team to ensure that staffing levels, above all else, were there to ensure that any emergency call could be properly responded to?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can assure the member opposite and the people of Ontario that staffing is a very, very high priority for the new leadership at Ornge. They are working very hard to get the right staffing in place so that they can provide the best possible care for the people of this province.

I can assure the member opposite also that the new performance agreement that we have put in place compels Ornge to provide us with information on the requests they have received, the percentages that they have serviced, and the reasons why the balance of the calls were not in fact responded to.

This is the highest priority for the people at Ornge. It is a tragedy. I urge the member opposite not to politicize this tragedy.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: The question is to the Acting Premier. Mr. Bartolucci made an announcement this morning that Cliffs Resources is planning a smelter in Sudbury. This morning, the minister has refused to indicate how much of the ore extracted in Ontario will be processed in Ontario, and he also mentioned an exemption. Why won't the government say whether Cliffs has been granted an exemption to ship resources out of Ontario for processing?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: A quarter of all metal resources in Canada are processed in Ontario. This is good news for Ontario; it is good news. We are locating a processing facility in Capreol. I wish the NDP would celebrate that. So we have a processing plant that will create 450 jobs in construction, 450 permanent jobs, and we are proud to celebrate this announcement today.

We look forward to Cliffs. Because of the material nature of this, they had to go public, as we did, to disclose just how important this is for Cliffs, to Ontario, to the First Nations of Ontario, to all Ontarians.

You know what? This is good news. We're processing in Ontario, something we've delivered and you haven't.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Let me be clear about where our position is. We support good jobs in Ontario, but we

want to make sure that we're getting good jobs in here furthest for all Ontarians.

Although Cliffs announced a smelter in Sudbury, the company is still in talks about getting exemptions to shift the semi-processed ore overseas for processing. Our communities need resources mined in Ontario to stay in Ontario for processing, to create stable jobs and take full advantage of the opportunities that the Ring of Fire presents. Why won't this government say whether it plans on granting an exemption to the company to allow it to ship raw exports outside of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let me remind the member opposite just what the NDP campaigned on, Mr. Speaker. In their last platform, the NDP said they would put a moratorium on development north of 51. That would have stopped the Ring of Fire. That was in your platform.

With respect to First Nations, let me read a quote from this morning: "Webequie First Nation acknowledges Ontario's commitment to support the directly impacted First Nations and to engage the federal government in the tri-lateral process. It is important for all levels of government, including local impacted First Nations governments, to work ... towards a co-operative framework." That's what they say, Mr. Speaker.

We're working towards a co-operative framework. We're working for more jobs for aboriginal Ontarians and all Ontarians. This is great news for Ontario. This is great news delivered by a government that puts northern Ontario at the front of the train, not at the back, the way the third party would.

FAMILY SERVICE ONTARIO

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Today in the Legislature, we're joined by members of Family Service Ontario. This organization represents 44 not-for-profit member agencies that provide community-based mental health services and programs to over 250,000 individuals and families annually. They have agencies throughout Ontario. I've had the pleasure of meeting with Elisha Laker, executive director of Family Services York Region, and was most interested to learn about the various mental health support programs, which provide assistance with emotional, psychological, social, physical and financial struggles.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: Please tell the members of this House how our government is working to support the important work being undertaken each and every day across our province by Family Service Ontario.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It is great to have so many people from Family Service Ontario here today. I want to say thank you for what you do in your communities. Thank you for your dedication and the difference you make to the people in your communities. You make a real difference, particularly for those suffering with mental health and addictions issues.

Family Service Ontario offers a wide range of mental health services across the province, including substance

abuse programs, domestic abuse supports and family counselling, just to name a few. I can tell you that these initiatives are absolutely in line with our 10-year mental health and addictions strategy. Our recent budget reflected our commitment. We are committed to a 4% annual increase to the community sector, and that includes community mental health. We're able to do that because we have taken a real wage freeze with the doctors of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you for the good news on funding, Minister. As the minister noted, Family Service Ontario provides valuable services to families across Ontario, and I know my constituents in Oak Ridges–Markham benefit greatly from their efforts.

In addition to their provision of valuable mental health services, I know that FSO agencies also offer other services, such as relationship and financial counselling, programs to address substance abuse, as well as services for victims of domestic violence and those with developmental disabilities.

Minister, could you please tell the Legislature what our government does to support Family Service Ontario's work with those who are victims of domestic violence?

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

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to answer from the perspective of my ministry and echo the welcoming of the members of Family Service Ontario who are with us today. As I mentioned in introductions, we have two outstanding agencies here from my riding.

I'm proud to say that in terms of the violence-against-women issue and the funding that we provide to combat that, we provide funding to 30 agencies that are members of Family Service Ontario. This includes funding for counselling programs, the Transitional and Housing Support Program, as well as the early intervention program for children who witness violence.

I'm happy to know that my ministry's annualized funding to Family Service Ontario has more than tripled since we first came to office in 2003. In fact, in 2009-10, MCSS increased annualized funding for VAW counselling agencies across the province by some 3.29%. I look forward to our continuing work with Family Service Ontario.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is for the Minister of Health. Speaker, the minister has repeatedly invoked the Auditor General in defending her failures, but she knows that the auditor's mandate is to investigate value for money, nothing else. He did this admirably, delivering a scathing indictment of her failed management.

But, Speaker, the Auditor General is an auditor. He's a numbers guy, and his report is being considered by the public accounts committee, a numbers committee. What he and the committee do not do is investigate adverse

patient outcomes that have surely resulted from the minister's complete abdication of her responsibilities.

So I ask the minister: When will she show concern for the thousands of patients and families who have come into contact with Ornge?

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

Hon. John Milloy: I'm actually quite disturbed by the question that was raised that called into question the good work of the Auditor General of Ontario, an officer of this Legislature. The Auditor General had a chance to examine the Ornge situation with great detail, and he came forward with a report, which right now is being looked at by the public accounts committee. I would remind members that that committee has sat for over 20 hours, close to 21 hours, and has heard from 29 witnesses.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, they've had a chance, as I mentioned, to look into the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General's report highlighted the fact that there were weaknesses in the performance agreement and the relationship between the government and Ornge, and the minister has rectified that through a number of steps, including a very important piece of legislation in front of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again to the minister—I'm not sure where to look now. However, Speaker, the government's true colours are showing. To them, this is merely an exercise in issues management. They're clearly indifferent to the countless patients and paramedics who have contacted the PC caucus seeking answers.

The Minister of Health has argued in this House on no less than 61 occasions that she takes the word of the Auditor General. Now, if that's true, she'll be aware that the auditor has, in fact, identified 21 incidents of adverse patient outcomes—21 incidents. And now, today, a death due to a lack of staffing; an unfortunate situation that could have been avoided.

So I ask the minister, given that she's invoked the auditor's name over 61 times in defending her failures, will she finally show his report the respect it deserves by supporting the expansion of the public accounts committee's terms of reference?

Hon. John Milloy: Will the honourable member show respect for the good work of the Auditor General and the fact that the public accounts committee is undertaking very, very important work?

Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the opposition party about knowledge that was had on this side of the House, but I think what we found in the public accounts committee is the deep ties between the Progressive Conservative Party and the Ornge situation. We've heard from Kelly Mitchell, who was paid \$400,000 in order to lobby opposition MPPs—Progressive Conservative MPPs—a well-known Conservative activist. We heard about the work of Guy Giorno and other prominent Conservative lawyers and the advice they gave Chris Mazza about how to hide his salary.

I think the public accounts committee is seized with this issue. They're coming forward with some very inter-

esting facts about that party and Ornge, and I think we should allow the committee to do its work.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, you used declining revenue at border casinos as justification for eliminating the slots-at-racetracks program in order to protect jobs at the casino in Windsor. Yet, yesterday, Caesars Windsor sent layoff notices to 27 workers there.

Would the minister care to revise his rationale for his decision to put hundreds of Windsor racetrack employees out of work?

1110

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No. We're not going to subsidize the horse racing industry any more.

I'll remind the member opposite that 10 years ago there were 5,000 employees at Caesars Windsor. Today, there are under 2,000. Casinos are coming on stream in Cleveland, in Toledo, in Columbus. We simply had a saturated market. We had the choice: Keep two facilities competing against one another, give \$350 million to an industry, or work to protect the market. Mr. Speaker, that is our commitment.

The member opposite forgets how many have been laid off at Caesars due to increasing competition, including the fact that we had two casinos working within seven kilometres of one another, in fact spending money to compete against one another. That's not the way to go. I reject his thoughts on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Hundreds of people are losing their jobs in the Windsor-Essex community after this government closed down the slots and ended the agreement with the horse racing industry without any consultation. And this week we learned that Caesars Windsor has been sending out promotional materials, one of which I've provided to the minister, enticing Ontario residents to spend their gaming dollars at the Horseshoe Casino in Cleveland, Ohio. The fact that Caesars Windsor, which is owned by this government, is mailing a flyer to its patrons, encouraging them to take their entertainment dollars to the US, is salt in the wounds to the workers of our community.

Mr. Minister, why is this happening? Please, answer the people of Windsor. Why is it happening?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd just remind the member opposite that in the last week of racing at Windsor Raceway, more than half of the horses were American; 106 horses were scheduled to race and 54 were owned by Americans. That money went to the United States.

The member opposite may want to diminish and try to undermine the viability of Caesars Windsor—which the third party, in fact, created in Windsor way back in the early 1990s—but he's playing games with hundreds of jobs. I would urge him not to easily succumb to the notion that we could support two casinos working within seven kilometres of one another, with a market that's

saturated with slot machines and other gambling opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we have moved to protect our investment in that facility: a billion dollars just four years ago, with new convention facilities—

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

EDUCATION REFORM

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister of Education.

The government has made some tough choices, given the current economic climate. But as the economy continues to recover, serious steps have been taken to ensure the budget is brought back to balance by 2017. That's why we have worked with the NDP on a budget that puts education on a sustainable path forward.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can she tell this House how she will protect the important gains we have made in our education system, given these tough economic times?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt for her constant commitment to public education.

The commitment of our government is also constant to public education. We're committed to a strong, publicly funded education system, and that commitment will never waver. That's why we have worked very hard to restore public confidence in our schools after years of neglect under the previous PC government.

Our work in education is now recognized, and we are being recognized around the world as being a leader in educational excellence. Our grade 8 students are leading the country in math, reading and science, and the Ontario students are the only ones who scored above the national average in reading.

That's why, despite a challenging economic time, we're very committed to protecting the gains that we've made in education, protecting the classroom experience, protecting small class sizes, keeping teachers in our classrooms. Education is the best investment in our future and that's why our commitment to it is constant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Minister, for that response. My constituents in Scarborough–Agincourt consistently tell us that good schools in their neighbourhoods are among the most important things to them. I'm proud to be a part of this government, which the OECD has called a successful education reformer. But I have heard some concerns about the effectiveness of smaller class sizes in boosting student success.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell this House how individual attention in classrooms helps Ontario students?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you to the member. We've been committed, as I said, to protecting the gains Ontario has made in education: full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and more teachers in our classrooms.

That's because we know that those investments set our students up for success.

Let me be clear: What we're giving our students in Ontario is an opportunity to compete in a high-skills world, in a new economy. Young students in small class sizes get the individual attention that they need to master the basics. Literacy and numeracy in grades 1 to 3 are so critical. I know that as Minister of Education; I also know it as a mum of two boys who are in grade 1. Some 90% of primary classes now have 20 or fewer students, and that compares to 2003, where one quarter of all primary classes had 25 or more students.

It's important that our students get the time and attention of their teacher in a small class size so that they can succeed, and that's what our focus is on.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Todd Smith: To the Minister of Finance: In April, last month, Ontario's small business confidence experienced its sharpest decline since August of last year. After good numbers in March, small business lost confidence in April when faced with the realities of a lacklustre Ontario budget. The analysis is simple: The numbers for March are because Drummond acted; the numbers for April are because Duncan dithered.

Ontario's small businesses have joined Moody's and S&P in what's becoming a chorus of rejection surrounding the budget. Minister, when will you actually show some leadership and come up with a real plan for Ontario's economy?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: March: 46,000 net new full-time jobs in Ontario; the unemployment rate's at 7.4%, the lowest level in three years; more than 555,000 new jobs since 2003, in spite of the largest contraction since the great downturn. Ontario runs one of the lowest-cost governments in Canada, according to every source, relative to GDP, according to Don Drummond. We're number one in Canada in mineral production, valued at \$11 billion, and today we announced a new project that will employ 1,100 people directly in northern Ontario.

This government has taken strong action to build a better future for Ontario. Part of that strong action is a strong education and health system. Those are our priorities. We reject the ideas that they put forward and want to build that better future for our children.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Minister, your bluster is embarrassing, and it's insulting to the hundreds and thousands of people who are out of work in the province of Ontario. Just last week, there were hundreds of jobs that were eliminated in Peterborough, Mississauga and North York at Norampac plants. There's hundreds more that could be gone in Trenton if you don't act soon.

According to the CFIB, 73% of small business owners list energy as a major cost concern, and your government has increased their hydro bills again this month. Some 57% say that taxes are a major cost concern, so you brought in a budget that drove up their taxes even higher.

CFIB stats show that this will cost businesses \$350 million this year and over half a million dollars next year. Ontario's small businesses are now working half the year just to pay the government.

Minister, when will you stop standing in the way of small businesses in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We cut the small business tax rate by almost 18%, and that party voted against it. When we brought in red tape reduction legislation, that party voted against it. When we brought in the most progressive reforms to our sales tax system, which were endorsed by small business, that party rejected them.

We need no lesson from them on building a strong economy, with good schools and good health care. That's what this party is about. That's what this government is about. We're going to continue to fight for small business the way we have up until now, working with the CFIB and others to continue to build that economy of the future, with the right investments for a strong and bright future for all of our children.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Minister, as you already know, today there was a fatal accident in York region and Ornge, the agency that provides air ambulance, was called to the scene. Their response? "We have no resources. We cannot send an ambulance to the crash scene."

Minister, we're talking about the Ornge core mandate. This is what they're there to do; this is why they exist. With all the spotlight being on Ornge right now, how can things go so wrong? What's going on at Ornge?

1120

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said in the earlier question, my thoughts are with the family affected by this terrible tragedy.

I can assure the members of this House and the people of Ontario that the new leadership at Ornge has, as their number one priority, patient safety. That is the very first and highest priority for the new management team, and I know that Dr. Barry McLellan, the CEO of Sunnybrook Hospital, a former coroner of the province of Ontario, is on the board at Ornge. He is heading up the patient safety responsibilities of that organization, so I would urge the member opposite not to politicize and not to prejudge this incident.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, the minister talks a lot about new management, new structure, new performance agreement, but there is nothing in the new performance agreement that talks about quality of care. It talks about a performance indicator that should be in an annual operational plan; that still does not exist and probably won't exist for months to come. This is very troubling.

I want to assure the people of Ontario that we have a strong and robust air ambulance, but I'm starting to doubt this very much. I think the way to restore confidence

would be to reflect the will of the House and put forward a select committee, so that we can look into this issue and restore confidence, because right now, my confidence is shaken to the core. I'm worried, Mr. Speaker. What does the minister have to say?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do think it's unfortunate that members of this Legislature are using this tragedy in a political way. I can assure you that I will be speaking to Dr. McLellan later today. I will get the facts of the case. I know that they will be very concerned about this situation.

I can also actually correct the member opposite. The new performance agreement does include quality improvement plans, like we have at our hospitals, so Ornge will be measuring and will be publicly reporting on quality improvement. Compensation to senior executives will be tied to quality improvement, just like they are in our hospitals.

I urge the members of this Legislature to support our legislation, Bill 50, to entrench oversight and responsibility at Ornge.

NORTHERN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We need to ensure that northern Ontario residents have improved access to more post-secondary education and training opportunities. All Ontarians have the right to benefit from a post-secondary education, regardless of their geographical locations.

The minister, in his previous portfolio, visited Thunder Bay Regional Research Institute to launch an innovative technology company called XLV Diagnostics. The minister is well aware of the talent that exists in Thunder Bay, but we need to continue to foster this talent through our post-secondary institutions. This announcement showed the fruits of our government's commitment to education, innovation and creating prosperity for northern Ontarians.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's not a question.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, through you to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities: How is the minister helping our northern and rural post-secondary institutions?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and contrast it to the member from Pembroke etc., who said, "That's not a question."

Mr. Speaker, what was very funny to me is we haven't had a question on northern education in years, opposite, while the members on this side of the House have fought for the following things: an additional 5,266 places in our northern colleges and universities, bringing them to over 31,000; a 65% increase in funding to northern colleges, from the member from Sault Ste. Marie, who led the creation of Algoma College to the establishment of an architecture school in Sudbury, a medical school and a law school in Thunder Bay. As to the Ring of Fire, after

this great announcement today, we now have the educational facilities in northern Ontario to make sure the high-value jobs from the Cliffs investment stay there—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your mike is off. Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you. Northern Ontarians need to be able to access post-secondary education to ensure that the manufacturing and natural resource processing industries continue to see a long-term future in our province. Northern Ontarians need improved access to more post-secondary education and training opportunities through enhanced distance learning services. There are more than 200,000 northern residents who do not have direct access to post-secondary classrooms in their communities. Many northern Ontarians see the distance to access post-secondary education as a barrier to their future.

Speaker, through you to the minister, how is the minister going to ensure that all northern Ontarians have access to post-secondary education like every other student in our province?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The member for Nepean–Carleton as well made the comment that nothing has happened in 10 years. On top of all that massive investment, the first law school in 42 years in the north; not only that—Contact North, \$2.5 million in infrastructure. We're upgrading the expansion information technology to provide Contact North with the necessary equipment and bandwidth for its audio conferencing and video conferencing in e-learning—\$5 million for information technology enhancements, and 90 small and remote communities and First Nations now have access to Contact North. Mr. Speaker, this essentially means that there is a college and a classroom in every small community in the north. That has happened over the last eight years. This is the greatest level of access we've had, and we're now seeing the biggest investments in the history of this province in the north. These are good times for northern Ontario.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education. As a former educator myself, I've long believed that a teacher's role is to teach the curriculum that is outlined by the government of Ontario in a manner that allows students, particularly young students, to develop and foster skill sets such as critical thinking, so that when they leave their formal education and enter the workplace they can be prepared to make sound, individual choices based on those skills. A teacher's role is not to brainwash children to further political causes under the guise of an alternative education model. Minister, what are you doing to ensure that children as young as eight are not exposed to the abusive authority demonstrated by this group of teachers at the Grove alternative—

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Ontario Liberals have invested in schools to give our children the education that they need to be tomorrow's leaders. We know that every kid deserves a world-class education, and that's why we have worked so hard over the past nine years to rebuild public confidence in our schools, to bring peace and stability into our classrooms, to get our class sizes down, to get our test scores up and our graduation rates up. We are very proud of what is happening in our schools across the province, and we believe that our students deserve the very best.

I know that in the supplementary I'll have an opportunity to speak more directly to the Grove Community School, but at its heart, it is a school where community and volunteerism is highlighted, and we believe that is a critically important issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'm proud to say that over the 13 years that I was a high school teacher I did not once impress upon my students my political, personal or professional opinions or views. What occurred at the Grove alternative school was an abuse of power by those entrusted in a profession that moulds the minds of our most precious and impressionable resource, Mr. Speaker. As a teacher, I'm appalled that a fellow educator would take advantage of our children. Minister, what are you doing to ensure our children are safe from the abusive learning environment that occurred at the Grove alternative school?

Interjections.

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

1130

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member opposite would know, as a teacher and someone engaged in the education process, that locally elected school boards are responsible for developing the programs and policies that suit their unique communities. The Ministry of Education works with those school boards to make sure that specialized schools meet our curriculum requirements and our high standards of achievement, so we need to support boards.

If parents, trustees and others have concerns about what is happening at the Grove Community School, it is the elected trustees that are best positioned to examine this issue, and the member, as someone in the teaching profession, would know that.

But I do encourage parents to talk to their school boards and share their concerns. That's the appropriate avenue to do that, Speaker. Local voices in the school boards are critically important because they know their local community, and that is the structure that we have had in place for many years.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Finance. I've recently been hearing from many of my constituents about the challenges they face now that your government has cancelled your partnership with the horse racing industry. The Sparling family has

three generations who have never worked anywhere but the family horse racing business. If they can't race their horses, they will lose everything.

Can the Minister of Finance provide an update on discussions he is planning to have with the horse racing community to work with families like the Sparlings on a way forward?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, the government does intend to deal, in part, with some of the challenges faced by people who have been affected by this. Unfortunately, in a world of priorities, subsidizing the owners of horse tracks is not a priority for this government. I know it is for the NDP, and that's fine. This is the party that one day says, "Don't give corporate handouts," and then the next day says, "Give handouts to horse owners in the United States." We don't agree with that. We've indicated that we'll mitigate.

I would remind the NDP that, as part of the budget agreement, you didn't put anything into it about that. You spoke well to your constituents, but when it came time to put something in the deal, you didn't.

We are prepared to mitigate, as we've indicated. We'll be making announcements in due course.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we get to the supplementary, I'm going to tell the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to come to order.

Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The horse racing industry does not consider this a subsidy; they consider it a partnership. Your decision to leave the partnership with race-tracks across the province has pulled the rug out from under families like the Sparlings. In an effort to cut costs, you may end up putting thousands of Ontarians out of work and make them dependent on income support programs, which will actually cost the province more.

Can the Minister of Finance provide details of the funding for the horse racing sector and their plans to work with families and small business owners?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we will be making an announcement in due course. But let me remind the member opposite what \$345 million could do in the rural part of Ontario.

It's 18 times what we spend each year on meat inspection. It's 3.5 times what we've spent since 2003 on promoting local food. It's two times more than we have spent since 2003 on rural economic development projects, which have created or retained more than 35,000 jobs. It's two and three quarter times what we've committed to spending on rural broadband programs.

No, Mr. Speaker, we do not see this as a priority. It is a subsidy. It's one that we have ended. We will work with the industry to transition as we build a better future for rural Ontario, including investments in risk management and other areas that benefit all of rural Ontario, not a select few, and certainly not American horse owners.

IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Our newcomer communities make important contributions to the fabric of our society. My community of Scarborough–Rouge River is fortunate to be home to a thriving multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community. Members of our diverse communities also offer their unique skills and knowledge, which play an important role in our economy. Skilled newcomers are in high demand with employers.

Minister, what action is our government taking to ensure that our immigration mix meets the needs of Ontario employers?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I thank the member for Scarborough–Rouge River for the question. Immigrants are key to Ontario's future economic growth and prosperity. Over the next five years, immigrants will account for all of Ontario's net labour growth. And while immigration is a shared responsibility with the federal government, Ottawa continues to make unilateral decisions that affect our immigration mix and our economic recovery.

That's why we're moving forward to create a made-in-Ontario immigration strategy. As a first step, we created the Expert Roundtable on Immigration, chaired by Julia Deans. This group of experts is looking at how immigration can best support Ontario's economic development while improving economic prospects for new immigrants. Their work is already under way and I look forward to hearing their recommendations.

Ontario remains the number one destination for newcomers to Canada. This is one more reason why Ontario needs to have a greater say on immigration.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I know my constituents are pleased that our government is taking action on this important issue. Many of them have raised concerns about the unilateral actions of the federal government.

Service delivery organizations and other stakeholders in my riding are also interested in how they can contribute to our government's strategy. They have on-the-ground knowledge and experience of the challenges facing Ontario newcomers and are excited about this opportunity to make a difference.

How can interested Ontarians contribute to the development of our made-in-Ontario immigration strategy?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I know people are excited about the work the round table is doing and are eager to contribute. Many people want to contribute to that discussion. People can submit their input to Julia Deans, care of Natasha Hall, policy adviser at the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Ms. Hall can be reached by email at natasha.hall@ontario.ca.

I'd also like to recognize and thank my parliamentary assistant, the member from Windsor West. She's been a real leader on this issue, Mr. Speaker. She's supporting the efforts of the round table by hosting consultations in communities right across Ontario. Her work will be

invaluable as we develop our immigration strategy, and I thank her for what's she been doing.

Immigration is vital to Ontario's economic success. I thank everyone who's leading and lending their advice and expertise as we work towards making this important goal for the benefit of newcomers and our economy.

VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Leal: I was remiss earlier today in that I didn't introduce Emmet Connolly, who's the president of the board of directors, and Casey Ready, who's the executive director of the Community Counselling and Resource Centre of Peterborough. I invite everybody to their lunch starting at 11:30 in rooms 228 and 230.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Todd Smith: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: In my supplementary to the Minister of Finance, I said that CFIB stats, when referring to taxes, show that this is going to cost over \$350 million this year and "half a million" next year. I meant to say "half a billion dollars next year," or \$500 million.

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

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome Crystal Lavallee. She's a Burlington constituent here today. She took the tour, and she found it very exciting.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TOURISM IN STRATFORD

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today I'm proud to share good news about tourism in Perth–Wellington. Despite the severe economic challenge facing our province, the tourism sector in Stratford is growing. A recent report shows that between 2006 and 2009, the number of visitors to Ontario increased by 6%. However, in that same period, the number visiting Stratford grew an incredible 30%.

I would like to congratulate the city of Stratford and Perth county for their outstanding leadership in promoting tourism. Eugene Zakreski, executive director of the Stratford Tourism Alliance, deserves our thanks for helping to create an even bigger profile for Stratford on the tourism map.

People are taking notice. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs recognized the Stratford Tourism

Alliance for its initiatives. The Canadian Tourism Commission named Stratford as one of the top five romantic destinations. AOL Canada awarded Stratford with the prestigious title of “top culinary destination in the country” in 2011.

Stratford is also home to the world-renowned Stratford Shakespeare Festival, the Savour Stratford Festival and the Stratford Summer Music festival, to name just a few of our superb cultural attractions.

I want to encourage all members to visit Stratford—and indeed, all of Perth–Wellington.

POLICE OVERSIGHT

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Just two years after we witnessed some of the worst civil rights violations in the history of Ontario in the G20 debacle, recent news has brought to light some very concerning matters surrounding police accountability. We’ve seen a Toronto Star article which describes over 100 instances where judges have found that police have lied, have misled or have fabricated evidence in court. We’ve found that mentally ill patients and individuals have been mistreated, have been fatally wounded and killed due to police action. In fact, we’ve also seen a police quota system being implemented where police officers and enforcement officers are told that they are expected to complete a book of tickets a day.

There are some serious concerns surrounding police accountability, and we as a province and as a country that supports the rule of law in a free and democratic society must ensure that we have proper oversight of police bodies to ensure that we have a safe society, a protected society and that police abuses do not continue in this country and do not continue in this province, particularly where it comes to the reliability of evidence in the court. We need to be able to rely on our officers, and there needs to be severe sanctions for those who are found to lie deliberately in court and mislead court proceedings.

GIVE 2 LIVE CAMPAIGN

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The Scarborough Hospital Birchmount campus was the only hospital in the GTA that could not provide MRI services. In December 2010, the hospital received operational funding approval to provide MRI services, committing the hospital to raise the funds to acquire the necessary equipment.

I would like to recognize and congratulate the members of the Islamic Foundation of Toronto, located in Scarborough–Rouge River, on their launch of the Give 2 Live campaign, which began on March 23, 2012. The Give 2 Live campaign is a youth-based initiative to raise \$100,000 towards the acquisition of this much-needed MRI equipment at the Scarborough Hospital Birchmount campus.

I take this opportunity to commend the Islamic Foundation of Toronto and the Muslim community for their leadership role in this initiative, which demonstrates their

devoted commitment to their community. Their positive contributions will have an immense impact on the residents of Scarborough. Mr. Speaker, to date, the Islamic Foundation of Toronto has raised \$90,000 and is well on their way to achieving their goal.

I take this opportunity to say thank you and congratulations to everyone in the community for this worthwhile cause.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The Minister of Northern Development and Mines has made it clear in conversation with the northern mayors and myself that his government is intent and committed to the divestiture of Ontario Northland. That fact is reflected in a motion adopted by North Bay city council. Their request is almost identical to the petition I had on my website, which attracted thousands and is one that I read in this Legislature frequently. It asks Premier McGuinty to meet with the mayors to discuss how the government would satisfactorily address concerns of the northern communities, their businesses and residents. It also points out that there is no apparent government plan or divestment criteria that address the concerns of northern stakeholders with regard to the current initiative and lost future opportunities.

The motion resolves “that the council of the city of North Bay requests that the government of the province of Ontario immediately stop the divestment of the ONTC”; and further resolves that “the city of North Bay request Premier McGuinty and Minister Bartolucci meet with mayors of the northern communities working group, affected aboriginal leaders, business leaders, and affected labour organizations in order to commence negotiations for a ‘new deal for the Ontario Northland.’”

KEITH AND CECILE HARRIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today, I want to take you back to May 11, 1942. The Second World War was in full swing. A young miner from Sudbury received his draft papers to report to Toronto on the 15th for deployment. That day he went to his sweetheart and proposed marriage. She accepted, and they married on Thursday, May 14, at All People’s Church in Sudbury, the night before his departure.

The groom’s mother cooked dinner for all the guests. There was a reception in Capreol, where she’s from, and a group of musicians from the mine played late into the night.

That young miner was never deployed. The production of nickel for bombs, tanks and ships trumped a new pair of boots on the ground.

Those two people have now been married for 70 years. Their names are Keith and Cecile Harris. She was 19; he was 21. She is 89 and he is 91 years old. They have five children, 15 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

Today, I rise to recognize the 70th anniversary of Keith and Cecile Harris, my mother-and father-in-law.

After 70 years of marriage, they are still in love, and I have the best in-laws in the world. Congratulations on your 70th wedding anniversary, Mr. and Mrs. Harris. I wish you many, many more. See you at our house: It's going to be a big party on Saturday. I love you both.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I can't resist: I offer my personal congratulations.

They probably have socks that are older than I am.

COUNT ME IN CONFERENCE

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Those of you who know the Mississauga Living Arts Centre know just what a beautiful place that is. It became even more beautiful the other day because it was the site of a very amazing scene. Picture this: 1,300 teenagers in one auditorium.

You're going to think, "If there's 1,300 teenagers, it's got to be a rock concert." But it wasn't. It was something called Count Me In. It was started by somebody called Shane Feldman, and the whole idea behind these 1,300 teenagers coming together was to get them involved in the idea of volunteerism. It was an entire day of workshops and entertainment to get teenagers to come together to make a difference.

What really made an impact on me is that often, when we talk to children, it's all about, "I'm going to do this when I grow up. I'm going to do that when I grow up." But the fact is that you don't have to grow up to do things, and these children showed me that on that wonderful day, where I was joined by the Minister of Education, Laurel Broten, as well. The children are making a change right now—teenagers.

Some of them I'm going to name: The stage manager was Irene Lambropoulos, 17 years old; the assistant stage manager, Carly Feldman, was only 13 years old; and director's assistant Jacklyn Grossman was 19 years old. I just want to commend all of these teenagers for putting this fantastic show on in Mississauga.

1510

RAIL ACCIDENT

Mrs. Jane McKenna: On Monday, April 30, five heroes of February's Via Rail tragedy were honoured at Burlington city hall. These individuals acted with a shared sense of purpose in a time of need.

Wayne Easterbrook, a warrant officer with the Canadian Armed Forces, helped people aboard the lead passenger car prior to and after the arrival of emergency services. He stayed even though his wife was injured and taken from the scene.

Via employees Joette Cantafio and Greg Mohoruk were at home in Burlington when they heard about the derailment. They hurried to the site, took vital identification information from passengers and helped transfer them to buses bound for Toronto.

Ceilidh Gillies was in the last car at the time of the derailment, where she gathered information from the

manifest, confirmed there were three employees in the engine and kept in touch with Via headquarters.

Via service manager Dean Melnyk was on the train and was injured, but stayed aboard until almost all passengers were removed from the lead passenger car, helping to move patients and translating for French-speaking passengers.

I would like to salute the calm and clear-minded action of these individuals, whose efforts strengthened the vital work being done by first responders.

MARGARET HAJDINJAK

Mr. Bill Mauro: This is Mental Health Week. I rise today to pay tribute to a woman of incredible strength. In 2005, Margaret Hajdinjak lost her son Steven to depression-induced suicide.

On Sunday, May 6, I had the great privilege to attend the second annual Out of the Darkness memorial walk for suicide awareness and prevention, an event that Margaret, with the help and support of community sponsors and volunteers, has established.

Margaret Hajdinjak has taken her tragedy and somehow summoned the strength and conviction to move forward with a community initiative that will support others who have suffered the same fate and most certainly, I believe, prevent the deaths of some who find themselves so alone.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among young adults 15 to 24 years of age—a truly incredible statistic. It's my hope that through the efforts of people like Margaret, her supporters and sponsors and the 300 people who attended the walk on Sunday evening, the stigma attached to mental illness can be lessened. We need people to understand it is okay to talk about suicide and mental illness, so that those affected become aware of the supports that are available, so they realize they are not alone.

I close by thanking all in Thunder Bay who came out to support such an incredible woman and an incredible cause.

CAMERON HIGHLANDERS OF OTTAWA

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I am so excited to tell you about a great experience I had on Saturday with the one and only Cameron Highlanders of the city of Ottawa.

In 1856, they were formed as the first volunteer militia rifle company of Ottawa. Over the years, they then became the 43rd Carleton Battalion of Infantry, and they recruited from communities across my riding: Bells Corners, Metcalfe, North Gower and others in Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

This past Saturday, I was with Afghan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Cyprus and Sierra Leone veterans who taught me how to shoot a C7 assault rifle and a 9mm pistol, and I'm happy to say that everyone is still here. Speaker, you can put your arm down; you don't have to worry.

I would like to make a special thank you to Canada's military. As patient as they were with me, they brought VIPs from across the city of Ottawa to show them what the inside of our military is like, and these Afghan veterans—many of them were there—took their time with us.

I would like to make special mention of Sergeant Will Thompson, Sergeant Eric Proulx, Master Corporal Thanuya Reckman, who was the most patient one, because she was assigned to me; and Sergeant Lance Levaq, who would not cheat on my shooting card, Mr. Speaker. He still only gave me three out of 10. I'd also like to say thank you to Major Dan McNeil for taking his time to set this up.

Speaker, I, with every member in this chamber, salute Canada's military, and I want to say to the Cameron Highlanders, thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wish it was all this fun.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

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

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

Bill 16, An Act to amend the Animals for Research Act and the Dog Owners' Liability Act with respect to pit bulls / *Projet de loi 16, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les animaux destinés à la recherche et la Loi sur la responsabilité des propriétaires de chiens en ce qui a trait aux pit-bulls.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PESTICIDES AMENDMENT ACT (LICENCE FOR COSMETIC PURPOSES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PESTICIDES (LICENCE À DES FINS ESTHÉTIQUES)

Mr. Chudleigh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to amend the Pesticides Act to provide for the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes with a licence / *Projet de loi 88, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les*

pesticides afin de prévoir l'utilisation de pesticides à des fins esthétiques en vertu d'une licence.

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. Ted Chudleigh: Basically, this bill allows a professional applicator to apply approved pesticides to control weeds or pests on your lawn or garden.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Hon. Charles Sousa: May is Asian Heritage Month. This year marks the 10th anniversary of this annual celebration proclaimed across Canada by the federal government in 2002.

In Ontario, our greatest strength is the diversity of our people. The 1.7 million Asian Canadians who make Ontario their home are one of the largest communities in our mosaic of cultures.

Asia covers nearly a third of the world's land mass and includes dozens of countries. The range of traditions, religions, languages and cultures among Asian Canadians is as vast as the continent itself, and the contributions of Asians to our country and our province are just as rich and varied.

Newcomers from China have played an important role in Ontario's economy and society for more than 100 years. China is still a major source of immigration, but in the recent decades Ontario has also welcomed newcomers from all over Asia. From medical researchers like Dr. Tak Wah Mak and Dr. Helen Chan, to environmentalists like David Suzuki, to athletes like world champion skater Patrick Chan, and former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, Asian communities have made a huge contribution to our prosperity and our quality of life. We are also fortunate to have colleagues of Asian descent in this very House.

I encourage all Canadians and all Ontarians to partake in one of the many festivities taking place across the province to celebrate Asian Heritage Month. This is a time to learn more about the journeys and experiences of our Asian communities and to reflect on the beauty and wisdom of Asian cultures. It's a time to recognize the significant contributions of Asian Canadians to our growth and our prosperity. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, it's a time to rejoice in our diversity and the advantages it brings to Ontario.

ENVIRONMENT INDUSTRY DAY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased to recognize that today is Environment Industry Day. This is a day organized by the Ontario Environment Industry Association.

For more than two decades, the Ontario Environment Industry Association has been the voice for the environment and clean tech sector. This is an exciting and growing sector of our economy, and Ontario's environment companies make a significant contribution to our quality of life.

Ontario's environment and clean tech sectors are driving innovation, creating good jobs for Ontarians and helping us build strong and healthy communities and a high quality of life for people across the province and around the world.

1520

The world market for environment and clean tech products and services is estimated to be between \$600 billion and \$800 billion annually, and growing rapidly each and every year. It is also becoming more competitive. The expanding economies of China and India are joining other industrialized countries such as Germany and Denmark in areas of clean energy, water treatment, soil remediation and other growth areas.

Ontario is well positioned to take on the international field in this exciting sector. We have a well-educated and knowledgeable workforce. Our universities and colleges are some of the world's best, fostering innovators, researchers, engineers and professionals who are internationally recognized.

Today, there are close to 3,000 companies—the majority of the country's environment and clean tech companies—calling Ontario home. These are, for the most part, small and medium-sized businesses, which are well-known job creators and economic drivers. Despite their relatively modest size, these companies are already employing 65,000 Ontarians in the areas of clean energy, recycling, waste diversion, engineering and consulting, brownfield remediation, and air, water and waste water purification and treatment.

As the world moves to respond to environmental challenges, Ontario companies are stepping forward and delivering solutions. They are also delivering success. They are contributing \$8 billion in annual revenues and \$1 billion in export earnings.

On behalf of the government and all members of the House, I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Ontario Environment Industry Association, and in particular, Alex Gill, Jon Hantho and Derek Webb, for organizing Environment Industry Day. These gentlemen, along with the rest of their industry, are passionate advocates for Ontario's environment and clean tech sector. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the House will take an opportunity to seek them out and speak to them about their work.

My ministry is pleased to partner with the Ontario Environment Industry Association, and we continue to look for ways we can collaborate on initiatives such as Environment Industry Day.

Our government is committed to ensuring that we have a healthy environment and a strong, sustainable future for all Ontarians. We value the important role of Ontario's environment industry in helping us achieve that important goal, a goal that I know we all share.

NURSING WEEK

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It is with great pleasure that I rise during National Nursing Week to acknowledge the invaluable contribution nurses make to our health care system and to thank them for that contribution.

Applause.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, indeed.

This is not the first time I have sung the praises of our nurses in this chamber, nor am I by any means the first Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to do so, but some things bear repeating. It is a fact beyond question that the health care system in which we take such pride in Ontario would not exist at all if we didn't have nurses, and wouldn't be nearly as great as it is if our nurses weren't as great as they are.

Nurses have been called the backbone of our health care system. They have been called the soul of health care, the glue that holds the system together. They are all these things.

For the last eight years plus, this government has tried to show the same commitment to Ontario nurses that they have consistently shown to their patients. Almost as soon as we took office, we began working to change the culture in health care. Our government views nurses as our front-line partners in health care, and that's why we're committed to investing in them throughout their career.

One of the ways we've accomplished this is through the nursing graduate guarantee, which we launched in 2007. To date, over 12,400 nursing graduates have been connected with not just nursing opportunities but full-time nursing opportunities through that program. Today in this province, there are over 15,000 more nurses working than there were in 2003. There are 1,100 more nurse practitioners, who, as of last year, are able to diagnose, prescribe, treat and discharge hospital in-patients. They are also able to order lab tests and complete and sign death certificates.

Twenty-one nurse-practitioner-led clinics are now delivering care to more than 23,000 patients across the province, and these clinics will soon number 26. They are made up of nurse practitioners, registered nurses, registered practical nurses and other providers, and when these 26 nurse-practitioner-led clinics are all operational, they will be caring for more than 40,000 Ontarians.

Helping nurses achieve 70% full-time employment is a big part of that, and we're almost there. Today, more than 66% of Ontario nurses are working full-time. That's an increase of almost 17 percentage points since 2003.

On Sunday, Speaker, our government announced that we will fund an additional 144 nurses to work with mental health workers and school board staff to help students—and their families—with mental health and/or substance abuse issues right in their schools. Because if you're committed to the overall health of our children and youth, then you know it's important to involve nurses.

It's because nurses understand health care as well as anyone anywhere that they've been supportive of our

action plan for health care. This three-pronged plan will start with keeping Ontarians healthy, encouraging them to participate in their own wellness. Clearly, nurses will be there to help them with that.

The action plan will provide patients with faster access to stronger family health care. This will involve bringing primary care under the umbrella of the LHINs, and nurses will be a big part of that transition and, naturally, they will be a big part of delivering that care.

Of course, the action plan will ensure that patients have access to the right care, at the right time, in the right place. This is very much about helping seniors receive as much care as possible closer to home, and that will clearly mean a bigger role for registered nurses, registered practical nurses and nurse practitioners.

A sustainable health care system also requires diverse health care teams. Ensuring patients receive the right care from the right provider means making sure all our nurses are working to their full scope of practice.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Ontarians have the finest health care system possible and that their children and grandchildren do as well. We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. It's a source of real comfort to me as health minister that I can count on the nurses of this province to do their part. They always do.

In addition to this being National Nursing Week, this coming Saturday is International Nurses Day. On Saturday, I hope that each and every one of my friends in this chamber can spare at least a quick thought for the everyday contribution of nurses all over the world and say a sincere thank you. I know I will.

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Michael Harris: I rise today to mark the 10th anniversary of Asian Heritage Month. Across the country, people are joining together to celebrate the long and rich history of the Asian community here in Canada and to celebrate the many contributions Asian Canadians have made to develop our prosperous and diverse society.

More than 100 years ago, Asians began emigrating to Canada to build a better future for themselves and their families. The road to prosperity was not easy, yet success would come because of the hard work and values they brought to this country and passed on to their children.

Because of their hard work and commitment to Ontario, Asian Canadians continue to play a large role in shaping our province's economic, political and social character. Every day I see this when I speak to Asian community leaders who have opened businesses, served in politics and volunteered their time to help those around them.

We should use this month of May not only to reflect on the past achievements of the Asian community but also to look ahead to the future as we continue to build and develop our great province together. Our recognition for our country's different cultures helps us to build upon our shared identity as Canadians.

On behalf of the Ontario PC Party, I would like to invite all members of this House and all Ontarians to join in celebrating Asian Heritage Month.

1530

ENVIRONMENT INDUSTRY DAY

Mr. Michael Harris: I also have the opportunity to speak to the Environment Industry Day today. I, too, would like to mark the 12th anniversary of Environment Industry Day here at Queen's Park. The Ontario Environment Industry Association has done an excellent job over the years of bringing together business leaders to support Ontario's growing environmental sector.

Today, ONEIA represents 2,700 environmental companies that employ more than 65,000 highly trained professionals. These men and women continue to develop innovative and efficient clean technologies for air and water pollution, site remediation and decontamination, and solid and hazardous waste management. Collectively, these companies add \$8 billion to our economy and create nearly \$1 billion in exports each and every year.

The Ontario Environment Industry Association understands that the economy and the environment are directly linked. You can't develop new regulations in a silo. You have to work with industry to ensure that the government can complement private sector efforts to improve our environment.

I see so much potential for further growth in this industry. More and more companies are realizing the importance of becoming more environmentally responsible to both protect the environment and increase economic efficiency.

I believe Ontario's environment industry can create and deliver the technologies businesses need to upgrade and enhance their operations, both here in the province and around the world. I would encourage all members of this House to attend the Ontario Environment Industry Association's reception today in the dining room, starting at 5 p.m.

NURSING WEEK

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On behalf of the PC caucus, it's a pleasure to join with Ontarians across the province to recognize National Nursing Week.

In honour of Florence Nightingale's birthday, the International Council of Nurses declared May 12 as International Nurses Day. Activist and author Nightingale advocated for better care and hospital conditions for British soldiers. Through several hundred publications, hospital planning and her work on the social determinants of health, Nightingale actively contributed to the professionalization of hospital services.

In honour of this tradition, the government of Canada declared the second week of May as a time for Canadians to pay tribute to our own world-class nurses. Today, nurses from across our province carry on Nightingale's

legacy through their commitment to public service and advocacy.

Nursing Week is a time for Ontarians to recognize the dedicated service of over 150,000 registered nurses, registered practical nurses, nurses and nurse practitioners that care for our loved ones. These skilled, hard-working professionals commit their lives to the well-being of all those around them. Their commitment and dedication to serve in their communities and to care for those in need is an inspiration to all Ontarians.

On behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus, I'd like to offer my most sincere congratulations and thanks for the phenomenal work you do and wish you all the best as you celebrate this most deserved week of recognition.

ENVIRONMENT INDUSTRY DAY

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to stand today to make a statement on Environment Industry Day. Today, we have a really good opportunity to speak with the environment industry. I want to recognize those who are working in the clean tech sector. They're doing an important part of the work to protect the environment.

I think that Ontarians are doing their part as well, as individuals. When they make consumer choices, they are demanding that we have a green industry here in Ontario.

Corporate responsibility is a key pillar in the environmental agenda, and industry has an important role to play in cleaning up and protecting our environment. Industry is a key stakeholder, and they are responding to the consumer demand for green choices and sustainable business.

But we also need to remember that corporate responsibility does not take the place of good government policy. We need leadership, and we need to see action from this government on this file. It's time to address the growing environmental crisis we face at a government level.

NURSING WEEK

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to add my voice to the celebration of Nursing Week. First, I want to thank the 113,423 registered nurses, the 40,457 registered practical nurses and the 2,061 nurse practitioners who practise here in Ontario. Happy Nursing Week.

Then, I want to talk to you about a registered practical nurse called Peter Burrell. Peter was punched in the face by a confused, strong gentleman while trying to talk him out of walking in the middle of the night in the middle of the winter while in a hospital with no shoes or jacket on. He received very little compensation for his injuries, including broken teeth and lacerations on his face. Unfortunately, that violence is repeated in many long-term-care homes and many hospitals. Our nurses deserve better than this. Let's commit, on Nursing Week, to protecting every single one of those nurses who work for us.

Merci pour votre travail.

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Michael Prue: It's my privilege and my honour to stand today and talk about Asian Heritage Month.

People who understand history, particularly ancient history, will know that the whole world has a great debt of gratitude to the cultures of Asia. It was there that the first farming took place. It was there that the first towns were built, the first division of labour. It was there that metallurgy was developed so that we could leave the Stone Age and go into the age of copper and of tin and eventually of iron. And it is there that was the crucible of most of the world's great developments.

It was there that the great religions all found their start, because, remember, Asia starts all the way from Israel and Turkey all the way over to China. Even today, all of the great religions of the world found their roots in Asia. And it was from there that people came forward to develop most of the arts and culture that we today know in the entire human race.

Canada has had a long tradition of immigration, but it has not always been a proud one. You know, when we think back, we can think of the head tax that was put on Chinese Canadians to make sure they could not come here and the enormous sums of money they had to pay to get off the boat in order to come and work in hazardous conditions building our railway.

We know what happened to the Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, as they were taken from their lands along the coast of British Columbia and shipped inland, where they lost all of their belongings, their boats, their means of livelihood, and were treated as enemy aliens, although almost all of them were born in Canada.

We also know what happened to some of the Asians who were on the Komagata Maru, those being members of the Sikh faith, when they tried to land in Vancouver and were not allowed off the boat.

Today we are much more enlightened. Today we recognize the importance of Asian culture. We recognize the traditions that the people bring with them. We recognize that their ability to work hard, their love of family, their moral beliefs are all exactly what this country needs. Today I'm very proud to say that Canadians have embraced Asia and Asian cultures. Today we are proud to say that what is coming from that entire massive continent to come and join us here in Canada is very welcome. And today we are all very proud to say that Asian culture and Canadian culture can be and are one and the same.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's really important to be close to the Speaker. It helps.

I'm very thankful to one of my constituents, Luverne Baron from the Model "A" Acres Bed and Breakfast. She

has sent all these petitions because on the weekend it was Maple Fest in my riding of Durham and they presented these petitions there.

“Whereas under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08, public health inspectors are required to undertake risk assessments of small drinking water systems;

“Whereas many of these small drinking water systems are located in homes operating bed and breakfasts,” in my riding of Durham and in Ontario;

“Whereas private homes that are the sites of bed and breakfasts already have potable drinking water used by the homeowners and their families every day;

“Whereas many of these bed and breakfasts have established the quality of their drinking water through years of regular testing,” which I would encourage;

“Whereas these home-based businesses are facing high costs to comply with the new requirements of regulation 319/08;

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

“That the Ministry of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process;

“Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water system meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to” this onerous “regulation 319/08.”

I'm pleased to sign and support it and present it to Manak, one of the pages on his last week here.

1540

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt.

“Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term care...; and

“Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don't complain because they fear repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

“Whereas Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care homes;

“We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include Ontario's long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors.”

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

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce this petition, which is quite similar to my colleague's from the third party.

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“That the government engage in meaningful community and employee consultation in order to find alternate uses within the youth services or correctional services system for this facility, thereby preventing job

losses and economic hardship for an area already badly impacted by plant closures and tornado damage.”

I fully support this petition, I'll affix my signature and give it to Vincent to deliver 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 give this to page Shanice to deliver.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition 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 fully agree with the petition, Mr. Speaker. I sign it and pass it on to page Noah.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. John Yakabuski: “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 enthusiastically sign this petition and support it and I will pass it down with Shaumik.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank all the armchair quarterbacks for all the noise during petitions. Thanks very much. I appreciate it.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oxford, thank you.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity. I have a petition here signed by a great number of constituents in my riding who hand-delivered it to me at my office, and I just wanted to read it on their behalf.

“Whereas Bill 13 is unnecessary as an anti-bullying measure because Ontarians already have Bill 157; and

“Whereas Bill 13 promotes radical revisions to school instruction on sex and gender that a majority of parents do not support; and

“Whereas legislation is not the way to implement equity education (this should rather be addressed by

teacher training, after wider parental consultation, in a way which respects the views of people of faith);

“We, the undersigned, petition the assembly to vote against Bill 13.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this petition on behalf of the people of my riding.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

“Whereas the Dog Owners’ Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law.”

I add my name, along with the tens of thousands, to save another 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized. I’m going to sign my name. I’m going to give it to Sarah. She’s going to deliver it to the table.

1550

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition 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.”

As I agree with this petition, I will sign it and send it to the table with page Gillian.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

“Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

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

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

“Call on the government of Ontario to:

“(1) protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program.

“(2) direct OLG to honour the contracts with race-tracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

I agree with the petition. I sign it and will give it to page Ranbir to take to the table.

TOURISM

Mr. John Vanthof: “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” other “roadside attractions that they learn about through travel information centres;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly” of Ontario “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 fully agree with this petition and send it down with page Manak.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

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

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The minister doesn't want to speak to this?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Bradley has moved third reading of Bill 2 and Mr. Naqvi of Ottawa Centre stood up. I'm not sure what's going on here.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa Centre.

Do you want me to continue speaking now?

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much. The member for Ottawa Centre will be very detailed in his analysis of this bill and will be very helpful. I simply want to add just a few comments at this time because, as I say, the member for Ottawa Centre has engaged in much participation in this in terms of its development.

I can recall, Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign talking about this with many people at the door, and they were eager to see this coming into effect. I said to them that when this was introduced into the House, I was confident that all members of the House would see the virtues of the provisions of this bill and would want to pass it expeditiously. I know that members of the third party in the House were eager to see the bill proceed as well, but somehow it was being slowed down, and I don't know how that was happening. Someone informed me that every time a member of the Conservative Party got up, the member from the Conservative Party would in fact call for adjournment of the House or adjournment of the debate, one of the two, and the bells would then ring for some 30 minutes and no debate would be taking place.

Now, this appeared to be—heaven forbid, I've not known the member for Pembroke to be one who would want to delay good legislation, so I was quite surprised. I consulted around and I said, “Surely members of the Conservative Party over there would not want to delay something that is good for seniors in our community.” But indeed, that has been the case. This is why I'm particularly pleased that we have now moved to third reading of this bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Do you know what the bill is?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I certainly do. It's the home renovation tax credit. It's particularly helpful for seniors because there are—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Could you tell us what's in there? Because I know they were talking to you at the door.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No. It helps seniors stay in their homes longer. It helps family members sharing a home with a senior. It benefits taxpayers by relieving pressures on the long-term-care home costs.

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It supports 10,500 jobs per year—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: He just wants to get it accurate; he wants to get it right.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to be accurate with this, so I'm making—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm glad you're all having a discussion across the floor with each other. You might want to go through the Chair. And could we take it down a couple of decibels over there? Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to be directly accurate on this. It says as well that it will support about \$800 million in home renovation activity. So, if passed, effective October 1, 2011, senior homeowners and tenants and people who share a home with a senior relative would be allowed to claim a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 for expenses related to permanent modifications to the home. To continue to meet the fiscal targets, the cost of this program would be offset by savings in other areas, because that's the approach that we're taking with these initiatives.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What other areas?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, every time we mention an area—I'm hearing interjections, and I'll try to answer them through you, Mr. Speaker. Every time the government does try to bring forward an issue which would save money, the third party will have its comments, but the official opposition then begins to complain.

It reminds me of question period, and I know you enjoy question period when you're sitting in your seat in the House, Mr. Speaker. The question period consists of about the first half, or now two thirds of question period, where the Conservatives get up and demand that the government cut further. But once the media leaves—of course, that can be earlier than halfway through—the gallery up there, what happens then is that they—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We have a point of order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Point of order: I'm wondering if we're discussing the behaviour of the Conservative Party, the Progressive Conservatives or the nature of the bill. I'm wondering if we could stick to the content of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I appreciate the member's comment, but that would certainly be my decision if he's drifting from the topic. I do believe that I've noticed a little bit, so maybe the member could get back to the topic.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Certainly. I always enjoy being chastised for wandering and will keep that in the back of my mind when I hear members on the other side of the House wandering from the exact text of the bill.

It's similar, actually, to the federal 2009 home renovation tax credit, for up to 380,000 people could benefit from this credit each year.

What I want to say—and I want to be relatively brief on this because the member for Ottawa Centre is very good. I know that the federal member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Ms. Cheryl Gallant, would be in favour of this bill. She's very highly regarded in the House of Commons. She sometimes tends to overshadow the provincial member, but I'm sure she would be very pleased with this particular piece of legislation.

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I guess my plea, because it's part of the third reading in the House, is that we deal with this bill expeditiously. We have had a lot of debate on second reading, though that debate has been interrupted by the—what I would call reckless—ringing of the bells, unnecessarily, by the official opposition. That's a subjective evaluation; I understand that's a subjective evaluation.

I would hope very much that, having had a full discussion of this bill—I believe it has gone to committee; there has been discussion there as well. Although neither of the members who are sitting here in the House today were here in the Harris government, you may recall that at that time, bills rarely went to committee. There are very few people in this House who would remember, if they were here during the Michael Harris Conservative years, that very few bills went to committee. That will surprise the Speaker, because he recognizes the importance of going to committee for detailed analysis of a bill of this kind, and perhaps to have some public hearings where necessary. Well, I have to say, that rarely happened under the previous Conservative government. I'm pleased to see that now, since our government took office in 2003, that has been routine procedure, to go to committee.

What I am saying now is, we've had the initial introduction. We've then had a full and complete debate on second reading. We've gone to committee. The bill has been strengthened in any way that is deemed appropriate. We've heard from people from outside, heard from members of the opposition, heard from the government, and now the bill is at third reading.

This is where I'm going to relinquish the rest of the time that is available for debating this to the very capable member for Ottawa Centre.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Let me first start with thanking the member from St. Catharines, the Minister of the Environment, for that very apt and succinct summary of Bill 2. I think he really hit all the highlights in his remarks, and I thank him for leaving me only 52 minutes to talk about this very important bill.

I think it really provided an executive summary that I will then rely on to give you more detail. It was just perfect. It was like going through the index of all the important elements of this bill, which gives me the opportunity to talk about this extremely important piece of legislation in far greater detail so that those who are watching at home—I know there are a lot of folks at home who take an interest in these proceedings, especially seniors in our communities, who want to learn more about the healthy homes renovation tax credit: what it means; how it will work, if passed by this legislation, of course; and what kind of benefit it will give to them, because they've been hearing about this particular tax credit for some time. They did hear about this—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Susan Eng, from CARP.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I will speak about Susan Eng, from CARP, because she's very supportive of this bill.

We've been talking about this for some time. This has been asked for seniors for a long time. It was part of our Liberal Party's platform in the last election campaign, and as you can tell by the number of the bill, Bill 2, this is one of the earliest bills to be tabled in this House after the government was formed, speaking to our desire, obviously, to fulfill our commitment that we made to the people of Ontario, especially to the seniors in our province, across the communities.

But also, it shows how much importance we put on seniors and how much we, as a government and as a party, want to work towards ensuring that seniors have a good-quality life in their own homes and their own communities. I think this is very indicative of our desire to ensure that our seniors are healthy, that our seniors are living in their own homes. That's why the very first piece of legislation that we brought and tabled in this House was the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

It's a great honour to rise today to talk on the third reading of the healthy homes renovation tax credit. That's the simpler name for this legislation. The more technical name is An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit. That's the more technical name. As folks at home know, legislation has very technical names to them, but I think it's easy to have a simpler name to reflect them, hence the healthy homes renovation tax credit because it really highlights what this piece of legislation is about. It's making sure that our seniors' homes are healthy, that they are able to renovate those homes and get some sort of a tax credit that will enable our seniors to continue to

live at home. I will be speaking to more detail of this bill, and of course speak of some examples from my community as well because I think it's very important that we highlight what's happening in our community, the impact it's having in our community, and how people are going to be able to benefit from this legislation as well.

My riding of Ottawa Centre, which I'm very proud to represent, is home to many seniors who live in their own homes. As I'm always speaking to them—I do knock on a lot of doors almost on a weekly basis and visit seniors, be it in apartment buildings or in condo buildings or at home—they tell me again and again that they want to live in their home. They don't want to move to a long-term-care facility. They don't want to go to a nursing home. They definitely don't want to go to a hospital. What they want to do is to continue to live in their own home because that's where they have their independence, that's where they live with dignity, and in a lot of instances, especially that I found in my riding of Ottawa Centre, be it neighbourhoods like the Glebe or Westboro or Hintonburg, a nice up-and-coming area in my riding, or Carleton Heights, where I live, or Carlington, not only seniors or parents are living in their homes, but their children are living not that far. So they're close to their grandkids. There's that opportunity for the family unit to stay together within the same neighbourhood. So there's even a heightened need or a want to continue to live in their own home because they're close to their family. They're close to grandkids. They're able to assist their children in the upbringing of their kids.

My parents don't live in Ottawa, so I can tell you that it would be a great benefit if they did live close, especially now that I have a young baby at home.

Applause.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much.

It would be great to have them around close by, but they travel from Oakville, and my mother-in-law is there at home right now with my wife and young Rafi. My mother is coming next week. She's very excited to come out and help the family.

So there's many benefits of having seniors continue to live in their home, because of the support structure they're able to build by living in their community. They have friends. They have family. They of course have neighbours that they rely on. They're involved in local communities, local activities like the community association. I think we all benefit, not just the seniors, because the seniors have so much to offer from their experience, from things they have done in their lives. Having them in our neighbourhoods I think is a win-win for all of us. That's exactly what this legislation is attempting to do, making sure we make it that much easier for seniors to continue to live at home and hence to try to create an incentive by providing them with a renovation tax credit.

Speaker, during second reading I outlined for you how this proposed new act would amend the Taxation Act, 2007, to implement an innovative new tax credit, one that would help Ontario seniors relieve the pressures on the

health care system and boost economic growth, another very important element, because part of the equation here is not only that seniors continue to live in their home, but because of the renovations they will have to engage in to make their home more accessible, it has a great economic spinoff, because it really will employ the renovation sector, which is a big sector in Ontario, as we all know. We have heard from folks within the renovation sector. It employs thousands of Ontarians. I believe it's at least a billion-dollar—if not over a billion-dollar—industry in the province, and this tax credit helps in that it boosts economic growth as well.

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Today, I would like to elaborate on my earlier remarks to let you know why this important act needs your support and the support of all the other members in the Legislature. The proposed new healthy homes renovation tax credit would make it more affordable—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need the member from Renfrew talking to himself out loud, okay? And I don't need a cross-dialogue on the floor. You seem to have raised the decibel level in the chamber. I don't want to have to warn you once more. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker.

We know that many seniors today want to stay in their homes as they get older, but often homes are not designed to accommodate people with mobility issues. This is probably more true for older neighbourhoods where homes were built a long time ago. I think of neighbourhoods like Centretown in my community, in Ottawa Centre, where some of the homes—beautiful homes, by the way; some of them have a heritage designation and go back to the Victorian era—a lot of the homes are anywhere from 80 to 100 years old, and of course they're not accessible. They have steps; they have fairly steep staircases to the second floor; they have attics and low basements, making it difficult for seniors to live in that atmosphere. But they have been living in those homes for a long, long time, so I think it's really apt, at least from my perspective, from my community's perspective, looking at some of the older neighbourhoods, where this tax credit is going to be extremely—of a lot of help.

We have spoken with Ontarians like Sue, whose parents don't want to move, despite mobility issues and the excessive challenges of their homes. Here's what Sue told us:

“Both my parents are 88 years old, and they've lived in the same house for 40 years. It's a two-storey, four-bedroom home—they love it—and they want to stay. My job is to keep them happy and comfortable in their home for as long as they want to be there, and for as long as it's safe for them to be there.”

That's what Sue said about her parents, who live in an old home. Just as I was mentioning about Centretown, in my community, that's not a unique situation. I think it's a fairly common situation across the province, be it urban

communities or rural communities, where people like Sue and her parents are facing the challenge to continue to live in their home because the house is older and is not as accessible, especially for aging parents.

We want to help Ontarians like Sue's parents stay in their homes as they get older, and to do so, we need to ensure that their homes are accessible, functional and safe. Our proposed new healthy homes renovation tax credit would, if passed, help seniors with the cost of home modifications to make their much-loved homes the best place for them to live and age. We are proposing that this credit be a permanent and refundable personal income tax credit that would cover 15% of up to \$10,000 in eligible alterations to the principal Ontario residence of a senior. By improving accessibility, mobility and safety, the credit would help more seniors stay in their homes for longer periods of time.

I would just like to remind you how we are proposing that the healthy homes renovation tax credit would work. Effective October 1, 2011—so, retroactive to October 1, 2011. As I mentioned earlier, this was a platform commitment that was made by the Ontario Liberal Party in the last provincial election, and in keeping with that promise, we have introduced this legislation which, if passed, will apply retroactively to October 1, 2011, where senior homeowners and tenants who are 65 years of age or older, as well as people who share a home with a senior relative, would be allowed to claim a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 for expenses on permanent modifications to the home. These modifications would have to improve accessibility or otherwise help a senior be more functional or mobile at home, or they would have to reduce the risk of harm to the senior in and around the home. In either case, these must be the type of modifications that would typically be done for a person with an impairment, to improve accessibility, mobility or functionality in and around the home. Renovations that simply improve the value of the home would not be eligible, and I think that's an important qualifier that we should know.

Just as an example, renovations that would make a bathroom safer for seniors with accessibility challenges, such as installing a walk-in bathtub or wheel-in shower or adding grab bars around a toilet, would be eligible under this tax credit. But redecorating a bathroom just to make it look better or to add resale value—by adding a Jacuzzi tub, for instance, or ceramic tiles—would not be eligible under this renovation tax credit, the point being that the tax credit will apply to modifications, to changes, to alterations, to renovations that are actually going to make the home more functional, mobile or accessible for the senior who will be using it.

Detailed rules for eligibility are set out clearly in the proposed legislation. To claim the tax credit, seniors or their family members would have to get receipts from suppliers and contractors, helping to ensure that these amounts are reported by vendors for tax purposes. They would then claim the tax credit on their personal income tax returns.

Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that we are not proposing to unduly restrict this tax credit by allowing only seniors to claim it. Another very important point which I want Ontarians who are listening to this debate or watching this debate to know: We are aware of demographic realities. We know that many Ontario families across the province share their homes with a senior relative. Many of us know members of the sandwich generation; some of us might be members ourselves. A growing number of Ontario families are raising their children while also providing support for Mom or Dad or another elderly relative. That's why we are proposing to allow people who modify their homes to accommodate a senior relative who lives with them to claim this tax credit as well. That means, for example, that a family who renovates their home to install a first-floor-occupancy suite to accommodate an elderly relative would also be able to claim the credit, provided other criteria are met. I think that's an important point and something that we are starting to see more and more.

I have the case of a good friend of mine—André, again, lives in Centretown and lives with his family, a wife and a young son, in a beautiful old two-storey heritage home. The mom lives on the first floor. This way, the family is together. The units are sort of divided, so both families have their independence, but it's also giving an opportunity for my friend to be able to look after his mother whenever she needs it. She's very able and she lives a very active lifestyle, which is fantastic, but it also ensures that that great relationship, that bond, is there. Those are the types of situations that will qualify through this tax credit.

There are probably a lot of people who are perhaps considering that their elderly relative, a mom or a dad or both, move in with them, and want to see if they can renovate part of the house so that they can accommodate their relative. This tax credit, if passed in law, will be able to grant that benefit to either the child, the person who owns the home, or the elderly relative who may be using it.

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The credit will be calculated as 15% of up to \$10,000 in total eligible expenses for a senior's principal residence in Ontario for a calendar year, for a maximum credit of \$1,500 each year, whether that principal residence is theirs alone or shared with family.

I would like to provide a few examples just to illustrate how the tax credit will help Ontario families.

Helen is a widow in her early 70s who lives in Etobicoke. The arthritis in her hands means that she sometimes finds it difficult to complete even simple household tasks such as washing dishes or making herself a cup of tea. She paid \$400 to have a hands-free tap installed in her kitchen to make these tasks a little easier. Helen would keep her receipt and claim \$400 on her 2012 tax return to receive a credit of \$60.

For another example of how the credit will help Ontario families, take Clarence, who was 68 years old when he had a mild stroke. He successfully recovered most of

his mobility, but his son and daughter-in-law were worried about him living on his own, so they modified their home to allow Clarence to move in with them. They paid their contractor \$8,000 for various renovations, including a ramp to make the climb up to their front porch easier, and grab bars and non-slip flooring to make the bathroom safer. They would keep their receipt and claim \$8,000 on their 2012 tax return to receive a credit of \$1,200.

These are real examples. I think these are examples that we probably hear on a regular basis. These are the types of things that seniors face as they face different health-related challenges. These are our constituents whom we, I think, have spoken to at different community events or visited at their home, where a small, little change or alteration will make it easier for them to continue to live in their home.

I think another very good example and an easy one to remember is a simple ramp. Most of the homes have front porches and staircases involved. If you've had any mobility challenges—for example, a lot of seniors now have to use a walker in their later years of life. It's difficult for them to climb even two or three steps to get to the front door. Even if they live in a bungalow type of situation, they probably have a couple of staircases. Building a small ramp makes it easier for them to be able to get into their home. You and I think about it and say, "Well, it's a small cost, but it's something relatively easy to do." Yes, absolutely, but I think for a senior who is living on a fixed income, living in their own home, giving a tax credit up to 10% on building that ramp is going to be of some help to them. It will provide that incentive for them to not just put off building that ramp to another time but hopefully get it done as soon as possible, because it will ensure, one, that they continue to be comfortable, and two, I agree with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in saying that it's a prevention. It will allow for them not to get into any future injuries.

I think that another good example is something we hear about all the time. Especially if you are speaking with doctors and nurses, they'll tell you—or social workers who assist seniors in communities and personal support workers will tell you—that one of the highest incidences of injuries that seniors face are in the bathroom: slip and fall, right? No fault of their own, but it's just the reality that a lot of seniors slip and fall in the bathroom. Bathrooms get wet. They may have mobility issues. Bathrooms tend to be smaller. They need to grab on to things. They have to leave their walker outside or their wheelchair outside to use the bathroom for the purposes they need. That's where, if they are coming out of the bathtub or if they are just using the toilet, they may run into an accident which can result in some serious consequences. Especially if the injury is a significant one and they are not able to seek out help right away, it could have quite a long-lasting impact on them. By ensuring that a senior will be able to put grab bars in the bathroom, make the floor non-slip or change the bathtub to a more

walk-in type of bathtub, it goes a long way in terms of reducing the incidence of injury in their home condition. We know how much you need the bathroom—you use it multiple times in a day. This is a significant—it's not only a safety thing for a senior, but a huge cost savings for the system, because every time a senior faces injury, they may need to call an ambulance or go to a hospital, and that's a serious cost. I think that by a very small measure like this healthy homes renovation tax credit, we can make a real impact in terms of the health of our seniors and their quality of life.

For the 2012 tax year only, the \$10,000 maximum will apply to expenses paid or payable from October 1, 2011, to December 31, 2012. For 2013 and all subsequent years, the maximum will apply to expenses paid or payable from January 1 to December 31 of that year. So it will go to the regular calendar year from 2013 onwards.

To put more money back into people's pockets, we are proposing that this tax credit be fully refundable. This means that seniors or their family members would get the full benefit of the amount they qualify for, regardless of whether they are paying income tax for the year. So even if you're not paying income tax, even if you're getting a refund, you'll still get this tax credit. You'll still get this money back to you. So it's not only in instances where you owe taxes and then the government will subtract the amount it owes to you; you'll get this tax credit regardless, whether you are paying taxes or not.

To help more Ontario families, we are proposing that there be no income testing for eligibility for this tax credit. So, if you're a low-income senior, a mid-income senior or a high-income senior, you will qualify for this tax credit. This means that seniors or people who share a home with a senior relative at all income levels could qualify for this particular tax credit.

Speaker, I would like to point out that while this proposed tax credit is focused on seniors, there are also a number of different programs to help Ontarians, including non-seniors with disabilities who have challenges with accessibility and mobility at home.

The assistive devices program, for example, provides consumer-centred support and funding to people with long-term physical disabilities, including seniors living independently, through access to more than 8,000 assistive devices responsive to their individual needs.

Other programs specifically help people with disabilities stay in their homes. These include the Ontario and federal medical expense tax credit for eligible seniors relating to home modifications or home construction costs for a patient who lacks normal physical development or has a mobility impairment. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. offers a residential rehabilitation assistance program for persons with disabilities. And the Ontario March of Dimes offers a home and vehicle modifications program, which was established by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

In addition, there are a number of tax exemptions that assist people of all ages with disabilities. These include sales tax exemptions on the purchase of various medical

and assistive devices and property tax exemptions for certain alterations that help people with a disability.

We expect that, if passed, the proposed tax credit will cost the province about \$60 million in 2011-12. This amount—and this is a very important point, given the current economic climate we are in and the need for us to eliminate our deficit by 2017-18—this amount of \$60 million will be offset by savings that have been identified from lower spending on business support programs in the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation, as well as lower-than-forecast costs for tax-related expenditures in the Ministry of Finance. This is our new reality. We have to balance new spending aimed at helping Ontario families with the lingering effects on the economy brought about by this time of significant global change, upheaval and uncertainty.

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Over the last generation, governments of all political stripes have accumulated debt. Recently, when Minister Duncan presented the 2012 Ontario budget, he spelled out the realities of our post-recession world. This includes forecasts for slower and more modest economic growth. As we experience slower economic growth, it's going to take strategic thinking to ensure our families are taken care of while we keep the economy moving forward.

So we designed our proposed healthy homes renovation tax credit to help provide a much-needed economic stimulus in response to the current economic conditions while also helping Ontario families.

How would that tax credit do that? By helping Ontario seniors make the renovations they need to stay safely in their own homes, the tax credit would support about \$800 million of home renovation activity and around 10,500 jobs throughout the Ontario economy each and every year.

This proposed new tax credit is smart policy for our times. Given the reality of an extended period of more modest economic growth, helping seniors stay healthy and independent at home will become increasingly important as Ontario's population ages, because helping seniors stay in their homes or in their families' homes rather than in a long-term-care home is more efficient and cost-effective. Helping seniors stay in their homes or in their families' homes also frees up health resources for patients occupying costly beds in hospitals who could be best cared for in a long-term-care home.

Ontario's senior population is expected to more than double over the next 25 years, to 4.1 million seniors by 2036 from approximately 1.8 million seniors in 2010. Regardless of how you look at the numbers, there is no doubt that this dramatic demographic change will bring significant fiscal challenges. So our government has already started looking for affordable solutions and meaningful alternatives to help seniors lead healthy, active and independent lives.

Our aging-at-home strategy is a great example. We have invested \$1.1 billion over four years in this strategy to provide community-based services for seniors and

their caregivers to allow them to stay healthy and live independently with dignity in their homes.

In fact, we have made it a priority to ensure that Ontario seniors can live safe, active and healthy lives, and I'd like to highlight a few of our accomplishments for seniors over the past eight years.

We have expanded home care services to about 500,000 Ontarians each year.

In the 2008 budget, we introduced a new Ontario senior homeowners' property tax grant to provide eligible senior homeowners with assistance with their property taxes. Over the next five years, we will be providing about \$1 billion through this grant, benefiting more than 600,000 seniors with low to moderate incomes who own their own homes.

More than 740,000 seniors are seeing an increase in tax relief with the enhancement of the Ontario energy and property tax credit, which provides seniors who own or rent their home with up to \$1,044 in relief for the sales tax on energy and for property taxes.

We're working in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society of Ontario to develop a new wandering prevention program to help quickly find seniors with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias when they are missing.

We have introduced the new Retirement Homes Act, which, for the first time in Ontario, provides legislative protections for Ontario seniors living in retirement homes. The act established the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority, which will be responsible for enforcing this legislation. Last May, we introduced immediate measures to protect residents from abuse and neglect until the act comes into full force.

Our government has taken important steps to ensure seniors who cannot live at home enjoy access to the highest-quality long-term-care services by making key investments in long-term-care homes and increasing front-line staff. Other achievements in long-term care since 2003 include adding more than 9,100 new beds in long-term-care homes; increasing long-term-care funding by more than \$1.6 billion; and funding more than 7,000 new front-line staff in long-term-care homes.

Then there is the issue of pension reform and retirement income adequacy, both of which are key priorities for the McGuinty government. Ontario is playing a leading role in a national effort to review the state of the current retirement income system, its future sustainability and options that could strengthen the system for our seniors.

Our government recognized that pension legislation in Ontario was badly in need of updating. We worked hard to create the new Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2010, and the Securing Pension Benefits Now and for the Future Act, 2010, which together marked the most significant reform of the Pension Benefits Act in more than 20 years. We have been working with the federal government and the other provinces and territories to explore options for expanding the Canada pension plan.

The McGuinty government is also supporting seniors through reforms to the rules for locked-in retirement savings accounts, giving seniors and other Ontarians more flexibility in accessing the funds in these accounts. We are making investments that help provide seniors with more opportunities to stay active, healthy and involved in their communities. This includes investing more than \$1.2 million to expand our elderly persons centres program, which supports seniors' centres across the province. Also, since 2003, we have invested more than \$6 million in elder abuse prevention, including providing \$900,000 annually to the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse to better assist victims in communities across the province.

As you can see, Speaker, our government is making significant investments to ensure that Ontario seniors, like our parents, our grandparents and our elderly neighbours, have access to quality programs and services that help them live life safely, healthily and independently. The proposed healthy homes renovation tax credit will be the best example of this commitment.

I also want to take a little bit of time to talk about the economic benefit of this credit. As I mentioned earlier, this is going to be a significant boost for our renovation sector. It could result in the creation of about 10,500 jobs year by year, because seniors will be procuring the services of contractors who will be renovating homes because of this healthy homes renovation tax credit. It is also going to help suppliers, of course. You've got a lot of businesses, big and small, in our communities that sell products like accessible toilets and walk-in bathtubs or stairlifts. I have visited one such business in my community and was able to use, as a demonstration, one of these stairlifts. They are obviously a technology that has come a long way. That obviously assists these local businesses in our communities and will ensure that it's going to help an economic boost. It will help in the creation of new jobs.

I think a tax credit like this is also going to be helpful in curtailing the underground economy. That's an issue that you hear often from the renovation sector. By the way, the renovation and construction sector is very much supportive of this tax credit.

One of the key things in this legislation, as I mentioned earlier, is that in order for a senior or a relative to benefit from this tax credit, they would have to keep the receipt, the invoice, of the services that they have procured, whether they purchased something or they paid a contractor. Obviously, they have to declare that as part of the income tax return when they're filing it. The vendor, of course, also has to demonstrate on their end that they have provided that service. So there is more transparency; there is more visibility of the services that are provided. Of course, the vendor would have to pay taxes that are related to that as well.

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That helps undermine the underground economy, which is a huge scourge. We should do everything in our power to ensure that we're not participating personally in

the underground economy. Sometimes it's tempting to just pay somebody cash and not pay taxes, something that I refuse to do at every single opportunity. If somebody makes that offer to me, "I will cut your grass and just pay me cash," or "I'll clean the snow," I say, "No, I want to pay my sales tax." I, as a legislator, think that's something we all need to do. You send a clear message: "I need a receipt, I need an invoice, I will cut you a cheque." That's how you do it. I think we all have to play a role, and all of us have an opportunity every single day in our interactions to create that example, to show that we all benefit when we pay taxes, we all benefit when we keep the economy above ground, because those are the revenues that help pay for our health care and education systems.

This tax credit is going to really assist in that endeavour as well, because it really brings the renovation sector above ground. Something I've heard often, again and again, in my meetings with the renovation sector in my community in Ottawa is that they really favour a tax credit of this nature because it creates an incentive for people to engage in the activity, get a renovator and make their home more accessible. Also, it makes sure that everything is happening in a transparent fashion, where receipts and invoices are being exchanged, which is extremely important. So that's a very important aspect of it and something we should all be mindful of when we are supporting this legislation. And I hope that all members will be supporting this very important legislation, because it is going to create jobs, it is going to make sure our economy continues to go forward on a sustainable path, and we are helping to grow and create good-paying jobs in our local economies.

The other good thing about this type of tax credit is that the kinds of jobs that get created as a result of this tax credit are very local. They happen right in our communities. If you are from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, as you are, Speaker, and a senior is taking advantage of this tax credit and getting a contractor to come and do the job, the person from your community who is doing it is most likely going to hire a person from your community to do the work. It's got that very direct impact on our local neighbourhoods. We won't be seeing these jobs going somewhere else. These jobs are taking place right in our communities, in our neighbourhoods.

I know something that all the members are very much concerned about: They want to make sure that if you're going to use public dollars and create tax credits, it is creating jobs all the time. This tax credit does that, and I really hope the NDP will be supporting it because of that. I do think they are supporting it, and I want to thank them for their very constructive dialogue on this bill.

I'm sure we are going to be hearing from them as well, but they were very constructive in the committee process that took place, coming up with some good suggestions, and their suggestions are included in this bill, Speaker. There are two amendments that are part of this revised bill as a result of the ideas that were put forward by the NDP, and I thank them very much for really using the minority government. What is best is working together.

It's unfortunate that the Conservatives did not participate in that exercise. In fact, they threw in quite a few obstacles. That committee was supposed to go two days with submissions and clause-by-clause, and I think it ended up going more than that. There were several sessions held, and that's unfortunate, but c'est la vie, as they say.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank a few people who helped me as I was going through some changes at home with a baby coming, etc. I want to thank all the members of the committee from all three parties for being understanding and assisting me and relieving me of my duties in the committee. I want to thank the member from Windsor West for sort of taking the lead on my behalf one day, the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for playing that role, and I believe the member from Etobicoke Centre was also there to assist me. Really, I think it's a great example of how we all come together to work with each other.

The committee is an important place. A lot of people came and spoke in support of this particular bill because they saw it as helping and providing support to the economy and jobs, because Ontarians deserve nothing less. Our seniors deserve to live in their own homes in an independent, dignified manner.

When we had public hearings, Speaker, on this bill, the stakeholders made it clear: They want to see this bill passed because it will help seniors. Let me quote a few of them now. I only have nine minutes to go, and I just want to make sure that some of the comments that were made by the stakeholders who came and spoke on this bill are on the record, because I think it's really important what they said, and their opinions really do matter in this instance.

Ms. Sandra Baldwin, who is the chair of the Ontario Home Builders' Association—we're talking about the impact for the renovation sector; it's really important to see what Ms. Baldwin had to say about this bill. She said, "The renovation tax credit will achieve the objective of allowing seniors to age in place. Maintaining health, independence and dignity is a very important objective which the legislation seeks to address. As our society ages, it's very important that policy-makers provide seniors the tools to allow them to live a full life." I wholeheartedly agree with Ms. Baldwin and the comments that she offered at the committee hearing on this.

Susan Eng, who was mentioned earlier, who is the vice-president of advocacy for CARP, which stands for the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, has a huge following. I think we all know Susan quite well. She does a really good job, works hard on behalf of retired persons, seniors across the province. She said the following: "Policies such as the healthy homes renovation tax credit would make it easier for seniors to remain at home." I think that's a really good endorsement to have from somebody like Ms. Eng.

Paul Golini, who is the chairman of the Building Industry and Land Development Association, had the following to say at the committee:

"Residential renovation is essential to our region's economic stability and prosperity because it creates jobs while improving the existing housing stock for years to come....

"The entire residential construction industry is expected to bring in 165,800 jobs in new home construction and renovation in 2011, making it one of the largest employers in the region."

I think he speaks very significantly as to the impact this piece of legislation is going to have on our renovation sector and economic growth.

Jacquelyn Micallef from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario also spoke at the committee, and this is what Jacquelyn had to say: "Bill 2, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, offers one type of support to facilitate a senior remaining safe and comfortable in their home or in that of their caregivers. This bill will also help caregivers to make their home more responsive to the needs of a person they are caring for by offsetting the cost of home renovations. This is established in the inclusion of the individual with a qualifying relation to the senior."

So she spoke, obviously, in support of relatives who may want to have a senior live with them being able to qualify for this tax credit. She thinks it's a good idea that we will not only just have the seniors qualify for this tax credit, but also a relative. For example, a child who wants their parents to live with them also qualifies.

We also had the Ontario Real Estate Association, Speaker, come to the committee. Patricia Verge, who, by the way is from Ottawa, spoke on behalf of OREA about this bill, and this is what Patricia had to say: "OREA is here today to speak in support of Bill 2. We commend the government for bringing it forward and encourage all parties to vote in favour of its passage." That's Patricia's request of all of us, that she hopes that all of us will come together and vote for the passage of this bill.

As we can see, we had people from all kinds of backgrounds—from the business community, from the not-for-profit sector, from advocacy groups who represent seniors—coming forward to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and speaking in support of Bill 2, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, because they see the positive benefits for seniors in terms of making it easier and accessible for them to live in their homes and also the impact it's going to have on our economy.

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Speaker, in closing, I want to quote the Premier as to what he has said and what he had in his mind that this tax credit was going to accomplish. He really concisely summarized our goals in introducing this tax credit, and he said, "We want families to have the peace of mind that comes with knowing that a mom can make it safety upstairs, or a dad can easily get to the kitchen. This credit would help our seniors live independently longer and it will also create jobs across the province to help build a stronger future for all Ontarians." I think that's a very good way of describing what this bill is going to achieve.

I'm really pleased that I had the opportunity to run on a platform that championed this idea. In the October 2011 election, I had many conversations in my community about this particular bill and seniors or loved ones wanting this to come into place. I'm really happy that I had the opportunity to work on this bill from the inception to now at third reading, and I'm really hopeful that the work we have all done together up to now in getting this bill through second reading and committee and now for third reading debate will result in its passage before the end of this session so that we will, as soon as this is passed, be able to allow our seniors to qualify for this tax credit. Like I said, this credit applies, if passed, retroactively from October 1, 2011, so if you have made changes, renovations, that make your home more accessible since October 1, 2011, please keep those invoices, please keep those receipts, because you will be able to use them to get this tax credit if the bill is passed into law.

I'm really hopeful that this will pass into law and that we will all continue to work together to make it easier for our seniors to live in their homes. I think this is a good-news story. We can go back to our communities, no matter which party we come from, and say, "You know what? This is available to you, and if you want to continue to live in your own home, if you want to make sure that you have the independence that you so much cherish and that you so much want to maintain, let's find a way to renovate your home and be able to apply for this tax credit."

You know, once it becomes law, when it becomes policy, it's not a Liberal policy; it's not a Conservative policy or NDP policy; it is the policy of the government of Ontario. We can all champion it, because what it's going to do is really help seniors in our communities, and it's going to help create jobs, local jobs in our communities, both worthy matters, not partisan in nature. Ideology has no meaning in this, because we all want to ensure that our seniors have the opportunity to live healthily, to live independently. Seniors don't want to live in long-term-care homes. Seniors don't want to live in nursing homes. Seniors don't want to go to hospitals. Seniors want to live in their homes, close to their families, and I think this bill really gives that opportunity and also gives this significant lift-up opportunity for our business community, local small businesses in our communities who work very hard in the renovation sector. It will allow them to work with seniors to be able to renovate homes and take advantage of the tax credit.

Thank you very much, Speaker. I don't want to use up all my time, because I know other members want to talk about this bill as well, so thank you for giving me the opportunity.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I am pleased to rise to respond to the debate that we are having today with regards to Bill 2, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act.

The fact of the matter is, I recall speaking to this bill last fall, and with all due respect to the member from St. Catharines as well as the member from Ottawa Centre, I have to share with you that I didn't support the bill then and I can't support the bill now, because the fact of the matter is, if the government is very serious about keeping seniors in their homes, they need to fess up and realize that the greatest hurdle, the number one thing that's prohibiting seniors from staying in their homes, is the rising cost of living, and the biggest culprit in that rising cost of living in homes is the cost of energy. They need to fess up, ladies and gentlemen. If seniors want to stay in their homes comfortably, they need heat and they need hydro.

Just earlier today and earlier this week, I referenced the fact that there are people in my riding who are calling our offices because their hydro is getting cut off. Is this the type of legacy that the Liberal government wants to leave? I don't think so, so we're encouraging them to do the right thing. Do the honourable thing and listen to what the PC caucus has been saying for months, and that is, if you're going to be serious about helping seniors, do the right thing, recognize that the Green Energy Act has failed and that we need to take a serious look at how we can help our seniors stay in their homes by bringing down the cost of their hydro and their heat. That is the right thing to do.

I found it interesting that the member for Ottawa Centre referenced jobs. They're short-term jobs. We need a real plan for job creation and affordability.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I rise to just comment on the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I had the pleasure of sitting on the finance committee that actually dealt with this bill, which was my first—interesting and challenging. The bill itself makes a small contribution to the financial ability of some seniors to actually make improvements to their home that will keep them in their homes. We will be supporting the bill.

But there are at least 100,000 seniors in this province living in poverty who won't be able to access this bill at all because they won't have the money up front to do that up to \$10,000 in renovations. I think the important thing for me and for our party is that we were able to make amendments to the bill, some consumer protection amendments, amendments around the government having to provide lists of contractors, reputable contractors, because we all know that there are good contractors and there are bad contractors. If anybody watches Holmes on Homes, we see on that network all the time where bad contractors go in and do work and people are left holding the bag. We don't want that to happen to our most vulnerable seniors in this province.

We also were able to put in an amendment that actually will provide costing at the end of each year on what was actually spent out of that potential \$60 million, so that if the uptake is not enough, we will perhaps be able to move some of those funds to those lower-income

seniors to meet some of the needs that they need in their homes, perhaps like the program that is currently going on in Quebec which actually does upfront costs for about \$3,500 per senior.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: It was a great opportunity this afternoon to listen to two substantive speeches, one delivered by my colleague the Minister of the Environment and the other one delivered by my colleague from Ottawa Centre. They were both—in terms of substance, the content was very detailed and the logic was superb to lay out the arguments in supporting Bill 2, which has been, Mr. Speaker, around for a while.

I want to bring this home to Peterborough for a moment. I always see my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, a former Home Hardware owner—there are two of them in Peterborough, and I can see the people lined up, homeowners helping homeowners, to get in there to buy those materials, to take advantage of the healthy homes renovation tax credit. It's a real opportunity to generate activity locally, like the former program in Ottawa that was in place—and the member from Huron–Bruce, I believe.

This was an essential part of Canada's economic recovery program when they introduced that tax credit. We see this tax credit, in parallel fashion, a real opportunity to drive economic activity in Ontario, an opportunity for seniors of all incomes to renovate that bathtub, look after that shower, put in a stairlift, perhaps an elevator, to make their home easier for seniors. Members of that family as they age need accessibility to all parts of the home, and this very substantive piece of legislation will go a long, long way to make that happen.

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So I'm delighted that the Minister of the Environment, a former minister for seniors in Ontario—

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: —and the member from Ottawa Centre—

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: —are supporting this bill on third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. I will remind the member from Peterborough that he was so wound up in his speech that he forgot to sit down. So when I say, "Thank you," that's your quote.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I duly apologize.

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

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Certainly by now you'd think people in this Legislature, Speaker, would know that when the Speaker rises, the member sits.

I listened to both the Minister of the Environment and the member from Ottawa Centre. The thing that gets me about this bill—the member for Peterborough talks about it being significant. The problem is, it is so targeted. What about that senior whose windows are leaking, so the air is blowing through on those cold winter days?

Nothing for them. What about the one who needs a new furnace? Nothing for them. They need to stay in their homes too, and they don't need to be there freezing.

You know, the old federal program was a renovation credit for all. It spoke to the problems that people have in their homes and how they need this help. This is targeted to knock off one of the dominoes, hoping that the Liberals can garner support among those seniors at home who need some help with mobility issues or otherwise. It's that kind of targeted political thinking that we need to stop in this province. We need to have relief for all people out there who need it, not just for one targeted group.

When this thing is passed, and it will be passed because the third party and the Liberals are going to vote for it, it's going to result in such confusion. Yes, they've got this amendment in here about having a ministry hotline, so to speak, but you know where people are going to be calling? They're going to be calling their MPPs' offices, saying, "How come I'm not eligible?"

Oh, it was a big story in the newspaper: "Liberals to Help Seniors." Do you know what that is? It's misleading, Speaker, because this is targeted to a very narrow group of seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate? Oh, sorry. The member has two minutes to respond. The member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the members from Huron–Bruce, Welland, Peterborough and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for their remarks to my brief comments earlier about this bill.

I'm going to say that I'm really saddened to hear that the Conservatives are not going to be supporting this bill. Now, they claim that they've been talking to us; they've been telling us for the last two months what to do. Well, the only thing I recall hearing from them goes something like, "Ding, dong; ding, dong; ding, dong." That's what they have been doing for the last two months: delaying the debate when it comes to this piece of legislation or other important pieces of legislation like Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act that will protect our children in schools from bullying.

This is an important bill. I don't know what the Conservatives are going to say when they go back to their own communities and face seniors who are going to benefit from this legislation: "I don't really care about you"? That's what I guess the Conservatives are going to be telling their seniors, that, "You know what? We don't care whether you continue to live at home or not." That is extremely sad, Speaker.

I applaud and appreciate the NDP working together, coming up with ideas, improving this bill, strengthening this bill through the committee process. Here we are at third reading, working together, ensuring that this becomes law and that seniors, going back to October 1, 2011, will be able to take advantage of this tax credit.

We, of course, have a lot more to do to ensure that seniors have the care and the services they need. Health care services are important. That's why the investments

we've been making in community care are very important.

I really urge the members of the Conservative Party to reconsider their views. They've made their point, whatever that may be, but this is the time for them to pull together and support this bill into law.

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

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind members that musical chairs and not standing up when you're supposed to stand up is very confusing for the Speaker's chair. You know you have a two-minute response. If you don't stand up, I can't recognize you, and then other members stand up. So it gets very confusing in here. You know the rules. I don't want people playing games and the wrong people standing up when they shouldn't. Thank you.

Further debate. The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to say at the outset that I'll be sharing my time with my colleague the member from York-Simcoe.

The first thing I want to comment on is the fact that I listened with interest to my colleague from Ottawa Centre. While we don't agree on many things, I certainly understand the passion that he displays, I understand why he believes what he believes, but I have to say, with respect, that I don't believe what he believes. What I believe about this bill is that it's not really about seniors; it's not really about helping the trades; what it's really about is politics. It was, indeed, the very first bill that was tabled in this House when the new session started back in December. My colleagues on the other side want to say that it's a good bill, and I'm sure from their perspective they can sell that concept. It seems we've heard that we have support for their bill from the NDP, even though in discussions in committee we heard the same kinds of concerns expressed by the NDP that were expressed by my party. So I'll be rather interested to see whether the NDP actually votes with the Liberals or abstains. But that's another thing for another day.

The point is this: that helping seniors is an essential aspect for me in being a member of provincial Parliament. Helping people who are less capable is an important aspect for all of us. For me, that's both ends of the age scale. Seniors have less opportunity to go out and do for themselves, young children have less opportunity to do for themselves, so we have to provide help for them.

My colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, who spoke quite eloquently in his two-minute contribution to the debate, said it very well when he talked about slicing the onion, peeling away layers. This is an incredibly thin bill, and I'll explore this more significantly as I go on in my comments. This is a very thin bill by the time it gets to the people it really purports to want to help.

Helping seniors is an issue of great importance for us in the Progressive Conservative Party; it is for us in our constituencies, as it is for all members in all parties. This is particularly apparent to me in Thornhill, where we

have an aging population, where we have many baby boomers approaching the age that qualifies them as seniors. I moved to Thornhill in 1983. I was a man in my thirties. That's when the expansion of Thornhill was encompassing people of my generation. So those people—

Mr. John Yakabuski: How old are you now?

Mr. Peter Shurman: You're asking me how old I am now? For me to know, for you to find out, but let's just say I'm qualified for old age supplement. The bottom line on this is that that entire area of Thornhill and many other areas are occupied by people who have been in homes for approximately 30 years, who want to stay in those homes and want the opportunity to do so. I think in most cases this bill doesn't afford them that opportunity.

All in this Legislature know that my party has the best track record for standing up for seniors. So whether we support this bill or not, there is no question that for time immemorial this party has stood for seniors. As I've mentioned in this House before, I myself have been responsible for introducing a property tax deferral bill for low-income seniors. I want to explore this a little bit more deeply because it's rather interesting. I introduced this bill twice. The bill was, unlike this bill, of no cost to the province of Ontario or to any jurisdiction whatsoever. All it did was say that if you wanted to stay in your house and you were a senior, very particularly a senior who in the recession period suffered and had a problem meeting all of the commitments that go with home ownership and home occupancy, you could defer the payment of your municipal property tax, at an interest cost that was commensurate with interest costs across the board, and that the province would support it unless and until you sold the house or you passed away.

I presented that bill a couple of years ago and it was shot down in flames for a variety of reasons. At the time, I made copious notes on what those reasons were. I went back to the legislative people and recast that bill, and I addressed every single one of those concerns. Further, Speaker, again in my quest to aid seniors to stay in their homes, I re-presented that bill with all of those exigencies covered, and I solicited the support of an NDP member at the time and of a Liberal member at the time. I'm going to tell you, Speaker: This bill failed as well, and that was the one and only time in the history of this Legislature that a bill sponsored by all three parties, including the governing party, failed. How could that be? If you had consensus amongst the three parties, how could that be? Well, that was really simple. They decided that it was going to fail. It was such a good bill that the Liberal government obviously couldn't stomach the idea of someone else coming up with the concept, and they voted it down twice before they reintroduced it as their own, as a campaign promise, in September 2011—speaking of which, I'm wondering when the Liberal Party is actually going to introduce this bill as government legislation, because I'll stand up and vote for it. I can tell you, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. They can take anything they want. Just put that on the floor, because that's a good bill for seniors. It costs nothing, and it helps immensely.

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The bill that we're talking about today doesn't meet those criteria, and that's the issue. It's because of our party's support of seniors that I stand here today and I speak to Bill 2. As has been said, we are not supporting it. I want to make it clear that you can be pro-senior and not support this kind of—let's call it a Liberal loot bag. That's what this bill is. It's something that sold well at election time, so they brought it in as Bill 2, the first bill after the basic bill that starts the Legislature, and we discussed it briefly, and it went to committee. When we debated this bill in committee, the Liberal government showed absolutely no willingness to co-operate with the Ontario PCs or to consider recommendations that we actually had. Our party sought to provide what is needed for seniors, while keeping a close eye on the provincial budget, because living within their means and on a budget is something that the Liberal Party considers—let's call it a suggestion instead of a rule to live by. That's not the way we see it.

Seniors get it. Seniors get it, yet seniors are the ones who foot the cost of pretty well everything, more than most groups. They're the people who have made the largest contribution, just by dint of their age. They've been around long enough that they've paid the taxes, they've built lives, they've built homes, they've paid mortgages, they've brought up families, they've schooled their children, they've fed their children, and now they deserve a little bit of respect. This bill purports to give them that respect, but it's so thin in terms of who it serves that that's not possible. Perhaps this government should seek some input and some advice from the seniors themselves on how it's done, not from interest groups.

The bill, in third reading form, that we are debating today happens to include amendments from the NDP, and these amendments—this is very important—have not been costed out. This is a very important aspect of what we're considering today. During the course of study on this bill, when we were in committee, I requested, on behalf of the PC Party, some costing—what was this bill going to cost?—and I received three numbers. One was in arrears; in other words, what would it have cost to date? Given the fact that the budget year ended on March 31, what would it cost in the budget year that we have now entered? What would it cost in the ensuing year? I got three simple figures, but they were rather incoherent because they didn't connect to anything. I think they were figures that were best-guess estimates, because we don't know what the take-up on this is going to be. Let's just say that when I asked for the cost of this program during the committee discussions, the government provided three figures, but they provided an awful lot of rhetoric.

In addition, if you take a look at the NDP amendment, which calls for what essentially amounts to some kind of an information line, that uses an awful lot of verbiage to describe the drill-down process—where do I go to get the best estimate for what it is I want to have done on my house? Where do I find a contractor who is a reputable contractor? How do I qualify? Am I qualified?—all of

the things that my colleague from Renfrew suggested probably would come to MPP offices, to a great extent. That entire way of addressing this bill, which would probably be some form of government-operated call centre, will have a cost attached to it that we have not been provided figures on. And yet here we are in third reading and it winds up being a part of what will undoubtedly become a fairly convoluted and difficult bill to administer, with a cost figure that really isn't estimable at this point. Never was the actual or projected total cost outlined in committee or outlined before this chamber. "Don't worry," we were told. "It is covered out of allocations that exist." That means that money that had been allocated to other programs, perhaps in other ministries, would be transferred and there would be, we were told, no new net cost to the province.

You could get off on an entire tangential debate here and say "no new additional cost" to a province that's going into deficit this year to the tune of \$15 billion, when our entire push for the past six months has been about controlling spending—that's an entirely different aspect of this and one that we could well consider, because if you have money to allocate to this, better you allocate the money to pay down a deficit.

In the midst of a financial crisis, how can the Liberal government expect any responsible members to vote for a bill without providing information on how much it will cost to implement? This seems—to me, anyway—to be a new policy of the Liberal government that we could charitably describe as, "Trust me. Trust me. It will be okay. We'll get it done." I'm debating a bill today that, obviously, with the Liberal vote added to the NDP vote, is going to result in passage. It will be through third reading sometime next week, or maybe when we come back after the one-week hiatus and before the House rises. And it's going to cost some amount of money to administer and it's going to cost some amount of money in the tax credits, but we don't know what that amount is.

So here we are. Without knowing what the true costs are, how can this government even hope to prevent the cost from ballooning to unaffordable levels? How? The government has not told anyone where the money for this program actually comes from, other than that business of being moved from other ministries and other allocations. I recommended, to the repugnance of the Liberal committee members, to hold back the payment, the bonus pay, for parliamentary assistants. I said, "You know, parliamentary assistants get an additional \$16,000 per year for being parliamentary assistants," and, to my knowledge, absolutely everybody on that side who is not a minister of the crown is a parliamentary assistant, save and except for one. That means everybody over there who's not a minister gets an additional \$16,000 for that work. I said, "If you can't tell me where the allocation for this bill comes from, maybe I'd better move a motion that says that until we find that out, we'd better take away the parliamentary assistant pay." The motion unfortunately failed, but I thought it was a pretty good idea at the time.

I might say, I'm no parliamentary assistant, so I get your basic MPP pay, and by the way, it's been frozen for

four years. As I said the other day, no complaint, but I think it's important that people out there know that there is an entire raft of Liberal people on the other side who get \$16,000—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member is kind of really wearing this segment of his speech out, and he knows that it's not really dealing with the issue by talking about that particular item. So can we not go there? Thank you.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I accept what you say, Speaker, and I take your point. I'll simply say that by going far afield, I was trying to call attention to the fact that there is money that is spent in different ways and we could more easily and in a better way direct this to the bill.

If you look beneath the surface of the bill to focus directly on the bill, and by that I mean look beyond the catchy title of the bill, the healthy homes tax credit, you'll see that this bill, like almost any other introduced by the Liberal government—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke was warned earlier in the afternoon. That was kind of like, "Don't do it again." He went out and came back. That doesn't mean that that penalty still isn't in effect.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I didn't know that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, now you know. Thank you very much, and I'm sure we won't be hearing much from you. Thank you.

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Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaker, thank you.

Again, if you look beneath the surface of the bill, and I'm talking about beyond the scope of healthy homes tax credit, which is yet another Liberal attempt to make a bill sound palatable, you see that the bill, like almost any other introduced by this government, is essentially empty. Now, many of the Liberal members will try to argue about what the bill's intent is. "We want to help seniors," is what they'll say. We do, too, but let me say, not in the same way.

News for you: Intent is not enough. The program has to actually deliver. It doesn't matter what the intent is. Some of the taunts we had in committee were, "You don't want to help seniors." That's not true. It's patently untrue. We want to help seniors, but we want to be effective in that. We want to be effective in everything we do in this Legislature, and Bill 2 does not pass the test on that.

We all know there's a saying that the road to somewhere is paved with good intentions. That addresses the idea of intent. We've had over eight years of Liberal intentions, and look where Ontario has wound up. So, intent: not too much. Forty per cent of this country's population is in Ontario, and we're at the end of the line on employment insurance benefits. We're last.

Let's now delve beneath the surface of the bill. Let's talk about the bill itself. Let's consider how much of an impact, if any, Bill 2 could actually have on Ontario families and seniors as a mechanism to stimulate the economy.

First of all, only seniors—65 plus is the definition—would qualify for the tax credit proposed by the bill itself, which equals about 13% of Ontario's population. That's about 1.8 million people. So the broad base of seniors is 1.8 million people. Of all the people living in Ontario, the tax credit could potentially apply to only 13%. The median senior income in Ontario, meaning that most seniors living in Ontario are in this category, is \$25,000 per individual and \$45,000 per couple. That translates into approximately \$2,000 to \$3,700 of income per month, depending on whether you're a single senior or a senior couple.

In order to qualify for the maximum tax credit of \$1,500—15% of the maximum expenditure of \$10,000—a senior has to actually spend that \$10,000, so a senior has to actually have that \$10,000. When the senior spends that \$10,000, he or she or the couple is actually out of pocket \$8,500.

You've got to ask yourself again, if you're going to that thin edge of the wedge, after you look at all seniors being a global universe of 1.8 million and you cut through the first layer—that layer is people who can afford any amount of spending, much less an amount like \$10,000. It's a substantial sum of money, nearly an unreachable sum of money for many, especially given the fact that savings have taken such a serious hit in the past few years and the nest egg that provided the cash flow for many seniors has been very seriously diminished, it's probably safe to say, for no segment of the population more so than that segment, because if you were 70 years old and it was 2008-09 and you had to live, your income from the nest egg was zip, zero, nada, nothing, and so you dipped into the principal, and what you've been left with now—we're in 2012—is a diminished principal yielding a diminished income.

Not just any renovations qualify. Now we get to another thin edge. Only renovations that the Liberal government has decided are acceptable, or may decide through regulation are acceptable.

So a senior living alone in the province of Ontario has to spend nearly half of his or her annual income to get back \$1,500 as a tax credit. My one-line rejoinder to that is: Who are you guys kidding? Where's the take-up on this? How many seniors do you know who can put up nearly half their annual income for a renovation? Not very many. So the number of people this program would, in reality, apply to shrinks again by a significant number. It begins with 1.8 million, but that drops based on income and drops based on marital status. As if that weren't enough, seniors receiving ODSP benefits are excluded from qualifying for the tax credit, and that shrinks the pool even further.

Then your renovations have to meet specific criteria—we haven't gone there yet—which means that, of those who could afford to renovate their homes, an even smaller fraction of those would get the refund. Do you get the idea?

My friend from Renfrew spoke a couple of moments ago—that's you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's me.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I can't say your name. But my friend the member from Renfrew talked about the fact that there are seniors who have deficiencies in their homes that they want to stay in. Homes get old, just like people do. So if you're paying for energy and you don't have windows that keep the cold out, if you're paying for electricity when the rates continue to go up higher and higher, if you've got a furnace that isn't working and it absolutely is crying out for replacement—and that's before you get to any of the aesthetics—you don't qualify. You only qualify if you have an infirmity that means that you have to spend money that maybe you have and maybe you don't have, that gets you up the stairs on one of those lifts, or a means to enter a bath appliance in a way such that you don't have to lift your legs, those kinds of things.

You're cutting away and cutting away, and peeling the onion and peeling the onion. All you've got is a bud at the end. It's no longer a whole onion. That's the problem.

The question I have is: Who actually benefits from the program?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: People who need those things.

Mr. Peter Shurman: No, it's not true. It certainly doesn't help those people who need it most.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Speaker would like them to go through the Chair and not have cross-dialogue.

The member from Renfrew: The comedy is getting a little worn out with the silent routine. Please don't do that. Don't make a mockery of the Chair. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you, Speaker.

The people who are financially well off and can put up \$10,000 to renovate their homes don't have to wait for a government cheque or a tax credit. They'd do the renovation in any event. That's what they'd do. Meanwhile, those who need the help who cannot afford the renovations, who don't have the cash to do what they need to do, are still left sitting in the dust.

This bill, at the end of the day, as I started out saying about 20 minutes ago, is basically a nasty piece of business because it addresses seniors and proceeds to deny the majority of seniors. That's why I say, and that's why my party says, that this is a nasty piece of business, that this is a political bill. Most of what we hear from the other side is about politics.

Seniors are also people who, more often than most—and I know we hear statistics such as, the amount of medical care that you need at the end of your life is 80% in the last 20% of the years that you live. That medical care extends, for example, to air ambulances like Ornge.

We've been thwarted by that party over there on the issue of a select committee to investigate Ornge, and so at this point, I have to say, because of that, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those against will say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1728 to 1758.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Shurman has moved adjournment of the debate. All those in favour of the motion will please stand to be counted by the clerks' table.

All those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 19; the nays are 29.

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

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'll now move into a late show. Thank you very much.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

TOURISM

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Kenora–Rainy River has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport concerning Ontario tourism information centres. The member from Kenora–Rainy River has five minutes.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: On May 3, I asked the minister a very straightforward question regarding the closure of three travel information centres in my riding. Speaker, that question was not answered.

Since the time when these closures were announced, without consultation and without notice, I have done everything in my power to obtain answers from the minister about the reasons for this decision. At first, the minister said it was to focus on online marketing and travel applications for phones. I pointed out that my region does not have the infrastructure in place to market in such a way. Then the minister said it was about the numbers. I inquired about the numbers, and I was told that they were still being compiled, which struck me as a little strange because you generally need the numbers to make a decision that's based upon the numbers. I asked the minister, then, if this was a politically motivated decision. He got very angry at that insinuation, yet when I finally received the numbers, they didn't add up.

Speaker, there were three travel information centres in my riding of Kenora–Rainy River. They were at Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River. Tourism is not a secondary or complementary industry in my region; in many cases, it is "the" industry.

Following the collapse of the forest industry, communities across the region made the decision to focus on tourism, and they have done an outstanding job. Despite the fact that they've been battling a government that simply does not understand that our markets are different than those in southern Ontario, our industry did press

forward. They pushed forward despite the closure of the spring bear hunt. They pushed forward despite having to compete with markets in Manitoba and northern Minnesota that do not have the HST. Now they're expected to move forward without travel information centres.

This government did not give any notice of the decision; it just went and did it. Municipalities that rely heavily on tourism are now scrambling to figure out just what to do. They were not given the time to look at other options, including taking over the centres. They were not given the respect of advance notice from this ministry. They can't even get the minister to respond to their letters or their emails. This is an insult, and this is totally unacceptable.

Speaker, the Minister of Tourism is supposed to facilitate growth in this industry, not drive another nail in the coffin. The minister is supposed to uphold his duties in a manner that is not political but is for the betterment of the province.

The minister maintains that this was not a political move, yet the seasonal centre in Pigeon River remains open, despite having many fewer visits than in Kenora, and Kenora is being closed.

I'm not advocating for the closure of any centres. I believe they send an important, welcoming message to all tourists in all communities, and at a minimal cost to the government's budget.

My point has been clear: If this is not a politically motivated decision, then the minister has a duty and an obligation to tourist operators in my riding and across the province to outline his plan—a plan that does not rely on technologies that are simply not in place. If the minister is straightforward in saying that this decision is about the numbers, then it stands to reason that the travel information centre in Pigeon River will close. If that is the case, the minister is doing the business community in Thunder Bay and across the entire north a disservice by not announcing it. If there are other centres that are set to close, this minister is doing those communities a disservice as well.

Speaker, I ask once again: Will the minister please explain how these decisions were made? The hard-working people of our province's tourism sector deserve to know.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Parliamentary assistant, the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to do a late show. Mr. Speaker, I have some comments that I will make on behalf of the minister.

I'm pleased to rise in the House to discuss the Ontario travel information centres, affectionately known as OTICs.

This government has presented a budget to put Ontario on track to tackle the deficit while continuing to provide quality services for Ontarians. We're moving forward to achieve sustainable services, and we continue to provide sound investments. Government services need to keep pace with changing demands and with the expectations of the public.

Over the past 10 years, the one year-round OTIC in Fort Frances and the seasonal OTICs in Kenora and Rainy River, like the four that are closing in southern Ontario, including one in my own riding of Fort Erie, have shown an average decline in visitation of more than 50%. I actually know that because in my riding of Fort Erie, I'd stop there many times to see the one person who worked at our travel centre. We'd have conversations about how many people were coming into that location, so I'm quite familiar with that.

These declines are telling us that these services are no longer the primary source of travel information. Travellers are turning increasingly to using the Internet, their GPS, and planning their trips well ahead of time, knowing where they're going, what they want to see and going in those directions.

In fact, in 2010, over four times more travellers used the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp. website to make travel plans than those who visited a travel information centre.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and our agency, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp., stand by the decision today, as we did when the decision was made. We have taken a hard look at the way in which we deliver services to Ontarians, and as part of our plan we are realigning our tourism marketing services by focusing on online travel marketing activities.

Ontario is stepping up its 24/7 electronic- and Internet-based travel marketing presence to meet consumers' travel research and booking preferences. This will allow us to meet consumers' travel research preferences through major redevelopment of Ontario's tourism information website, our call centre and our brochure distribution service.

We're also introducing a tourism presence in the Ministry of Transportation's 23 new, high-traffic highway service centres.

We will continue to operate our travel information call centre so that people may dial a toll-free number and speak directly with a travel counsellor.

This transformation will result in savings of \$300,000 this fiscal year and \$1.5 million annually thereafter.

We're committed to ensuring Ontario's tourism competitiveness by making sound investments.

The Pigeon River OTIC continues to serve an important American market and is located at the border on a main highway for travellers from Duluth, Minnesota.

Although the OTIC in Kenora has closed, the Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre opened in the summer of 2011. Located in Norman Park, the centre is Kenora's primary destination for visitor information services. This newly operated facility provides a unique interactive experience for discovering Kenora and the Lake of the Woods region. The Ontario government was extremely pleased to support this project.

We continue to invest in northern tourism initiatives to build a stronger, more competitive tourist industry. Our support includes \$68 million since 2003 to support tourism initiatives in the north, including Kenora, Rainy River and Fort Frances; over \$6 million since 2007 to

support 130 events in northern Ontario through Celebrate Ontario; \$5 million each year from the OTMPC for the northern Ontario marketing budget since 2003; and \$5 million annually to the new Northern Regional Tourism Organization 13 since 2010.

These investments are seeing results. In 2001, the average hotel occupancy rate in northwestern Ontario was up compared to the previous year.

We're committed to ensuring Ontario's tourism competitiveness by making sound investments. We are

meeting the expectations of travellers by focusing our efforts on enhanced Internet-based services.

We will continue to work with our partners in northern Ontario to build a stronger, more competitive industry for tourism now and into the future.

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

The House adjourned at 1809.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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

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Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre de Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
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Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
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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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Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
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McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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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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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
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Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
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Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
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Shafiq Qaadri
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Toby Barrett, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
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Ted Chudleigh, Dipika Damerla
Cheri DiNovo, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Ernie Hardeman, Tracy MacCharles
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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