



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)**

Tuesday 15 May 2012

Mardi 15 mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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

Tuesday 15 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 15 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 14, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I speak today on the government's Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts. This is the government's omnibus bill to implement their budget. The Liberals call their budget Strong Action for Ontario. This budget is anything but strong action. I would go so far as to suggest that this government does not know what restraint means.

In my mind, it couldn't get much worse: a \$15-billion deficit, a \$240-billion debt and an increase in spending of \$2 billion. This is a budget that proves the Liberals have not grasped the gravity of our province's financial situation. This budget does not reduce spending, it does not reduce our deficit, it does not reduce our debt, and this budget has no job creation plan. This budget continues with total disregard for our economic realities.

The proof of this came from the world markets two weeks ago. Standard and Poor's downgraded Ontario's credit outlook from stable to negative. The next day, Moody's downgraded Ontario's credit rating from AA1 to AA2. Moody's actually warned this headstrong government in December that we were headed toward a downgrade. This means that the government of Ontario has lost the confidence of the moneylenders of the world.

The consequence of these downgrades could make it more expensive for the province to borrow money. An interest rate increase of 1% would equal a \$500-million increase in interest payments on the province's debt.

Debt servicing is already the third-largest item in the budget. Each year we pay over \$10 billion in interest payments to service our debt. Over 8% of this budget goes toward interest.

Over the last eight years, the Liberal government has taken Ontario from being Canada's economic engine to being a have-not province. Now we receive equalization payments from the federal government instead of providing them. It goes without saying that the Liberal campaign slogan "Forward. Together." isn't a good slogan for Ontario when we are at the edge of an economic cliff.

My comments today will highlight the problems with the budget: increased government spending and debt, a short-sighted energy policy, an expensive education policy, lack of a public sector wage freeze, reluctance to sell public assets and negative impacts on private sector job creators.

On spending and debt: This budget shows that the Liberals haven't found a cure for their spending addiction, as they will add \$23 billion to the province's debt. Next year, their own numbers show that the net debt is scheduled to increase to over \$260 billion.

This government is mortgaging our grandchildren's future, and they don't seem to care. The Auditor General and economist Don Drummond both have tried to sound the alarm bells to wake this government from its spending stupor. Both identified areas where savings can be made and tighter management of the public purse should be implemented.

In spite of these expert recommendations, the Liberals propose to increase spending in 14 of 24 ministries. These 14 ministries represent 82% of the budget. This budget takes us in exactly the wrong direction.

On energy: The Green Energy Act is a financial failure. Subsidizing the so-called green energy sector and paying small-scale producers up to 80 cents per kilowatt hour for their solar and wind electricity is bankrupting us. This will cost us many tens of billions of dollars over the next 20 years—this at a time when we have a surplus of electricity in Ontario that we have to sell to New York and Quebec for as little as two cents a kilowatt hour.

Our electricity costs are predicted to rise rapidly in the near future. Our homeowners can't afford it; our businesses can't afford it. A manufacturing company in North Bay paid a new fee on their hydro bill last year of \$1 million; it's called the global adjustment charge. Three years ago this charge didn't exist. It's predicted to increase six-fold in the next 10 years. This company has 250 employees and says it will have to leave Ontario if the global adjustment charge continues to increase.

The global adjustment charge was created to pay for the Green Energy Act. The Green Energy Act is driving businesses and jobs out of Ontario. The Liberal government could have purchased all the green hydroelectricity we needed from the province of Quebec for about five cents a kilowatt hour. Why didn't they do it?

On education: Full-day junior kindergarten is a great idea, but at this time we cannot afford it. As Don Drummond outlined in his report, this is a program that should not be expanded until our deficit crisis is under control. It is a \$1.5-billion cost that must be postponed.

On public sector wages: Public sector wages need to be frozen across the board until we're out of this debt and deficit quagmire. Our public sector workers will be asked to share the burden of paying our massive government debt. It's the right thing to do.

On crown corporations: Government should be doing what only government can do. All else should be left to the private sector. The Drummond report recommends that we should sell one of the casinos in Niagara Falls. I agree. We should also sell the LCBO and all other crown corporations. Government should be smaller, and we need the money.

On job creation: For the trades, we should change the required ratio of journeyman tradesmen to apprentices from the current ratio of 3 to 1 to a ratio of 1 to 1. This could create up to 200,000 new good-paying jobs for skilled tradespeople—young people.

We should have reduced the corporate income tax rate from 11.5% to 10%, as was promised by this government. This would have been an incentive to industry to invest in plants and jobs.

I would say we have a problem in this House. What we need is a select committee on Ornge to solve many of the problems on the overspending at Ornge. For that reason, I move to adjourn the debate.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 0910 to 0940.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask all members to take their seats.

Mr. MacLaren has moved adjournment of the debate. All those in favour, please rise to be counted.

All those opposed, please rise to be counted.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 21; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member, to continue.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Speaker, I asked for adjournment of the debate for the reason of the Ornge problem and that we have not had a select committee created yet, and we are working towards that.

We're disappointed that the government has not chosen to abide by the wishes of this House and create this committee. Unfortunately, we'll have to continue our tactics in the future.

I'll continue with my speech, if I may. I simply cannot support this budget. It does nothing to address runaway spending and ignores the problems. Ontarians were looking for a budget that was a positive alternative approach to the economic problems of this province, that offered real ideas for reducing deficits and debt, and an effective private sector job creation plan. Instead, the Liberals have put forth a budget that is being deemed a failure by respected international financial institutions. This budget is a continuation of the Liberal tax-and-spend ideology and will continue to punish prosperity and reward failure at the taxpayer's expense.

Liberal claims of a strong action budget are nothing but spin. This budget can never be called austere restraint or belt-tightening. This budget also sends a clear signal to job creators and credit agencies that Ontario is not focused on what needs to be done to put this province back on track.

For all of the reasons I have mentioned, I cannot support this budget and will be voting against it.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. I thank the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills for his comments. A lot of his comments were around privatization, and certainly that isn't the way that the NDP wants to see our province going. A lot of us have seen privatization and deregulation under the Harris regime. That kind of continued under the Liberal government with respect to hydro, for example, in this province.

I know that in my own riding of Welland, where I used to sit on the hydro board as a member when I was in local municipal politics, we saw our hydro rates, which were the lowest in the province and probably one of the best hydro services with the least number of brownouts in the province—we've seen now that they don't even post where they are in the pack of hydro rates in the province. That's because under deregulation they're actually having to float money every year to the municipality, which is the sole shareholder of the hydro company.

So we're inflating hydro rates, which is an essential for everyone who lives in this province. We're inflating those hydro rates so that we can actually give money to the shareholder, and then the shareholder uses it for whatever purposes they choose to, whether that's a project in their municipality or to offset taxes. People who don't even necessarily pay residential taxes are having their hydro rates artificially inflated to support the municipalities through that deregulation process.

So I'm not in support of privatizing anything else, particularly the LCBO, where we get huge revenues to the budget every year. Thank you.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Let me start with this, Speaker: I think there's a huge element of disappointment out there in the public vis-à-vis the actions of the Conservative Party. This whole bell-ringing business is a waste of taxpayers' money. I can tell you, when I'm in my community, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, people are asking me, "Why are you guys not getting some work done? Why is the budget not getting passed? Why is the anti-bullying legislation, which is so important to our kids and to our schools, not getting passed?"

They are very disappointed by the tactics the Conservative Party are taking in terms of wasting the time of this Legislature—which is extremely disappointing, because they're abdicating their responsibility, their leadership role in ensuring that as a province we continue to move forward and make great strides. Especially in these tough economic times, we need to all work together. That is the nature of a minority government, Speaker. What we're seeing from the opposition party is none of that, but just childish antics, which is extremely disappointing. I feel bad for children who come and visit this place, and the only thing they get to see is bells ringing. That's extremely disappointing on their behalf as well.

On the other hand, the other point I want to raise is that the opposition party is again all over the map when it comes to the Drummond report and its recommendations. On one hand they say that if they were in government they would implement every single recommendation, but when it comes to eliminating the subsidies for the horse racing industry, "Oh, well, we won't touch that." So there is this disagreement or discord in their position. I'd like to know from the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills: Where do they stand? The former member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills would never have that kind of contradiction in his opinions; he was a man of principle who stood for things he believed in. He served our community in Ottawa very well. I don't see that coming from the current member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills as to—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I withdraw, Speaker. But I think it's important that we know where the party stands.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Your time is over. Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to the member for Ottawa Centre that he was certainly trying to get a speed speech in there, but very little of it was accurate. One part was: He was talking about wasting taxpayers' money. What's going on in this House is irrelevant to that, but I'll tell you what is: When you start to build a gas plant in Mississauga and cancel it, and you start to build a gas plant in Oakville and you cancel it, and you go through all of those processes—we've already got things on the ground in Mississauga. We're talking hundreds of millions, quite possibly a couple of billion dollars—a billion dollars apiece—for these two gas plants.

You want to talk about wasting money and why we can't support this government and this budget? Look no

further than the seat-saver programs in Oakville and Mississauga. We could be talking a couple of billion dollars—a couple of billion dollars. And you wonder why this province is so deeply in debt and in the hole? We can't support this budget, Madam Speaker.

This was a time for a budget that brought some austerity to Ontario. What do we get from this government? We get increases in spending by almost \$2 billion, we get an increase in the debt, we get a less than 1% reduction in the deficit, and they claim they're going to have this out of the way by 2017-18. Impossible.

They want to talk about subsidies? What about the \$2.7 million that went to WindTronics in one of their ridiculous green schemes so the plant could close? They promised 200 jobs; the plant is closed. That's the kind of decisions you're getting. There are the subsidies.

You want to talk about subsidies, member from Ottawa Centre? The money they're throwing into this green scheme that is not working, is costing jobs in this province—and they're not going directly to the taxpayer; they're putting it on the hydro bill. Shameful. This government has got to go.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to address, in the budget, schedule 28 of Bill 55. It includes new legislation, the Government Services and Service Providers Act, which opens the door to privatization of ServiceOntario. The member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills was all over that with regard to selling off the LCBO and other government agencies that provide services. What that's going to do, Speaker, is that's going to open the door to privatization. This specific act will open up the door to privatization of ServiceOntario and many other services provided by the Ministry of Government Services.

0950

The new legislation allows the government to enter into service agreements with any person, entity or non-share capital corporation for the provision of government services. The legislation also allows one or more corporations or partnerships to be established in order to provide government services. This particular area in the budget is reminiscent of Ornge. When we start dismantling government services and allowing these private sectors to come in, have an umbrella of what they mentioned here, a person or entity for non-sharing corporations, and then that corporation or person or entity can then have other companies deliver the service, that is a real concern.

Is the public's interest going to be served? In this particular act, it talks about the regulations that can be imposed on these companies, but in the act they talk about "may": The government may set up a structure—may. That's not right. We have to have a "will" and a "shall" if we're going to make any changes to any act and not just leave it open to allow the companies to do as they will—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Mississippi Mills has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to thank my colleagues for their comments. The member from Welland and the

member from London–Fanshawe were both concerned about privatization of crown corporations, and I think we just disagree. As Conservatives, we should not be in the business of business; that is the business of the private sector, always, and always should be.

Government is inefficient. The trouble with government is, we have a tendency to do it very badly and very inefficiently. You look at eHealth, Ornge, we have a Presto scandal—it's going to be our next opportunity to have some excitement with the party across the hall—the Green Energy Act: These are all huge, wasteful things dealing with hundreds of millions of dollars of waste.

As far as inefficiencies, the Ottawa Centre member is concerned that we're ringing bells. That's because of what they're doing, which is nothing. They're not addressing the Ornge problem, not creating the select committee that they promised they would.

I would go on and make a few comments here. The government has failed the people of Ontario with this big-spending budget that doesn't reduce deficit or debt and is increasing spending. It has ignored the recommendations of the Auditor General and then the Drummond report.

What they should have done was cancel the Green Energy Act, cancel the full-day junior kindergarten program and cancel the Far North Act. They should have implemented public service wage freezes. They should have sold all crown corporations, again. They should have reduced the corporate income tax rate, as was promised, to 10% from 11.5%. They should have changed the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio for trades to 1 to 1 from 3 to 1. That would have created jobs, and there is no job creation program from the far side of the House. They didn't do it, and we're headed the way of the Greeks and the French. We're heading for a brick wall financially.

It is time to take this government, along with the race horses that they made obsolete, to the glue factory, where we can finally get some good out of them.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, my colleagues have brought forward the many great ideas that Ontarians have—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Finished, fellows? Thanks. My colleagues have brought forward the many great ideas that Ontarians have told us need to be part of any budget measures this province embarks upon. We've tried to work with this minority government to bring the best to the most, but we continually run against a big brick wall with the Liberals. It's a wall that doesn't seem to entertain even the smallest need of many Ontarians.

When we raise questions about the budget, the responses don't even address the issues raised, let alone give the full information that Ontarians demand.

Speaker, this minority government displays an ever-widening gap between its rhetoric and reality. The slots-at-racetracks fiasco is an extreme example of how out of touch this group across the floor is with Ontario's history and reality.

The answers given by the finance minister to questions about the sneak attack on a significant money-making agreement with the horse racing industry are quite telling. First, the minister would say that the government was no longer going to subsidize the horse racing industry, which only made us shake our heads in disbelief. Then, when he made the jaw-dropping assertion that he wouldn't take money away from health care and education to give to the horse racing industry, we just couldn't believe that he was actually spewing this stuff. When we brought forward the facts—that is, that there was no additional revenue for health care, education or any other provincial program before the slots-at-tracks agreement was made—he continued his odd rhetoric.

Then we reminded him that it was only because the horse racing industry was willing to accept slots at tracks, and communities with horse racing were the only ones willing to accept the additional gambling activity, that this additional revenue was even available. And he continued his odd rhetoric. Again, the facts appeared to have escaped his briefing notes, his memory and certainly his rhetoric. This behaviour has left many Ontarians quite concerned about the direction of this minority government and the future of this once financially sound and proud province.

While all of this rewritten slots-at-racetracks history was being recorded in this House, we had the increasingly scandalous Ornge fiasco rearing its ugly head. We have a minister who does not appear to want to take responsibility for a financial and public safety nightmare, a creation of her own government. Again, the stories that we've been expected to swallow, like "I wasn't acting as minister when this mess began to become public, because I was in an election campaign"—really? How stupid does this government think Ontarians are?

Well, I think I can tell you. The provision in Bill 55 dealing with ServiceOntario showed a government willing to re-create Ornge, but on 100 times the scale, and they expect all of us to sit back and let them go. But let's look at the bill. Schedule 28 sets out a legal framework for privatization of ServiceOntario. Schedule 28 opens up the possibility for a nightmare scenario, a scenario that might be described as Ornge times 100—that is, Ornge on steroids.

First, it enables the creation of a for-profit holding company under which would be a network of for-profit or non-profit subsidiaries. Then it allows the private sector to leverage the traffic created by offering a public service—for example, renewing your health care card or driver's licence—into private profit by trying to get you to buy additional non-government-issued products provided by a subsidiary of the new for-profit entity. So perhaps buying an additional bobblehead for your car deck isn't that bad after all. The product you initially went to this place to purchase is a government-issued product, and it is now being delivered through other than a public service. In fact, the legislation forbids that it be delivered as a public service, a service for which your taxes are already paying at a non-profit level. So already you're into the loss of already-paid-for public services.

And, Speaker, it gets worse. The legislation enables newly created companies to provide services not only on behalf of the Ontario government but on behalf of the federal government, municipalities, universities, colleges, schools, public hospitals and “such other persons or entities as may be specified by regulation”—in other words, persons such as private corporations. So all of your personal, private information is now in the hands of private corporations. Isn't that wonderful?

It's bad enough when banks have our personal information, but now the banks are also—insurance companies as well; they have that information too. Now, think of all the personal information the government has about you, from birth to death and every aspect of your life in between, and think of that being delivered by a private corporation. What's their motive? Only to make a profit, quite literally at your expense, both financially and with your privacy in jeopardy. Quite a chilling scenario, folks.

Okay, so we think that our government will set standards to protect our privacy and the costs for accessing our government-held information, but the legislation is very weak on this—as has been proven in the last five years I've been here—simply saying that the minister may—may—establish standards for the provision of Ontario government services under this act. This was a huge, huge problem with Ornge. The Auditor General was critical of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for not setting well-defined performance measures, and here's this minority government repeating such a fatal error 100 times worse. It's a nightmare in the waiting.

1000

It boggles my mind, as the Ornge mess continues to unfold with new, daily revelations, that this group across the floor hasn't pulled all schedule 28 provisions and sat down with the opposition parties to work out a system to make restructuring of ServiceOntario a safe, long-term, workable organization. But what we do get? Fantasy about the financial impact of this selloff. ServiceOntario already brings in billions of dollars each year. What odd thinking makes this minority government think that selling it off to a private entity and having to provide profits for that entity is going to bring a better revenue stream? I think not. I think the word “monopoly” comes into mind here.

Let's not forget that ServiceOntario must provide accessible service to all corners of this province. As a government, it is our responsibility to ensure that Ontarians, even in remote areas, can get full service without having to make a 100-kilometre drive to find a government office—or a private office. Will a privatized entity be required to do this? I think not. Will you be paying double, the private profit as well as the cost of making the service available, plus your travel? I think so.

Based on the language of Bill 55, the minister may establish standards, but it doesn't require it: “may,” “shall”—not sure. There is no definition here, so I'll leave it to your thoughts, folks, on how this is going to play out.

Yesterday, OPSEU President Thomas sent a letter to the Premier—and I want to be sure that all Ontarians

have the opportunity to read this letter when they check Hansard. I don't know if I've got enough time to get it in, but I'm going to try. This is from Smokey:

“Dear Premier:

“According to the budget, your government's stated reason for privatizing ServiceOntario is because you need \$100 million from the private sector to improve online services.

“You are apparently considering investing more than twice that amount in the auto sector.

“I do not for a minute begrudge a \$240-million investment in the private sector. Ontario needs a progressive economy with an industrial strategy that provides winners. Ontarians also need quality public services. The public sector is the foundation of every modern economy.

“ServiceOntario is a huge money-maker for this province. The government operation annually earns \$2.7 billion in revenues on only \$270 million in operating costs. That's a 10-to-1 return on investment.” Show me a bank where you get that. “These revenues fund public services that Ontarians rely on.

“Why would your government give up an annual revenue of \$2.7 billion in order to obtain \$100 million?” Sounds like the horse racing industry is coming back here. “This must count as one of the most short-sighted and potentially dangerous decisions a government has ever made.

“Your government's budget implementation bill includes legislation that will enable the privatization of ServiceOntario.

“The Government Services and Service Providers Act, 2012, allows for a corporate structure that sounds like the worst excesses of Ornge.

“The act allows a holding company to be set up with a network of subsidiary companies, all operating in complete secrecy, outside the oversight of the Auditor General, the Ombudsman and the Legislature.

“ServiceOntario operations—its public counters, call centres and online services—could be sold off piece by piece to the highest bidder.

“If there is a breach in the security of Ontarians' personal information—and there are annually 48 million transactions done through ServiceOntario—no one will ever know.

“My union”—his union—“calls on your government to immediately withdraw this draft piece of legislation from your budget bill.

“I await your response.

“Sincerely,

“Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President.”

Speaker, this is a nightmare in the making. I'm going to sit back and watch it unfold, and this government is going to wear it.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: It's a pleasure to be standing here to speak about our budget. I do hear my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, but I do want to challenge his statement this morning about the budget.

The single most important step our government is taking is to make sure our economy will continue to grow and to balance our budget by 2017. As such, we are doing everything we can to create jobs. That's our first and foremost priority.

In 2011, more than 121,000 jobs were created in Ontario, virtually all of them full-time. Our government has established—and last Friday, Minister Duguid talked about the jobs and prosperity council, with a new chair of the council, which will advise the government on a plan to boost Ontario productivity, at the same time creating jobs.

As you know, Madam Speaker, our government has taken an initiative on the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to ensure prosperity and job creation, and to date, over 4,400 projects have been levied in that particular fund. As well, the eastern Ontario development fund—again, over 100 businesses and regional projects have been developed, leveraging about \$488 million in additional investment. Now, in this new budget we are proposing a new southwestern Ontario development fund, again hopefully to attract new businesses investing in that area and creating new jobs.

At the end of the day, in order for our government and our province to move forward, we must have prosperity through jobs. We, as a government, take full responsibility but, more importantly, working in partnership is working to bring jobs and investment to Ontario. That's what it's all about. I fully support this government and our initiative going forward, and job creation is the key, fundamental piece for prosperity for Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on the budget. Of course, this debate shows the differences between the approaches of the three parties in this House.

I want to touch again on the absolute disaster that this government has created with their Green Energy Act and their feed-in tariff program. I was talking earlier about the subsidy that was given to WindTronics in Windsor, and then, of course, WindTronics flew the coop. Silicon is gone as well from Windsor. But when you talk about subsidies, people generally expect them to be done as a direct payment from the government and it is directly on the tax base so then, if it fails or succeeds, the government is at least held accountable.

In the case of WindTronics, that's the case. They gave them \$2.7 million, and they failed. The sad part of it is that on top of that \$2.7 million was the massive subsidy that the government gives to the producers of wind power in this province—far in excess of the market price of power which, since January, has been running under two cents a kilowatt hour in this province—under two cents a kilowatt hour average wholesale price in this province. But the government is not even honest enough to put it on the tax base. No, what do they do? They directly put the burden onto the hydro bills of this province so they're

not even accountable for that scandalous, excessive, obscene subsidy that they're giving to the producers of this power in this province. That is what is making it so hard for people to live in this province, and this budget gives them no help whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you Speaker. I just want to touch on a few of the points that my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek brought up, in particular to the ServiceOntario services in schedule 28.

In northern Ontario, a lot of the business owners are basically just surviving on the bare minimum of their jobs. They're having a hard time particularly in the forestry sector, and particularly those who are operating trucks, who are transporting the wood from the forest to their mills.

Within this bill that the government has proposed, they're actually going to be increasing the licensing fees for those individuals, who are having a hard time just making ends meet right now. This is going to be the last nail in their coffin. They're going to have a very hard time meeting their bills, meeting their daily expenses and costs, and they're going to be faced with some very, very difficult decisions going forward.

Those services and those licensing bureaus where they go and obtain those services are also going to be challenged, because they're losing a lot of the services and the agreement factors that were there with this government, which are no longer going to be presented or available to them. They're going to be challenged in regard to making those services available for a multitude of communities that do not have these services readily available to them. They will now have to go the extra mile, 50 to 100 kilometres, in order to get a health card, in order to get a renewal done, in order to get some information, in order to get the services they need. It is very difficult getting these services, first and foremost, in northern Ontario, and I would hope that this government is listening and will do what they can do in order to not say "may establish standards" but "will establish"—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I really appreciate the debate that's taking place in the House right now. This budget is an important document, Speaker, which is addressing and speaking to a very serious time in our economy. We are coming out of the great recession of 2008-09, and we are obviously in a place, in terms of the recovery that is taking place, where we have a strong plan moving forward to ensure that we balance the books, that we eliminate the deficit in the next five years, by 2017-18, but also at the same time ensure that very important services like health care, education and community and social services are there for all Ontarians across this great province.

I've spoken about the fact that I am, on a weekly basis, out in my community knocking on doors, canvassing on a regular basis. Just last Saturday morning, I was out in the Centretown community speaking to my con-

stituents door to door. I have to tell you, there are three conversations that come out to me, very interesting, enlightened conversations about the state of the economy, how we're creating jobs. Those are the issues that are front and centre for my constituents.

With another constituent, we talked about health care, particularly elder care, how we're going to look after our seniors. Hospitals are not really the place for our seniors to be getting care. We need to ensure that we provide care for our seniors within the community, closer to their homes, so they can continue to live as long as possible at home. Those are the kinds of things that my constituents in Ottawa Centre are interested in, and these are the kinds of ideas that we are pushing through this particular budget—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I was hoping that I'd get a response to what I said, but it seemed to have gone off in another area. Usually, when a person says his spiel, people refer to what he said, but they seem to get their own political agenda in there. It's unfortunate. Anyway, it's neither here nor there. I got the points across that I wanted to, Speaker.

This is just starting to unfold. There are going to be many, many more surprises coming across to that side of the floor about ServiceOntario. This is just the start of an avalanche. I don't really think they grasp it or understand what's going to happen here. I certainly wouldn't want to be sitting over there when it does unfold.

I have tried till I'm red in the face, trying to share my ideas, share my concerns, share my amendments over the last five years, and all I got was five people sitting there doing things other than listening. But then, surprisingly, Speaker, some of our ideas show up four months later, and it becomes a government bill. Hey, if it works, it's good. If it goes through, I'm happy. But at least have the courtesy to say where you got the idea from. It didn't just drop out of the sky; the tooth fairy didn't leave it under your pillow. It came from the opposition, but they never, ever acknowledge that. That's unfortunate, because I think a good government should at least give credit where credit is due, instead of running all the way down the road waving the flag like they did it all. It really is frustrating.

Folks, this is just the start of a lot of stuff that's going to unfold in the next few weeks, and I wouldn't want to be in your seat.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I wanted to introduce my EA, who's up from my riding. Marilyn McMahon is here to get some training and to enjoy the House. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Hon. Michael Chan: Today in the Speaker's gallery are delegation members from Hubei province of the People's Republic of China: Vice-Governor Zhao Bin, Director General Wang Zhongfa, Divisional Director Chen Jianhua, Vice-Division Director Ye Leping, and Vice-Section Chief Qin Wenlu. To our guests, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce four prominent ladies in the east gallery representing the Ajax Bomb Girls of World War II. I'll introduce the four, and I would ask them to stand as I call their names, and remain standing: the committee chair, regional councillor Colleen Jordan; the treasurer and long-time Ajax councillor Pat Brown; fundraiser and past regional councillor Pat Clark; and a very special lady, the honorary patron and an original Bomb Girl, Louise Johnson.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to introduce some members of the Canadian Snowbird Association who have joined us here in the assembly today: Lois Slack, Joan Brissenden, Joan Foster, Denise Leroux, Patricia Quigley, Judy Steeves, Yasmin Thorpe, Anne Weylie, Gord Hopcraft and Bill Huestis. We welcome them to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm delighted to introduce Tea Rasic of Lisgar, who is working with us in her third summer in the Mississauga–Streetsville constituency office. Tea attends McGill University in Montreal during the winter. Welcome.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce a good friend of myself and the caucus, Kelly Harris. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to introduce my Girls Government group in the Speaker's gallery. They're visiting Queen's Park today to watch question period and give a press conference this afternoon. There are 17 girls, and their teachers are from two schools in my riding: St. Eugene Catholic elementary and Dixon Grove Junior Middle School. I hope the girls enjoy question period today.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'd like to welcome Armand, Allan, Robert, Thomas, Genevieve and Daniel Conant, and Linda Sully, who are here in the Legislature today to celebrate the birthday of the Honourable Roger Gordon Conant, who turns 90 next week. Congratulations and happy birthday.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to introduce again Fouzia Baki, who is our page Shaumik Baki's mother, who is visiting us yet again today. I don't see her here quite yet, but I'm sure she'll be joining us shortly.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's intern season again, and we get those bright, energetic young folks. I'd like to introduce our two interns, Fareshta Raoufi and Tahiya Bakht, in the gallery today.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want us to welcome two interns who have come to work in our office, who are here in the members' gallery: Sarah Crowley and Nicholas Sherwin. Welcome, and good to have you here at Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I'd like to welcome the president of USW Local 1005, Rolf Gerstenberger, along with Jake Lombardo, Les Sherman, Steve Kajganic, Mauro Spaziani, Andrew Shand and Hans Nita, along with several of our injured workers' committees.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, in 1991 you said the following: "I submit I am not going out on much of a limb when I say there is a direct correlation between Hydro's rates and our rate of unemployment in Ontario. As the rates go up, so will the rate of unemployment." I agree with what the Premier said in 1991, but the Premier seems to be embarking in a different direction.

So, Premier, do you still stand by that accurate statement from years ago or have you found some way of suspending the basic law of economics when it comes to your expensive hydro policy in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always good to know what happened 21 years ago, Speaker; 21 years ago.

I would say to my honourable colleague that it's important to understand what we have done working together with the people of Ontario since 2003. Having inherited an electricity system that was in a terrible state of disrepair and neglect—

Interjections: A shambles.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A shambles is not putting it too strongly—we've undertaken to rehabilitate, restore, renew 80% of it over the course of the next 20 years. So we've been making massive investments in new generation and in new transmission. At the same time, we're investing in an exciting, new clean energy industry, which is creating thousands and thousands of new jobs.

So we now find ourselves at a point in time where we have clean, reliable electricity, Speaker, which is so important to the business community in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem, Premier, is that you're trying to turn upside down the basic law of economics. You somehow believe that higher energy rates somehow create jobs, when the opposite is the case. If anything's in shambles, Premier, it's the state of our economy: 300,000 lost manufacturing jobs across our province; in April, Ontario lost 8,000 jobs while the rest of Canada added 60,000; and Ontario's manufacturing sector lost a further 13,000 jobs in April. Premier, the point here is, these are good jobs. They had been good jobs. They were a ticket to the middle class. They helped to make Ontario's middle class strong and healthy. You are undermining the middle class with your expensive hydro policies.

I'll ask you: Will you admit now that higher hydro rates are actually driving jobs out of the economy, and it's time for a change of course in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, presumably at some point in time the leader of the official opposition is going to talk about his proposal. Why don't I take advantage of this opportunity to clarify his position in this regard? He wants to return to a failed experiment that hit Ontarians, business and homeowners alike, about 10 years ago; it resulted in a dramatic 30% increase in our hydro rates within a period of seven months, and it saddled us with a \$1-billion debt that we continue to pay to this very day.

I say to my honourable colleague: We've been there, we've done that; we have no intention whatsoever of re-turning back.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, if you want to talk about failed experiments, we need to look no farther than 10 feet there across the floor—300,000 lost manufacturing jobs; an erosion of our competitive position; and we're paying \$1.8 billion to Quebec and New York to take our power because we've signed contracts that make us take wind and solar at more than 10 times the price of power when we don't need it. You talked about a failed experiment, and the Premier wants to double down.

It's not just the PC caucus, Speaker: the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers; the Power Workers' Union; the former CEO of the OPA, Jan Carr; the Auditor General; economist Don Drummond—more and more are saying we need to reverse course and, instead, go down paths to prosperity in our province; a bold, new set of ideas to make energy policy about the economy to attract jobs in our province. Your path has failed. Try something new.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear here and now: We don't support selling off Niagara Falls. We think that's an important public asset that should be kept in public hands.

My honourable colleague references Don Drummond in passing. I would refer to some of the statements that he made in his recent report that he prepared for us. He specifically said, "We caution that any action must not be driven by ideology." My honourable colleague wants to return to a failed experiment. It drove up our electricity costs by 30% within a period of seven months.

1040

Don Drummond goes on to say, "Current circumstances do not appear to offer a convincing value proposition for" selling off our assets.

I think it's really important to be mindful not only of history and what that has taught us, but also of present-day expert advice from people like Don Drummond, who are cautioning against this very kind of proposal.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Premier, your green energy policy is nothing short of ideology that has been proven to be a failure everywhere it has been tried. You cling to it like some sort of religious zealot when the

economic evidence is to the contrary. It is not a new idea; it is an old, outdated, 1990s-style industrial policy that began in Germany, and the countries that began it have abandoned it because they found out, as the Auditor General points out, that for every short-term job you create, you lose three or four in the broader economy.

You talk about rigid ideology, sir; it's time to move off your ideological path. Get back to some common sense and good economic policy in our province, driven as energy policy, as economic policy to attract jobs. That's the path to prosperity to make Ontario strong again and to make Ontario the leader when it comes to job creation, not the ideological—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, to make it perfectly clear, we oppose selling off Niagara Falls, and we oppose returning to burning dirty coal, which compromises our health and, I would also argue, compromises our competitiveness.

Listen to some of the investments that we've made and how far we have come since 2003. We have built 9,000 megawatts of new generation. We have built 5,000 kilometres of transmission; that would take us from here to the Yukon. We've invested in some 20,000 new clean energy jobs, and we're on track to create some 50,000 by 2014. That is at risk, in keeping with the proposal put forward by my honourable colleague.

I believe Ontarians want us to strike the right balance. They want clean air. They want to move off coal. They want us to invest in their system to make sure it's affordable, clean, safe and reliable. That's the balance we're striking.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, people want jobs in Ontario. They want to see an Ontario that grows again.

For 100 years, Ontario had energy rates that were lower than our competing states and provinces—for a century—until you brought in your very ideological Green Energy Act. Now we're heading for the second-highest energy rates in all of North America and the highest rates on industry.

It is time to take a different path, to move away from your expensive subsidies and government mingling into the sector, Premier. We want to see investment by the private sector into our power system to see it grow. We want to see nuclear power as the basis of our supply, not wind and solar at 10 times the price of power. And where it makes sense to import power, do so, so businesses can actually hire again and expand and families can pay the bills—and to end your expensive gimmicks like your big subsidies for electric cars, to get back to a policy that says that energy is fundamentally economic policy to create jobs, a different path, a path to prosperity.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I take issue with pretty well everything my honourable colleague has said in that statement.

I think it's important that we cut to the chase on this, Speaker. What my honourable colleague is driven by is not so much the success of our approach, or lack thereof

in his eyes; what he's really bound by is an outdated ideology. He wants to sell off public assets. Mr. Drummond made it perfectly clear that there is no case to do that. He wants to proceed on the basis of ideology to sell off public assets like Niagara Falls, and he wants to return to the burning of coal. We reject that approach. We think it's outdated. It's not in keeping with the public interest. It's not in keeping with doing what we need to do to ensure we have a strong, competitive economy with businesses flourishing, as they are at present.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here are the facts, Premier. The average family's hydro bill has gone up 100%. You say yourself it'll go up another 50%, and I suspect you are actually lowballing that figure. Under your very ideological approach to energy, we now have the highest rates for manufacturing and industry, and that has cost us 300,000 jobs.

We have the preposterous situation of trying to power a 21st-century economy on when the sun shines and when the wind blows, and then we have to pay Quebec and New York almost \$2 billion to take our power.

Sir, your energy policy has been a failure. It is a train wreck of an economic policy. It's costing us jobs. I know it's hard for you to shake your ideological commitments, but it's costing us jobs and it's time to turn our province around. The PCs have put bold, new ideas on the table to power the economy, to create jobs and make Ontario a leader in job creation in Canada. That's the path for our province, sir, and I ask you to reverse course and get back to—

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again I find it interesting that my honourable colleague has had the opportunity to put six questions to me and he references his plan as "bold new ideas." Why doesn't he just step forward and say, "We want to sell off public assets. We want to do what we did in the past. It led to a 30% increase in our electricity rates over the course of seven months. We want to return to the burning of coal, because that's less expensive than proceeding with cleaner sources of electricity"? Why doesn't he just come upfront with that? He doesn't, Speaker, because Ontarians rejected that in the past and they'll reject it again today.

Interjections.

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

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. As the Premier knows, these are difficult times for Ontario families. The cost of everyday life keeps going up, while people haven't had a real increase in

wages in years. One of the big challenges for households is trying to balance their books, and one of the biggest issues that they have right now is the price volatility in goods.

Does the Premier agree that when gasoline prices spike by six cents a litre overnight, that makes it harder for people to plan their household budgeting?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, gasoline prices are a real issue for Ontario families and businesses alike. That's why I'd encourage my honourable colleague to take this matter up with the federal government, who has principal responsibility for these kinds of issues. If she's suggesting that we put in place price controls of the variety that they have in some other provinces around the country, history has demonstrated that overall, those jurisdictions, people, families and businesses end up paying more than they do in the province of Ontario. So I'd caution my honourable colleague when it comes to embracing that kind of approach and I would encourage her to contact the federal government with respect to gasoline prices.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Ontario is the only province in eastern Canada that does not have some sort of predictable pricing for gasoline. That's a fact. This afternoon, New Democrats are putting forward positive ideas. Let the Ontario Energy Board, which already has a role in regulating electricity and natural gas prices, create a weekly price ceiling for gasoline, so that drivers have a little bit more control over the price that they're paying at the pumps. Will the Premier be supporting our proposal to help Ontarians manage their household budgets?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let's just take a look at some objective information here. Canadian cities' gas price averages: Quebec City, \$1.42; Montreal, \$1.40; Halifax, \$1.40; Vancouver, \$1.39; Toronto, \$1.30; Kitchener-Waterloo, \$1.30; London, \$1.28. I can go on, Speaker, but I think it's very, very clear that there is no magic to be found in the approach that my honourable colleague would have us embrace. I think what we have in place is the best system. It's not a perfect system, but it's the best system among the choices available to Canadians today.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, by setting a weekly price, families would be able to plan their budgets. It's an idea that works in other provinces. It's an idea like the ones we've heard from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's an idea a lot like ones that we've heard from the Liberals in the past. It'll make life a bit more affordable for people who need help. Is the government ready to make life a little more affordable for people, or can we count on more of the same old inaction and indifference from the Liberal government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, it's been said that for every complex problem there is a solution that is neat

and tidy and completely wrong. I think this is a good example of such a solution.

1050

Speaker, if we look at what has happened across the country, and particularly if we compare what has happened here in Ontario with other parts of the country where they have regulated their gas prices, it turns out that, in the long run, Ontarians are further ahead. I'm talking about homeowners and businesses alike. This is not an easy issue—I understand that—for families and businesses alike to grapple with, but I would again encourage my honourable colleague to deal with those folks who have principal responsibility for gasoline pricing in the country, and of course, that's the federal government.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier, Speaker. In the past, the Premier has advocated the selling off of a portion of Hydro One and at one point he actually supported plans to sell it off entirely. Yesterday, the Minister of Energy called it a "failed" and "recycled" policy. Now, I know the Premier has had a variety of different views on this, so I just want some clarification on exactly where he stands today.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, they say that actions speak louder than words, so I recommend to my honourable colleague—she's criticizing us for something we didn't do. That's hard to take, I've got to tell you.

The fact of the matter is, we have proceeded in a way that demonstrates the high value that Ontarians attach to their public assets. We have continued to build on that foundation, building more transmission, building more generation, Speaker, and there are prices associated with that.

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my vociferous honourable colleague from the north: There are costs associated with investing in new generation and new transmission. I think it's important that we be honest about that. But this system was in a terrible state of disrepair. We've invested billions of dollars, and there's a cost associated with that. We're helping manage that with our 10% reduction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the government criticizes the failed Conservative hydro policies of the past, but they look a heck of a lot like the failing Liberal hydro policies of today. Families paying sky-high electricity bills want to know why they're on the hook for private power deals in Mississauga and Oakville, and they want to know why the government is pushing ahead with a scheme to privatize local utilities.

If the government knows these private power schemes drive up costs and make life more expensive, why do we get more of them every single year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The overwhelming majority of our power system is in public hands and it will

remain in public hands as long as we have anything to do with it.

We make no excuse for the investment in green energy to clean up the air, save health costs and build a strong economy here in the province of Ontario. We say to all, whether in public hands or not, that we are determined to find the most cost-effective way to deliver reliable, clean power to families and businesses. That's why we set up the panel to take a look at local publicly owned distribution companies to see if there's a more effective, more cost-effective way of doing that.

Surely the NDP would not stand in the way of a more cost-effective, publicly owned way to approach the delivery of power.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, we've been pretty clear on this over on this side of the House. When a family's hydro bill is nearly twice as high in Ontario as it is in Manitoba or Quebec, you're obviously doing something very, very wrong, and households are struggling with the growing cost of everyday life. They are paying the price of this government's failure.

We've put forward positive proposals to get out of this mess and asked the Premier to commit to a real review that would look at the role that private power is actually playing in driving up the costs. Is the Premier ready to act on this? Or are we going to see more of the same failed policies that keep people paying more and more and more?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I say, the overwhelming majority of our power system is in public hands; the overwhelming majority will stay in public hands.

We make no apology for the investment in green energy to clean up the air, save the health of Ontarians and build a very strong economy in the province of Ontario, and no excuse for saying to all companies that deliver that resource to the people, families and businesses in Ontario, "You have to do it at the most cost-effective way."

That's why we work with all of our major publicly owned agencies, including the local distribution companies, to say to them, "If there are ways this can be done more effectively, we're prepared to do it."

I hope the NDP won't stand in the way of delivering our public resource more cost-effectively to families and businesses in the province of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Good morning, Minister. It's becoming apparent to everyone that your green energy plan is failing. It's failing Ontario families as their hydro bills are out of control, thanks to outrageous wind and solar subsidies. It's failing Ontario businesses as rising global adjustment forces firms like Fabrene in North Bay to look long and hard about the decision to even stay in Ontario.

We've heard from ordinary citizens, we've consulted hundreds of stakeholders, and they're telling us that change is needed in the electricity sector to make Ontario competitive to create jobs.

Today, our party has issued Paths to Prosperity, which will restore an energy policy. Minister, as you have no ideas of your own, will you please take ours?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Unfortunately, we've seen your plan before. We've seen the plan to sell off publicly owned assets before. We've seen that you are desperate to take Niagara Falls and our other strong, publicly owned power assets and give them to the highest bidder. They'll never again be in the hands of the people of Ontario. We've seen what effect that has on hydro rates: a 30% increase in just a matter of months. We've seen that. The people of Ontario rejected that.

When will the party opposite actually come up with a forward-looking plan instead of just dredging things up from the past?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, our answer to the energy crisis is our 13 Paths to Prosperity. Your answer is to drive hydro bills through the roof, forcing seniors to choose between heat and food, forcing businesses to close or move. We say, enough is enough.

Without dramatic changes to the electricity system, hydro bills are going up by 46% by 2015, and that is from our very own Auditor General. Today, we put concrete solutions on the table to reduce this job-killing path that you've put us on. Will you do what we did? Will you listen to Ontarians and take the steps we've outlined in our Paths to Prosperity to keep hydro costs down and start creating real jobs again in Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Unfortunately, Speaker, their 13 steps are going to take us back to a failed policy that the people of Ontario have long since rejected. We do not want the party opposite to engage in a public auction of Niagara Falls and our other publicly owned assets.

We saw what that meant with the 407, where they got a one-year gain and an asset lost forever to Ontarians and billions of dollars lost from the pockets of Ontario families and businesses.

We saw what that did to electricity rates. We saw that when they broke up Ontario Hydro, they created the stranded debt that is still there, and we're still working to pay it down. Their failed experiment didn't work then; it won't work now.

It's time—surely, Speaker—that we move forward together.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. A simple question, Minister: If Bill 13 passes and a group of students wants to form a student group, and they want to call that group a gay-straight alliance, is there any possibility that they will be denied the right to name it that?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very happy to have an opportunity to talk about the Accepting Schools Act and how the Accepting Schools Act will make a difference in our province.

We used to have a debate in this province about whether, when students put up their hand and asked for support, when they asked to form a club, they would be allowed to form that single-issue club to talk about issues of importance to them in school, Speaker. That debate exists no longer. If this piece of legislation is passed, we will ensure—we will guarantee—that those supports will be in place.

1100

I've had a chance to say on many occasions that it's not for us from Queen's Park to tell every student what their club should be, and I would expect all of our boards to pay attention to the student voice and the value of students having a role in ensuring that those supports and those clubs are in place for those students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, occasionally evasion speaks volumes, and it does this morning. The minister does not say whether or not gay and straight students could form a club that they could call a gay-straight alliance.

Minister, you have not answered that question. You are evading that question. On one hand, you say that gay students need to be respected, that they need to have the validation that comes from legislation, and on the other hand you, in this Legislature, will not make it clear that they will have the right to name their clubs. Why will you not make that statement in this House?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: We have made it very clear in the legislation that student-led initiatives like gay-straight alliances need to be supported, be it by that name or any other name. It is many, many students in our province who want to have a voice, Speaker. They want to have support. We're focused on that support, and we have the support of many, many individuals across this province who have fought long and hard to ensure that issues regarding homophobia and sexual orientation will be front and centre in our schools so that our students, our LGBTQ students, our students who have two moms or two dads, can go to school every day and feel safe and feel respected, and they will have the supports in place.

These organizations have many names, but let's be very clear about one thing: The supports will be in place. The students put up their hands; if Bill 13 is passed, those supports will be in place for our students right across this province.

NURSES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As a public health nurse, I know how important it is to ensure that communities like my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt have access to more nurses. It wasn't that long ago, under a former government, that we saw nurses being fired. That trend has been reversed. However, there is still more work to

be done. There's a growing need for nurses to provide many different types of care in our schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes and at home.

To the minister: What is this government doing to provide more nurses to communities throughout Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, thank you to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt—a very strong member in this Legislature.

I am very proud to say that Ontario is making the right choice. We're directing precious health care dollars to front-line patient care and we're creating 900 new nursing positions this year. These new nurses will care for patients throughout the health care system: in home care, community care, primary care, in our hospitals, our long-term-care homes and our mental health care programs in our schools. The creation of more nursing programs to ensure the right care at the right time in the right place is part of our action plan for health care.

We now have more than 15,000 more nurses working in Ontario than when we took office in 2003—an increase of 33%.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: Our health care system faces many challenges. We need to move forward on house calls for Ontarians. Hospitals require more supports to shorten ER wait times. Our long-term-care homes need support for nurses who care for residents on a daily basis. More people are using telemedicine as a tool to access health care advice. And the demand for nurses to help children in our schools continues to increase.

To the minister: How will this investment in new nurses help Ontarians through the health care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Among the 900 new nursing positions, we've got 126 rapid-response nurses. They visit patients who have been discharged from hospital within 24 hours to make sure they're getting the right supports at home. We've got 200 new nurses to care for long-term-care residents with complex and challenging behaviours. We've got 191 new telemedicine nurses to support patients in remote areas while they receive care from specialists throughout video hookup. We have 144 new nurses working in schools to identify and support students with mental health or addiction issues.

So we are making the right choices to increase capacity in our communities with the precious new health care dollars that we have.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is for the Minister of Energy. We heard on Friday from StatsCan with the latest unemployment numbers. As a result of your Liberal government's policies, Ontario's unemployment is up to 7.8%. In April, the rest of the country gained 60,000 jobs while Ontario lost about 8,000 jobs. Coincidentally, electricity prices in this province have risen 100% and prices are projected to rise another 46% in the next five years.

Minister, do you agree with the Auditor General that the high cost of electricity here in Ontario is costing us jobs and hurting our economy?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know I'll give the supplementary to the Minister of Economic Development.

It's interesting that the member stands up and talks about jobs and has consistently voted against the south-west economic development fund, which in our part of the world is a very important job driver.

The fact of the matter is that, over the past couple of months, our full-time jobs are up. Since the depths of the recession, we are up many thousands of jobs—a very strong economic performance.

What we've done in energy is find a new source of employment for the future. We found green energy jobs, already more than 20,000 jobs in the province of Ontario on the way to 50,000 with billions of dollars of investment, all of which will be cancelled if the party opposite ever gets the opportunity.

It's time to support clean, reliable jobs for the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Minister of Energy: He is obviously completely out of touch with the realities that businesses in Ontario are facing.

Minister, the community of Wallaceburg has been hard hit by the recent recession. To make matters worse, on May 3, Sobey's in downtown Wallaceburg announced that they would be shutting their doors and laying off 70 employees. Company representatives have stated that, after an extensive and careful review of the operation, it was determined that the store is no longer a viable option, with a major factor being the skyrocketing increase in energy costs that are facing the store.

It is clear your callous energy policies have cost yet another 70 jobs in my riding. Minister, will you admit that the skyrocketing energy costs that your government has implemented are hurting Ontario's economy and costing us jobs?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We know what's going to happen if the PC policy is implemented, because we saw this before. There were shortages of power in 2002-03. There were brownouts. There were electricity generators on street corners, and the prices for families and businesses skyrocketed 30% in a matter of months. Businesses could not rely on the power when they had the chance. There was no certainty of supply and businesses were on the edge.

We've renewed the system. We have brought on the generation necessary. We're making sure that our public assets stay in public hands, and we're finding the jobs for the future in a clean, green economy at home right here in Ontario to provide opportunities for families and businesses throughout this province.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Budget Bill 55 establishes a legal framework for

the privatization of ServiceOntario, a framework that would allow an unaccountable, privatized, private-public system that could lead to private interests profiting from public services.

I want to remind you that it was a complete lack of transparency and accountability that led to the Ornge fiasco. Why is this government risking going down the same path with ServiceOntario as it did with Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite referenced an important budget initiative, which his party supported at budget motion time, Mr. Speaker. They didn't vote, I think is what happened.

Interjection: They didn't object.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They didn't object.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, this initiative began in the 2011 budget. We outlined options for the better provision of services to Ontarians. We've looked at those, examined them throughout the course of the last year, and in this year's budget we brought forward a proposal that will allow us to better manage the costs associated with the provision of important public services. We believe it's the right direction for the province to go in as we get back to balance so that we can continue to make the investments in education and health care that all Ontarians value.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The new piece of legislation contains no—I repeat, no—accountability measures and allows a labyrinth of for-profit corporations to benefit from the fact that almost all Ontarians must use ServiceOntario at one time or another. Despite the admission from this government that letting Ornge go down this path was a big mistake, this legislation replicates many of the mistakes made there. Can this minister explain why he is pushing ahead with legislation that replicates many of the failures of Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, that's not the case. I am looking forward to the passage of Bill 50, which will give greater certainty to Ontarians about the accountability of crown agencies in all of their various forms. So I'm pleased that in fact the Auditor General and others will continue to have scrutiny, as will the Legislature, as will public accounts, over this operation and other operations, as they do now.

We believe, frankly, that the passage of Bill 50 will aid this Legislature not just with Ornge but with the accountability of a broader range of arrangements between the government and the private delivery of different services and assets. Accordingly, we believe this is the right policy. It will allow us to get back to balance as we continue to make important investments in health and education.

BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation. Recent reports have iden-

tified that Canada and Ontario suffer from a productivity gap. It's very important to note that this is not a reflection of Ontario's hard-working labour force but a gap in how we capitalize and maximize the value and productivity of our limited investment dollars.

Can the minister assure this House and my constituents of Pickering–Scarborough East that the government has a plan to ensure we maximize the productivity of our limited investment dollars?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We sure do, and I want to thank the member for the question. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about the Jobs and Prosperity Council. The Jobs and Prosperity Council will advise the Ontario government on how best to improve our competitiveness and productivity. It will be an effective mechanism to seek cutting-edge advice and generate new ideas and approaches to improve productivity and competitiveness in Ontario. It will consider ways we can best other jurisdictions in the global workforce skill shortage, and it will consider how we can get the maximum results from our business support investments.

It will report to the Premier, and it will be headed by a well-respected champion of the Ontario economy, Gord Nixon. I'm confident that, with Gord Nixon's leadership, the Jobs and Prosperity Council will generate ideas and advice that will help us take Ontario's already strong economy to the next level.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I thank the minister for the answer. As a former executive in the private sector, I am very glad to see that we're moving forward on the budget promise to create the Jobs and Prosperity Council.

I'm also very happy that we're moving forward with Mr. Drummond's recommendation to look at ways to consolidate the business support programs we deliver and to ensure we're getting the best value for the tax dollars we're investing. Can the minister please explain how Mr. Gord Nixon, from RBC, is qualified to lead the new Jobs and Prosperity Council and perhaps shed some light on the makeup of the rest of the council, ensuring that it reflects the interests of all Ontarians?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Many of you will know that Gord Nixon is the CEO of Royal Bank of Canada and the chairman of MaRS. But he's more than that. He's an Order of Canada and an Order of Ontario recipient. He once was chair of the Greater Toronto United Way campaign. He's a recipient of Canada's Outstanding CEO of the Year award and the business leader of the year award. He has received all kinds of CEO recognition globally as one of the best CEOs recognized around the world. He co-chairs the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. I could go on, but let me say this: We're absolutely delighted that Mr. Nixon accepted Premier McGuinty's invitation to head up the Jobs and Prosperity Council.

As for the other members of the council, they'll be made up of a diverse and distinguished mix of Ontarians who will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to this initiative.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. At 2:30 this past Wednesday afternoon, a call was placed to Ornge from the St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay, requesting an emergency air ambulance transfer to the Queensway Carleton Hospital. One hour later, Ornge dispatch advised that the air ambulance was not available because it was undergoing maintenance. The hospital made arrangements to transfer the patient by local land ambulance, but Ornge insisted that the patient was now theirs and must be transferred by Ornge land ambulance—more confusion, more delay. The land ambulance arrived and eventually so did the helicopter. Now in kidney failure, the patient was flown to the Ottawa general hospital, where she died on Friday morning.

Did Ornge make the minister aware of this tragic incident? If so, can she tell us why, yet once again, Ornge was unable to respond?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me first express my condolences to the family.

I can tell you that we take patient safety extremely seriously. The new leadership at Ornge, the new board, are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There were people on this side asking for shushing and quiet when the question was being posed. I'm asking for shushing and quiet when it's being answered.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Patient safety is the highest priority of the new leadership at Ornge, and we do take every incident very seriously. Every incident is investigated, Speaker, and I can assure the member opposite that this incident will be investigated, as well. There is a process that the ministry goes through, that Ornge goes through and, if he so chooses, the coroner goes through to determine if there are any lessons that can be learned, and if so, we must implement them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Apparently the minister was not aware, and apparently Ornge isn't keeping her abreast of these incidents.

The inability to respond by Ornge is emerging as a systemic issue. Last week, the new Ornge CEO was quoted as saying that it's unrealistic to expect 24-hour emergency service, that it's just too expensive.

Is that the best that we can expect from the minister's new management team, from her new board of directors, from the new performance agreement and from the new legislation that the minister has tabled here? If patient safety cannot be her priority and if she cannot have Ornge reporting these incidents to her, then quite frankly we have a serious problem here.

I ask the minister to tell us again: Was she aware of this, and what—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I would caution the member opposite from jumping to any conclusions about any particular incidents. There are people who are highly qualified to do the research, to get the facts, to make determinations.

I can assure you that the people at Ornge, the front-line staff who every day come to work to save lives, are the most loyal, responsible and highly skilled individuals. We in Ontario should be enormously grateful for the people at Ornge.

The drive-by smears from the member opposite, I think, are not helpful. I would urge the member opposite, if he really wants to be part of the solution, to support Bill 50 and stop blocking passage of Bill 50.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Minister, the horse racing industry is an important part of the agriculture industry in rural Ontario. We keep hearing from the government that consultation with the horse racing industry will happen in due course, but breeders are making decisions that are three years away. Other parts of the industry, like feed, need time to plan their investments. Businesses cannot operate within this ambiguous “due course” time frame. They need firm commitments.

When exactly will the government make good on its promise to consult with the horse racing sector on a path forward for this important industry?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, the OLG goes to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Last evening, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the horse racing industry, as well—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Lanark, come to order.

1120

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I had the opportunity last evening to speak with representatives of OHRIA as well as the quarter horse racing industry. I sought their advice on how to move forward. I'll be meeting with them again. I'll have an announcement very shortly with respect to how we're going to transition this industry to a better future for horse racing in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: More ambiguity from the Minister of Agriculture on the effects that this decision has for rural Ontario as he passes the buck to the finance minister, who obviously has no plan for the industry going forward.

This was a revenue-sharing agreement, not a subsidy. It should have been worked on going forward and followed through so that that sector could continue.

We're hearing now that this decision is going to result in the slaughtering of thousands of horses in the province of Ontario. Why can't the minister give small business

owners a firm date on the promised consultation to transition that industry going forward?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As I have indicated, I began those consultations last evening. In spite of the NDP's opposition to corporate handouts, they want us to continue to subsidize an industry that sends a lot of its money outside of the province.

The member opposite talks a good game when he's out in public, but when it came to negotiating at budget time, they didn't want to put the issue on the agenda.

We will help this industry transition. We've undertaken that. I began those discussions last evening. There's no ambiguity about that. I expect very shortly more announcements as we move to a stronger horse racing industry that is sustainable in the future and that will help sustain rural Ontario. I look forward to hearing more ideas from the members opposite—

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

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

As a former medical officer of health, I know there is a direct link between student nutrition and academic success. Healthy foods allow students to grow not only physically but also socially, emotionally and intellectually while succeeding in the classroom. But providing meals and snacks to children does much more than help them succeed at school; it's also an important avenue for helping to combat poverty in the province.

To the minister: What is being done across Ontario to ensure that kids are getting the best possible start to their school day?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would like to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for the question. Last week, many of my colleagues know that the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Foundation for Student Success released the results of an important study on the role that nutrition plays in student success, and the results speak for themselves. Middle and secondary school students who eat breakfast at school on most days achieve better academic results. It sounds intuitive; the study has proven it. Those academic results improved right across the board. These same students are more likely to come to school and less likely to be suspended. Important studies like these emphasize just how crucial our student nutrition program is.

Since 2003, our government has quadrupled its investment to our student nutrition program, and I'm proud to say that last year, we provided nutritious breakfasts to over 660,000 elementary and secondary students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the minister for updating us on this important program in Toronto.

In York region, Food for Learning, operated by over 776 volunteers, serves 23,000 children. Last year, 83,808 volunteer hours were dedicated to planning, preparing

and serving over 450,000 breakfasts and 780,000 snacks. This program is invaluable for my constituents of Oak Ridges–Markham.

A strong, publicly funded education system which takes our children's nutritional health into consideration is key to reducing poverty. Minister, can you tell us what else is being done in Ontario to ensure that Ontario students get the best possible start?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Research has consistently shown how important it is for kids of all ages to get good nutrition. The urban and priority high school funding, as an example, through the Ministry of Education, gives help for secondary schools in urban neighbourhoods dealing with issues like poverty. Through this program, the Ministry of Education provides \$10 million to urban boards with at-risk students to, amongst other things, support nutrition.

Combining with that investment, our new school food and beverage policy has nutrition standards for food and beverages sold in schools, including cafeterias, vending machines and tuck shops.

We want all of our kids to eat healthy so that they will be successful in school, and we're building on the investments that we've made in a healthy schools strategy—daily physical activity for younger kids—to ensure that all of our students will be healthy and successful in every Ontario school.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Last week in their news release, Cliffs Natural Resources merely stated that they agreed to consider a feasibility study in Sudbury, not to build a facility. They also said the agreement could be derailed by certain conditions, which included “uncertainty in market conditions, results of future prospects, slowing of the economic growth rate in China, changes in currency values, availability of equipment, energy supply and weather conditions,” among others.

That adds up to a lot of uncertainty, and it's a far cry from the language you used in your announcement. In fact, it almost sounded like you were talking about two different projects. To listen to your rhetoric, one would think you were already shipping ore. How do you explain this discrepancy, Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We continue to celebrate the fact that Cliffs has every confidence in the province of Ontario, and that's why they announced that they're willing to make a \$3.3-billion investment in the province of Ontario that will create jobs not only in northern Ontario but across Ontario.

Speaker, this is incredibly good news that the company has moved from pre-feasibility to feasibility. We look forward to that process. We look forward to continuing to dialogue with Cliffs, with our First Nations communities, with the communities in Ontario. At the

end of the day, we see this Ring of Fire as an incredible opportunity for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, Sonny Gagnon, chief of Aroland First Nation, said that the minister tried to “buy him off” late Tuesday night, mere hours before his announcement, after ignoring First Nations for months.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation says they were completely shut out of this decision.

Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation said, “They're going to have to cross that river and I told them if they want to cross that river, they're going to have to kill me first.”

So my question is, if the minister is working closely with First Nations, as he claims, why are so many groups so upset?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The fact of the matter is that there are ongoing discussions with all of the partners in this particular mining project.

Our First Nations communities suggested to us that regional infrastructure supports were very, very important and that should form part of the framework that we enter into. They suggested that social supports were very important and that they should be a part of the framework we've entered into. They suggested that regional environmental impacts were very, very important and they should be a part of the framework agreement that we've entered into. They suggested that resource benefit sharing was very, very important to them and it should be a part of the framework for discussion.

Speaker, we will continue to dialogue with our First Nations communities. We will continue to dialogue with industry. We will continue to dialogue with our environmental groups. We will continue to do that which is necessary in order to achieve the Ring of Fire's potential for all of Ontario.

ONTARIO SAVINGS BONDS

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A constituent of mine from Port Colborne, Frank Olm, recently lost his spouse, Carol, who was a nurse, to cancer. While doing the paperwork for her estate, he learned that transferring her Ontario savings bonds to her spouse was going to incur a 3% fee of the total amount of the bonds.

Why is the Ontario savings bond program charging people a fee on a simple name transfer that's more than the interest earned on the bonds themselves?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our condolences to the family. There are a number of fees related to estate transfers. I'm not familiar with this specific circumstance. I'll undertake to look into it for the member and report back to the House. I know these fees have been in place for many years, likely brought in by the previous government.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, we're not talking about rich people here in my riding. We're talking about families who, over the years—in this case, 40 years—built up some modest savings in Ontario savings bonds, and they did that to support the province of Ontario because they believe in the province of Ontario.

Frank, the constituent, was told that the fee would be waived after my office actually contacted the ministry, but that transfer has yet to be processed. So the question still remains: Will the minister commit to intervening and looking into this kind of bizarre and costly practice?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very reasonable request. I certainly will undertake to look at not only the specifics of that but into the policy. I thank the member for raising it in the House today.

TOURISM

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. As the sun starts to shine and with summer quickly approaching, Ontarians are starting to plan their summer vacations. They will plan their vacations with itineraries that include stops at renowned attractions and beautiful scenic landscapes, and I'm sure Windsor-Essex will be on that list. As visitors to destinations both inside and outside of the province, Ontarians will seek out some of Canada's and the world's most alluring cuisine, entertainment, recreation and cultural hot spots.

But in addition to what lies beyond Ontario's borders, there is much to see and do right here at home. What is the government doing to invest in bringing tourists to Ontario this summer to experience all that we have to offer in this great province?

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you very much to the honourable member for asking the question. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that June 15 will be a sight to remember for Ontarians and guests to our province as we welcome Nik Wallenda, a world-renowned tightrope walker, who will cross the gorge at Niagara Falls. This signature event has already attracted interest from around the world and is estimated to draw 125,000 spectators and have an economic impact of more than \$20 million in Ontario.

Events such as these attract tourists, create jobs and support economic growth. Every year, they support over 20,000 jobs in Ontario and generate millions of dollars in revenue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. I'm pleased to see that this government is taking initiative to foster tourism throughout the province.

Ontario indeed hosts a variety of festivals and events, and showcases famous landmarks and outdoor sports activities that make it a destination of choice for outside visitors. I'm proud of the busy festival season we have in Windsor and across the province: Art in the Park, and Carousel of Nations, to name two that are quickly approaching in Windsor.

In order to continue to draw tourists to this wonderful province we are privileged to call home, our government must continue to reinvent the industry by promoting and supporting it, by ensuring we remain competitive to continue to support jobs and generating over \$22 billion in Ontario's economy. Speaker, can the minister indicate what else the government is doing to promote this sector?

Hon. Michael Chan: The member will be reassured to hear that since 2003, our government has invested over \$230 million to support more than 4,200 festivals and events across Ontario through a number of tourism and culture programs.

Over the next few years, the international spotlight will continue to shine on Ontario as we host the 2013 IIHF World Women's Championships in Ottawa, World Pride in 2014 in Toronto, and the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games.

We are also expanding into new markets in Brazil, India and in China. Our government has signed three agreements with Chinese provinces that are expected to have over \$200 million in benefits for Ontario's tourism economy.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the government House leader. Speaker, we now have a motion before the government House leader from the Legislature asking for broader terms of reference for the public accounts committee. We have a motion before the government House leader requesting that we sit throughout the break week. We have a motion before the government House leader asking to sit into the summer.

We have three hearing days left. We know that Dr. Mazza himself is refusing to come at this point. It looks as though if we don't get the extension, we may never hear from Dr. Mazza and other key witnesses whom we must hear from.

I would like to know from the government House leader: Will he commit today to give the public accounts committee the additional request to sit throughout the break and to sit throughout the summer so that we can, in fact, get to the bottom of this?

Hon. John Milloy: We will consider all requests that come forward, and the issue of Dr. Mazza, of course, is up to the committee. But I would like to congratulate the public accounts committee on the good work they do. They're going to be holding a number more hearings. In fact, a lot of information has come out, and it will be discussed by the committee. If the member wants to conduct hearings on the floor of the House, perhaps he'd like to know about a \$7,000 invoice from Kelly Mitchell, a top Tory insider, expense to prepare a strategy for engaging the PC Party. Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of it, and step 1 in the strategy is called, "Make Peace with Frank Klees." Let me quote: "It will be important"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Beaches–East York for a point of order.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, on a point of order, I would like to advise the House that today is a very special day. The member from Welland is celebrating a birthday, and I know we all wish her the best.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the Speaker's gallery today, we have students and staff from St. John's College in Brantford, Assumption College in Brantford, and Holy Trinity college in Simcoe. We welcome our guests for being here to learn all about the Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAVE STECKLE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize an outstanding citizen from the Goderich area: Dave Steckle. He was recently presented with the 2012 Man of Integrity Award. The Man of Integrity program was conceived by the Domestic Assault Review Team, known as DART, of Huron county.

DART members wanted to come up with an idea to help men become more aware and better educated to put an end to domestic violence. They decided to catch men doing positive things in their everyday lives promoting gender equality and reward them. This initiative is the first of its kind in Canada. This year, Dave Steckle, who owns and runs Huron Ridge Acres, a greenhouse and nursery, was recognized.

In the past year, Dave unselfishly took in a woman and her children to keep them safe from her husband for a two-week period. He kept their car out of sight in order to protect their whereabouts.

Dave has always upheld his employees with the greatest respect, and he has told them that if there are problems at home, that comes first, such as a sick child, for example. If there is one in their home, they should be there with their child, because there's always another day to go to work.

Over the years, Dave's home has been open to those who were going through a troublesome time. Dave always goes out of his way to make this a better world for everyone around him.

I want to thank Dave for his efforts in making Huron county a safer place for women.

CALYPSO WATER PARK

PARC AQUATIQUE CALYPSO

Mr. Grant Crack: It gives me great pleasure to take a moment to speak about the Calypso theme water park, which is located in Limoges, in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

On April 26 of this year, Calypso, Canada's biggest and best theme water park, was once again honoured during the Ottawa Tourism Awards, where it received the Innovation of the Year award for its spectacular aquatic complex, Summit Tower. At 10-storeys high, it's the highest free-standing waterslide tower in North America.

This is the second award Calypso has received in 2012. The water park was also recently awarded the prestigious title of Company of the Year by the Regroupement des gens d'affaires de la Capitale Nationale during its 2012 gala.

Calypso president and CEO, Guy Drouin, states: "Innovation is at the very heart of our business decisions, and both of these prestigious awards encourage us to set the bar higher moving forward. Furthermore, we are equally thrilled to see the tangible impact our efforts had on Ottawa's tourist industry."

I agree with Mr. Drouin.

Avec l'addition du nouveau complexe aquatique Summit Tower, le parc Calypso investit plus de 50 millions de dollars qui contribuent au développement commercial et économique de la région. Cet investissement procure 500 emplois et permet à des centaines de milliers de visiteurs de s'amuser davantage.

Parc Calypso has a positive impact on eastern Ontario and specifically in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. I congratulate them on their current successes. I look forward to working hard on their behalf as they embark on their existing future expansion plans, and I wish them well in their future endeavours.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. Robert Bailey: As the MPP for Sarnia–Lambton, as a father and as a grandfather, I'm deeply saddened by the string of youth suicides that have shocked my community in recent months. Last week, another young person from my community took her life. It is simply impossible for me to express in words the pain that these events have caused the families and friends and the larger community which surrounds these individuals. As one constituent wrote to me, "The time for quiet worry has long passed."

I again stand here, two years after I first called for a provincial comprehensive suicide prevention strategy and to urge this government to act. Last spring, this House called upon the government to table an action plan to implement the 23 recommendations found in the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health report entitled Navigating the Journey to Wellness. A year later, only two of these recommendations have been adopted.

Mr. Speaker, there's no shortage of studies and reports. It is time for this government to implement these recommendations, and also to move forward on Bill 14 to put an end to bullying in our schools.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We know that four times as many LGBTQ students attempt suicide as heterosexual students. I stand here as a United Church minister, a member of the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, a denomination that has been ordaining openly gay and lesbian people since 1988 and has condoned same-sex marriage for at least 10 years.

We were also privy to hear from the Ontario English Catholic teachers of Ontario, who stood up, 90% of them, and supported their children in being able to form peer groups, support groups, including gay-straight alliances in Catholic schools. We know there is nothing homophobic about being Christian, and in fact being Christian compels us to stand with our vulnerable children, to stand up for them and to stand with them. It is their charter right of freedom of assembly. It is their charter right to structure groups and to call them what they will. We support our students' right to support gay-straight alliances. It's not only our duty as legislators in this place, but it is also our duty as people of faith—not just as Christians but as people of all faith. So I stand here in support of our vulnerable children—I ask all members to do so—and I stand here also as a committed Christian.

ROGER CONANT

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I rise today in the House to say happy birthday and congratulations to the Honourable Roger Conant on his 90th birthday.

Mr. Conant was born on May 26, 1922, in Oshawa, Ontario. He is the son of the Honourable Gordon Daniel Conant, who served as Premier of this province in 1942, having previously served as the mayor of Oshawa and the Attorney General of Ontario.

Mr. Conant graduated from the University of Toronto with a bachelor of arts degree. He enlisted and fought in World War II as a lieutenant as part of the Canloan program, where young officers in Canada were loaned to the British army. Unfortunately, the casualty rate was about 75%. Two days after D-Day, Roger Conant landed on the beaches of Normandy. He was badly injured; they actually thought he was dead. But then luckily he had survived when 24 hours later the British retook the field and found him alive. It took eight months for him to heal in England.

After World War II, he joined the forces again in the Korean War and attained the rank of major. He was awarded the Canadian Forces decoration for his service.

He was called to the bar, was a Queen's Counsel, and raised his family in Ajax. He has been a major mover and shaker in that community. Appointed to District Court of

Ontario in 1977, he served in Superior Court for 17 years.

But he didn't retire, Mr. Speaker. He didn't sit on his laurels. He went on to serve as a judge and panel member of the Pension Appeals Board of Canada. His two sons and three of his grandchildren are joining him today, and we all say: Happy birthday, Honourable Roger Conant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Happy birthday. I'm allowed to do that.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Mr. Randy Hillier: Earlier I tabled a motion, which reads as follows, in the House:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms should be amended to enshrine property rights for Ontarians, as follows:

"(1) The following section is inserted after section 7:

"7.1(1) In Ontario, everyone has the right not to be deprived, by any act of the Legislative Assembly or by any action taken under authority of an act of the Legislative Assembly, of the title, use, or enjoyment of real property or of any right attached to real property, or of any improvement made to or upon real property, unless made whole by means of full, just and timely financial compensation," and that this section "refers to any act of the Legislative Assembly made before or after the coming into force of this section.

"(2) This amendment may be cited as the Constitution Amendment, 2012 (No Expropriation in Ontario without Compensation), and reference to the Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982, shall be deemed to include a reference to the Constitution Amendment, 2012 (No Expropriation in Ontario without Compensation)."

1510

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Last week, this government announced part of its backroom deal with Cliffs Natural Resources to the public.

While Cliffs made a business decision to process northwestern Ontario resources in northeastern Ontario, which is its right, this government has no excuse for failing in its duty to involve northerners in the process. While the government is silent on many details, it is clear that this government has made commitments without involving municipal leaders or First Nations.

Yesterday, Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation made his viewpoint pretty clear. He said he's willing to lay down his life to protect the lakes and rivers that will be jeopardized by a north-south corridor that this government seems to favour. Chief Moonias told me that not only was he not consulted, but he did not receive so much as a phone call from either the government of Ontario or Cliffs.

These are the northwest's resources, and this government has an obligation to ensure that we in the northwest benefit from them. This is our land, these are our re-

sources and they are ours to benefit from. We demand that this government stop making unilateral decisions and give northerners the respect we deserve. This government must start representing our needs and interests today; otherwise, its not just Cliffs that will receive an eviction notice from the northwest, it will be the government of Ontario.

AJAX BOMB GIRLS

Mr. Joe Dickson: Speaker, I would like to introduce the Ajax Bomb Girls legacy campaign. In the last of the Great Wars, from 1939 to 1945, there was one saying that proved true here in Ontario: Behind every good man there is a great woman.

Such was the case on 28,000 government-expropriated acres of land that was known as DIL, which is now the home of Ajax, Ontario. While our heroes were at war to protect our freedom, women made up over half of the 20,000 people who worked with explosive and hazardous materials, producing over 40 million shells, as DIL, now Ajax, became the largest shell-filling and munitions plant in the entire British Empire.

This morning we introduced four women who are leading a community initiative for the women of Defence Industries Ltd. They are chair and regional councillor Colleen Jordan; treasurer and long-time councillor Pat Brown; fundraiser and retired councillor Pat Clark; and honorary patron, 90-year-old Louise Johnson.

They came daily from across Canada on horse and wagon, on bicycles, on foot, in cars and on trains, including cattle cars, to work 10 years a day, six days a week.

This community is raising funds to erect a memorial on the planned civic square, and contributions are being taken at every town of Ajax municipal facility. The premier fundraising event will be a shell-abrasion tribute at Deer Creek on Friday, September 28.

We honoured our fighting men and women, and now we honour our women known as the Bomb Girls just two days after Mother's Day. God bless them all.

VISIT OF POLISH PRIME MINISTER

Mr. John Yakabuski: History was made this past Sunday, when Polish Prime Minister His Excellency Donald Tusk visited Wilno, some 154 years after the first Polish Kashubs made Canada their new home.

Wilno became the first Polish settlement in Canada, so it was most appropriate that Prime Minister Tusk made it a major part of his state visit to Canada.

Prime Minister Tusk made good on a promise to do so a few years ago. His planned visit in 2010 was cancelled when the plane carrying Polish President Lech Kaczynski, his wife and almost 100 top government and military officials crashed, killing all aboard just days before the trip was to take place.

Tusk arrived by helicopter and toured the Polish Kashub Heritage Park and Museum. He then visited St.

Stanislaus Pioneer Cemetery, where the early settlers are buried. He commented that he felt as if they were visiting the graves of our dearest relatives. He is a Kashub Pole himself.

A reception at St. Mary Catholic Church followed, where invitees had an opportunity to meet Prime Minister Tusk and other dignitaries. Guests were treated to a delicious traditional Polish meal.

When my ancestors first laid eyes on the land and the hills of Wilno, they would have been impressed by its beauty. They would have also been equally dismayed by its unsuitability for farming. There was, however, no turning back. As Peter Glofcheskie, president of the Wilno Heritage Society, said, they had to work extremely hard just to survive. What pulled them through was their faith that God would provide and his will would be done. That faith still exists today.

To all those who worked so hard to make this day possible, I say thank you. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. As a Canadian of Polish Kashub heritage, I was proud to be part of it.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated May 15, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HELPING ONTARIANS ENTER THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 VISANT À FACILITER L'ACCÈS AUX MÉTIERS SPÉCIALISÉS EN ONTARIO

Mr. Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 91, An Act to amend the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act / Projet de loi 91, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la qualification professionnelle et l'apprentissage des gens de métier.

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. Garfield Dunlop: The bill will be called the Helping Ontarians Enter the Skilled Trades Act, 2012.

The bill amends the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act to specify that no more than one person may be apprenticed to each journeyman of an employer in a trade and to remove the power to make regulations respecting the ratio of apprentices to journeymen who may be employed by an employer in a trade.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also say that we've got some folks here today in the members' gallery, if I could have a moment to introduce them: Gord Sproule from Merit Corp.; Stephen Sell, the Ontario Electrical League; Stewart Kiff; and, from the Pre-Apprenticeship Training Institute, Rui Cuhn, director of operations; Evan Holt; and two pre-apprenticeship young people, Michael Eccleston and Frank D'Assisi. I just wanted to give them a warm welcome. Thanks very much. It's good to have you here.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POLICE WEEK

SEMAINE DE LA POLICE

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: May 13 to 19 is Police Week in Ontario. It is my great pleasure and privilege to rise in this House today to express, on behalf of our government and the people of Ontario, our gratitude to the brave police officers who serve us and help keep our communities safe.

La Semaine de la police est observée au mois de mai de chaque année, en conjonction avec la Journée commémorative des agents de la paix, célébrée dans le monde entier le 15 mai.

Ontario's annual ceremony of remembrance, which is held on the first Sunday in May each year, is an opportunity for all Ontarians to pay tribute to fallen officers.

We know that police officers face extreme risks to protect us. Sadly, sometimes those risks call upon our officers to pay the ultimate sacrifice. That was the case of the late Constable Garrett Styles of York Regional Police, who was killed last year and whose memory we honoured during this Sunday's annual ceremony of remembrance.

We mourn the loss of the brave officers who died in the line of duty. We thank and honour them for their service and grieve with their family, friends and colleagues over their passing. We will forever treasure their memory.

Les collectivités de l'Ontario sont sûres grâce au travail de milliers d'hommes et de femmes qui servent comme agents de police. La sécurité de l'Ontario repose sur le dévouement des agents de police, qui incarnent ce qu'il y a de meilleur en nous. Ils partagent notre souhait et notre espoir de vivre dans des collectivités sécuritaires et dynamiques.

1520

Police Week helps to strengthen the link between the police and our communities by reminding us that we must all work together. Mr. Speaker, police officers are key members of our community. They are our neighbours and our friends.

This year's theme for Police Week, Leading the Way to a Safer Tomorrow, is all about that joint effort. It points to the need for a partnership between police and the community. It reminds us, as citizens, of the role we have to play in creating a successful partnership. The job of making our community safe is not just for the police. It involves all of us.

As we celebrate Police Week, we also acknowledge the thousands of men and women across the province whose community work helps prevent crime and helps make our communities safer.

Je tiens à remercier l'Association des chefs de police de l'Ontario de sa collaboration à l'élaboration du thème de la Semaine de la police, ainsi que tous les services de police pour les activités qu'ils ont organisées en l'honneur de la Semaine de la police dans toute la province.

Pendant cette semaine, les services de police démontreront le succès des partenariats qu'ils ont établis au sein des collectivités et inviteront le public à participer aux activités organisées.

I urge all members of this House to participate wherever they can and stand with local police officers and community organizations in working together to enhance community safety.

Thank you again to all the men and women of the police, who protect us and whose example inspires the spirit of community service in all of us. Merci.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

MOIS DE LA PRÉVENTION DE L'AGRESSION SEXUELLE

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I stand today to recognize May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in Ontario. Every day in Canada, women of every age and background are victims of sexual violence.

Une femme sur trois dans ce pays sera victime de violence sexuelle durant sa vie.

One in three women in this country will experience sexual violence in their lifetime, Mr. Speaker—one in three. Just think about that shocking statistic. Think of three women in your life. Now absorb that number. Pretty startling, isn't it?

In 82% of cases, women are violated by someone they know, and very often someone they trust. As a society, as parents, as siblings, as friends, we need to provide young women with the knowledge to recognize and protect themselves from the danger of sexual assault.

Nous devons affirmer que la violence sexuelle sous toutes ses formes est inacceptable et qu'elle ne sera pas tolérée en Ontario.

We need to affirm that sexual violence in any form is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in Ontario. Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to do this. It's also a time to thank the dedicated women and men in every community who are working to end sexual violence.

Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to recommit our support to victims of this intolerable crime. And it is a time for each of us to ask what it means to prevent and react to sexual violence if we ever experience it as a bystander.

Just over a year ago, our government brought forward Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives, Ontario's first sexual violence action plan.

Le plan a été conçu à l'issue de consultations dans des collectivités de toute la province, avec plus de 350 survivantes, fournisseurs de services et spécialistes des secteurs de la santé, de l'éducation et de la justice.

The plan was developed after consultation in communities across the province with more than 350 survivors, service providers and experts in the health, education and justice sectors. At that time, Jacqueline Benn-John, president of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, said, "We are pleased that survivors' voices were included in the consultation process into the development of Ontario's sexual violence action plan. Their perspective is key to understanding the issue of sexual violence in an effort to make the lives of women safer in the future."

La voix et l'expérience des survivantes sont centrales à ce plan, et nous continuerons d'accorder la priorité à leurs conseils.

The voices and experiences of survivors were front and centre to this plan, and we'll continue to make their advice our priority.

Since the plan's launch last March, we have provided increased funding to Ontario's sexual assault centres to help them respond better to women in their communities. We have trained more than 100 crown attorneys, sexual assault workers, nurses and police officers to help them better understand the impact of sexual violence on victims. We convened an international forum, which brought together experts on aging and sexual violence to discuss the impact of sexual violence on older women. We've supported the development of standards of care for hospital emergency rooms and hospital-based sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres to better support victims. We've set up a French-language services working group to improve programs and supports to address the unique needs of francophone women who have experienced violence. We've funded aboriginal organizations to address the needs of women experiencing sexual violence in aboriginal communities. We've established a human trafficking advisory committee and invested in initiatives to improve supports to victims of human trafficking. And we've supported the develop-

ment of sexual violence prevention public education materials.

Later this month, I will announce another important initiative that will better support victims of sexual violence whose first language is not English or French.

As we continue to move forward with our sexual violence action plan, I am confident that we are on the right path. Community by community, together with our partners, we will begin to erase sexual violence from our province's future.

There is more to be done to protect women from sexual violence. We all share a responsibility to stop this unacceptable crime.

En oeuvrant de concert au sein du gouvernement et avec nos partenaires communautaires, les survivantes, la police et même les spectateurs, nous parviendrons à mettre un terme à la violence sexuelle.

By working together across government with community partners, survivors, police and bystanders, we will put an end to sexual violence.

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Public works and infrastructure, as a matter of our government policy, play a significant role in economic development, job creation and our quality of life. That is true for our investments in colleges and universities, hospitals, schools, transit, roads, highways, sewers and clean water systems. We are proud of our record of investments over the last eight years.

Under the previous government, their total infrastructure investment averaged \$2.6 billion over their last three years. Over our last eight years, our government has invested more than \$10 billion per year, creating more than 100,000 jobs per year.

Our 10-year infrastructure plan in both last year's and this year's budgets includes a \$35-billion, three-year-running public infrastructure commitment.

Public works and infrastructure are the foundation that have built Ontario. That is why today, on behalf of the McGuinty government, I am pleased to declare next week, May 20 to May 26, National Public Works Week in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank the thousands of dedicated people who work in this sector. And I would like to acknowledge, in the legislative chamber today, representatives from the Ontario Public Works Association, including: Sam Sidawi, senior engineer, city of Burlington; Carl Bodimeade, chair of the Ontario Coalition for Sustainable Infrastructure and senior vice-president at Hatch Mott MacDonald; and Gary Moore, director of engineering services, city of Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge and respect the reality that the public works industry and all of its sectors are crucial to moving our province forward, creating jobs and keeping our economy competitive. Since 2003, our public works partners have helped our government

deliver more than \$75 billion in infrastructure investments.

Here are some highlights. In public transit alone, more than \$13.4 billion has already been invested across Ontario, including \$6 billion in GO Transit. We have committed an additional \$8.4 billion to support the construction of the Eglinton crosstown LRT, the Sheppard LRT, the Finch LRT and the Scarborough RT in Toronto; a \$600-million commitment to the Ottawa LRT project; and \$300 million to support the Kitchener-Waterloo LRT.

1530

In terms of other investments, this year's infrastructure budget includes \$618 million to support highways and bridges in the north. We are extending the 407 east toward Peterborough, and new 401 interchanges for London are soon to be realized. In fact, our 2012-13 infrastructure budget dedicates \$12.9 billion to infrastructure, of which 47% is for building highways and transit. We have also made record investments in electricity-generating and grid-capacity infrastructure.

And together, we've transformed project delivery. Our provincial agency, Infrastructure Ontario, is a global leader in innovative procurement, financing and project management. IO has completed or procured more than 50 projects worth more than \$21 billion, virtually all within budget with savings of billions of dollars.

We have completed 22 hospitals, and more than 30 new or expanded hospitals are now in procurement or under construction, including hospitals in Cambridge, Burlington, Brockville and Barrie. Other projects include courthouses, sports facilities, roads and transit in the procurement or construction stage. For example, the Windsor-Essex Parkway, truly an economic development initiative through one of North America's leading trade corridors, is under construction and is tracking on time and under budget.

Every step of the way, we depend upon the skills and knowledge of those employed in public works, acknowledged to be among the best worldwide. On behalf of all Ontarians, we salute and thank them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

POLICE WEEK

Mr. John Yakabuski: I welcome the opportunity to thank our police services and all the police officers in the province of Ontario, who put their lives on the line each and every day to ensure that we live in a safe and secure province. After all, it is their presence that stands between us and chaos. Whether it's on our streets, in our communities or on our waterways, they are out there risking their lives in order to protect ours.

Police Week is a great time for communities to show their appreciation and acknowledge the tireless efforts of these brave men and women. I would encourage my colleagues and all the citizens of Ontario to participate this week in the events in their own communities, hosted by their local police service boards. Just as police help

protect our communities, showing your support at the local events celebrating Police Week provides a strong vote of confidence and show of appreciation.

On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the Progressive Conservative caucus, we support the fantastic job our police officers do in this province. They put their lives on the line every day so that we can live in harmony, peace and safety here in the province of Ontario. We look forward to continuing to work with and support Ontario's finest officers.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to mark Sexual Assault Prevention Month. Sexual assault is a tragedy within our society, and we cannot ignore it.

Many community-based groups exist for the sole purpose of helping victims and their families. I want to take this opportunity to mention and commend the work of some of the organizations that work tirelessly to help women and children who experience abuse.

In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I'm proud of the work done by many agencies like the Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre, the YWCA in Haliburton and Peterborough, and the Peterborough Regional Health Centre Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Response Team. They provide immediate and confidential services for victims and survivors of abuse. These organizations provide a 24-hour crisis line, but also offer counselling, outreach services, public education, temporary housing and volunteer opportunities.

In the riding of Dufferin-Caledon, the Family Transition Place has spearheaded educational programs alongside its safe shelter, counselling and transitional services for abused women and their children. Its programs have been successful in creating a safe learning environment for students by boosting their self-esteem, teaching them about respect and encouraging children to reach out for help when an issue arises. This program has been so successful that they hope to take it across the province.

I want to use the opportunity of Sexual Assault Prevention Month to thank all the organizations for their outstanding work. To everyone who works on behalf of eliminating sexual assault in the province of Ontario, thank you.

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Frank Klees: I join with Minister Chiarelli today in acknowledging the work of the Ontario Public Works Association and also to extend a welcome to the representatives who are here with us today, as introduced by the minister.

The OPWA and its very capable board are blessed with members from both the public and the private sectors, who share and combine their expertise in public

works to advance the opportunities and solutions in this important sector.

Our public works are very important to all of us, not just because of the economic benefits we derive from them, but for the quality of life that they create for Ontario families. Hospitals, schools, community centres, roads, transit and water systems are all there for us to use and benefit from, and we use them every day. Each of them requires public works professionals to plan them, to build them and to maintain them. That is the work of the people involved in public works. It is a major responsibility, and we benefit every day from the work that they do.

I also want to talk about the opportunities. We have many needs related to our public works infrastructure these days, and finding the resources to meet those needs is indeed a challenge. More than ever, we need public works professionals to come forward, offer ideas, collaborate and help ensure that those facilities, those hospitals and bridges, the schools, are built and maintained for the people of Ontario and indeed across the country.

The theme, Creating a Lasting Impression, is very appropriate, because what we do today with respect to our public works will leave a lasting legacy. By working together, we can find those solutions to the challenges we face.

Congratulations to all our public works professionals. Thank you for the work you do each and every day to make our province a better place.

POLICE WEEK

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to both the Police Week statement as well as the public works week.

The work police officers do to protect our communities and municipalities across Ontario deserves respect. We hear from different police services that there is a need for more officers to perform more core duties. OPP officers have talked about communities that cannot afford to pay for policing costs, where the police officer might be a half an hour away. Given a situation where a house is being broken into, or a domestic violence situation, do we really want our police officers to wait for a half an hour until reinforcements come? The answer is no. We would like them to act, but acting when you're under-resourced presents several personal risks, and that's what we're asking police officers to do: to put their lives on the line even more because our communities are under-resourced.

Salaries for police officers have also been an issue lately. We in the NDP believe that the nature of the job requires that there be adequate and fair compensation, and compensation that they negotiate fairly. Police officers are being called to perform more and more duties, and their compensation should reflect their expertise, skills and the hazardous nature of their jobs, and I commend certainly the service that they provide for our communities each and every day.

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Also, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak on the public works week. Indeed, being a construction worker myself, knowing the vital nature and importance that our infrastructure plays in our communities—the bridges, roads, sewers, tunnels, hospitals and schools—I commend the minister for highlighting the need to continue to invest in these vital services and to ensure that they are valued, not only as an economic portion of a strategic, economic puzzle, but also the work that they create for workers in our communities: good-paying, tangible jobs that are on the ground, that support families, support communities and, ultimately, support us all in this province.

So I'm pleased to end my statement here, but I congratulate the minister on continued investment in infrastructure in Ontario.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm responding to the sexual violence prevention month and the statement by the minister on such.

I want to acknowledge two phenomenal organizations. One is the White Ribbon Campaign, started in part by our own Jack Layton, the New Democrat, that focuses on men's role in this and calls upon all the men who are part of that campaign to take an oath: (1) that they will never be perpetrators of violence against women; and (2) that they'll never be silent in the face of it.

Also, there's another group that was started right here in the Legislature, an all-party group called Ruth's Daughters, which calls upon all leaders of faith groups and all women in faith groups to take an active role against sexual assault and domestic violence, primarily with women as a target. They're now currently planning a conference to be held next spring, but also services in the respective faith organizations to commemorate the victims.

1540

I want to also make a plea for one such organization: Victim Services Toronto. This is the only agency in Toronto that goes out; when the police get a call about sexual assault or domestic violence, they go with the police. They have not had a funding increase from this government for 20 years. In fact, the funding per victim for Victim Services Toronto has gone from \$286 per victim in 1990 to \$31 in 2010.

This is a plea from the New Democrats. If this is the way that this government responds to the victims of sexual assault, this is not a commendation. This is an organization, the only one in all of Toronto that does this vital work, and yet this is how we fund them and this is how we fund their victims.

I would really plead with the government—I have been doing this ever since I was elected six years ago—

please, go and meet with victim services. They're a phenomenal organization, just around the corner, down on College Street, housed by the police. That's the only free rent they could get. See the good work they do, and finally, finally fund them appropriately. This is not the way to treat women who are victims, and this is not the way to treat those who treat the women who are victims.

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

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to be close to the top, if you will, in petitions. The one I'm presenting today reads as follows:

"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 rural 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;

"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 supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

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

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to have a petition from Scarborough–Agincourt addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which states:

"Whereas recovering from injuries or illnesses at home can enhance recovery, reduce the strain on our health care system and provide comfort to patients;

"Whereas family caregivers need to focus on what matters most—providing care and support to their loved one—without the fear of losing their job;

"Whereas Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones need job protection;

"Whereas the Family Caregiver Leave Act, if passed, would build on existing family medical leave to provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job leave for employees to provide care and support to a sick or injured family member;

"Whereas the PCs have pledged to vote against the bill, and permanently kill the legislation;

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

"That all parties recognize the importance of health, family, and job security by supporting the Family Caregiver Leave Act to protect the jobs of working Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones."

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and send it with page Noah.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

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

"Whereas approximately 3,500 suicides occur each year and suicide remains the second leading cause of death for 10- to 24-year-olds in Canada;

"Whereas Ontario remains the only province or territory in Canada without a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy;

"Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario called on the government to table an action plan to implement the 23 recommendations found in the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions report, entitled *Navigating the Journey to Wellness*, in March 2011, however today only two recommendations have been implemented;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the Minister of Health immediately implements the remaining recommendations of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions and create an umbrella agency, similar in scope to Cancer Care Ontario, to spearhead a provincial strategy that would ensure that a basket of core institutional, residential and community services are available to every region of the province for clients of all ages; therefore it would also ensure that there is equitable access to mental health services which are essential to suicide prevention and positive mental health in our communities."

I agree with this petition and will affix my name to the same.

TAXATION

Ms. Cindy Forster: I have a petition here.

"Whereas the Ontario budget tabled on March 26 continues to give billions of dollars to already profitable corporations through corporate tax cuts implemented in 2004 and 2009; and

“Whereas the Ontario budget freezes social assistance, ignores the child care crisis, dramatically underfunds health care and education, and threatens thousands of jobs in communities across Ontario, in both the public and private sectors; and

“Whereas all Ontarians are being asked to pay for corporate handouts;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore the corporate tax rate to at least 14% and add additional tax brackets for those receiving \$250,000 or more in income and redirect this funding to:

“—increase social assistance for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients to restore lost purchasing power;

“—address the child care crisis for children under four years of age;

“—increase funding for health care, education, and other social programs; and

“—reverse public staffing cuts to ensure Ontarians receive high-quality services; and finally

“We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce labour law reform that will improve workers’ ability to exercise their right to improve their working conditions through free collective bargaining.”

I support this petition and affix my signature and will send it with page Noah.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for York South–Weston.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: She wasn’t even standing. Go ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don’t know why your microphone is on, but I hope it gets turned off.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now, now.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

“Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

“Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

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

“We respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice.”

I agree with this petition, I will sign it and send it over with page Sarah.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and I’d like to thank residents of my riding and also Rideau Carleton Raceway for providing it to me.

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

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

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

“Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 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 of Ontario as follows:

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

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

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Toby Barrett: I wish to continue to read in petitions from Dunnville to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas, as an anti-bullying measure, Bill 13 is unnecessary 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

1550

“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 Legislative Assembly of Ontario to vote against Bill 13.”

I agree with this and will affix my signature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe it’s Timiskaming–Cochrane, as he was hiding behind the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, unfortunately. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north’s economy; and

“Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

“Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

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

“That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately.”

I fully agree, add my signature and give it page Shaumik.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Anyone else? The member from York-South Weston.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another petition from the residents of York-South Weston that reads as follows:

“Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

“Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

“Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

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

“Respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice.”

I agree with this petition and sign and send it over with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay, the member from Dufferin–Caledon.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, thank you. I am proud to enter the following petition into the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.:

“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 support this petition, am pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Sarah to take to the table.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Here’s a petition 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 agree with the thousands who have signed already, I affix my name and I give it to wonderful William to be delivered to the table.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Highland Companies, an American company, wants to build a quarry in Melancthon township which is to be bigger than Niagara Falls. It will be the second-largest in North America. It will be built over 200 feet (60 metres) below the water table of the headwaters that feed three major rivers. This will contaminate these rivers, which are a freshwater source for over one million people. Furthermore, the land that the quarry will be built on is some of the best farmland in Ontario. Over 50% of the GTA’s potatoes are grown on this soil. The Highland Companies is under no obligation to fill in the quarry when they are finished. There is also

no law stating that there must be an environmental assessment on the quarry site before it is built. This quarry will hurt the environment and affect many people, and therefore it must be stopped.

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

“To stop the development of the Melancthon quarry.”
I’m happy to sign the petition.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here that’s signed by over 1,000 people. It reads:

“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 support this and will give this to page Dia to deliver.

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

“Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

“Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

“Whereas Bill 23 passed first reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

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

“That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones’s Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act.”

I obviously support this petition. I’m pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Jenny to take to the table.

OPPOSITION DAY

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to task the Ontario Energy Board with establishing a weekly ceiling on gas prices in order to reduce price volatility, regional price differences and tackle price gouging and other anti-consumer industry practices. Addressed to the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think it’s really clear—I think to everybody in this chamber, regardless of which riding you have the honour of representing—that in many parts of Ontario, people simply don’t have a choice when it comes to the mode of transportation that they rely upon to go about their everyday lives: to pick up their kids, for example; take their kids to school; take them to sports activities; to get to work; to get to appointments; to take aging parents to appointments with doctors and specialists. It’s really, really clear that in a lot of places in this province, the only option that people have is to use the private automobile. I think that’s something that we need to acknowledge, and it’s something we need to address, because we know that that use of that private automobile—in fact, really, when you think about it, transportation costs overall. Whether you’re using a private automobile or public transportation systems, the cost of transportation overall is a large part of the family’s budget. In fact, it’s the second-largest purchase that people have in their budgets after their lodgings. Low- and modest-income families, in fact, devote much of the monthly income that they receive to transportation needs.

1600

I think it’s also really clear, if you look at a family budget and see that transportation eats up a big piece of that budget—it only makes sense, Speaker, that a household needs to know its costs in order to budget appropriately because it gives you some confidence in what you’re able to spend after you’ve allocated a certain amount to your transportation costs: your lodging, your transportation costs and then everything else comes after.

The thing that we see very clearly as a gap here in Ontario is the fact that the fluctuation in gas prices creates havoc with people’s family budgets, with the monthly household budgets that families try to manage, and try to manage with some difficulty, particularly in tough economic times. What we need to see is families being able to have some reliability in terms of what those

transportation costs are going to be. The only way we're going to be able to provide that kind of certainty for families to be able to effectively budget is if we create a way that gas prices can be more predictable, and that's what this motion is all about: putting a ceiling on gas price so that, each and every week, a family will know what kind of expenditure they're going to expect for that week, so that they don't wake up one day and pay a certain amount for gas and then, three days later, they're paying 10 cents more for gas, and then after that, maybe two cents more, and then maybe a couple of days later, three cents less. It is a market that fluctuates significantly. All we're saying is, we think it is important to give some stability to those prices so that families can plan around it. It's about giving consumers predictable gas prices.

It's not to undermine global markets. We all know where the prices for gas are set. We know that they're set at the Mercantile Exchange in New York City. But we also know, Speaker, that we have gas stations that are gouging people at certain times. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, we're coming up to a holiday weekend in Ontario, and I really wouldn't be surprised, and I'm sure nobody in this chamber will be surprised, if we get to Thursday night and see that all of a sudden, Friday morning, gas prices are up about four, five, six, or maybe seven or eight cents. That's one problem. It's opportunistic gouging that happens regularly in this province. I would suggest that pretty much everybody who operates a motor vehicle in this chamber has experienced that very situation. It's unacceptable, it's unnecessary and we can get a handle on it, because it is opportunistic, Speaker. It is gouging that's being done just because they can get away with it, and it's unacceptable because it's the people of this province who have to change their vacation plans, or perhaps change their weekend plans, if they can't afford to fill up the gas tank.

It's interesting, because we also see some wild fluctuations within the province in terms of the pricing of gas overall. So yes, there's no doubt that, based on the region in which you live, added transportation costs need to be calculated into what the cost of gas would be generally.

It's interesting, because I used to think that this was something that was specific to northern Ontario but have found since, after telling this story to others, that in fact it happens all over Ontario. My brother lives in Woodstock, and he has related the same kind of story to me as I've seen for myself and experienced in the north, and I'll tell you what that story is. You're driving along. You're in a particular town and the gas is, let's say, \$1.45. That's about where it is right now: about \$1.45. Yes, that's not a misspeak; it's about \$1.45 in northern Ontario. You're in a particular community and you decide, "I've got a quarter of a tank left. Maybe I'll go to the next town and maybe it will be a little cheaper." But guess what? You get to the next town and it's \$1.53 or it's \$1.49 or, if you're really, really lucky—though, usually you're unlucky, so really what happened is, you filled up at

\$1.45. You didn't go to the next town, and guess what? It was a buck forty at the next town.

These wild fluctuations within regional areas are unacceptable. It's not necessary. Again, it's a way that gas stations are able to gouge the captive audience, to gouge the captive community, because they figure, "What the heck. The people that live in and around that town likely aren't going to be going very far, perhaps, so we'll just price at whatever we think they're able to bear, because we don't think they're going to go to the next town over to fill up the gas tank." Speaker, it's unacceptable, and it's something that really takes advantage of people in those communities. It's quite frustrating for folks. I think they see that there's a problem, when it comes to gas pricing in this province, and they look to their government to try to do something about it.

That's why New Democrats identified this as a place where we can help with the affordability of everyday life. People in Ontario know that we understand—that New Democrats understand—very clearly how tough times have been. Liberals haven't really understood that so very much. They put the HST on people at a time when they were being hit very, very hard in the recession. They didn't think an HST was going to create any hardship for families. Well, they were wrong, and of course, it did create hardship.

Likewise, we have this gas pricing system that causes hardship for families unnecessarily, when we can actually do something about it.

What we're saying is: You decided to put the HST on. We think you should be doing other things. We think there are other initiatives the government should have undertaken. We disagree with the HST. You don't agree with us? Fine. Here's one where you can agree. Here's one where you can say, "Yeah. Guess what? We agree with the NDP."

Why? Because most states in the United States are doing the same thing. Every other province in the eastern part of the Canada is doing the same thing in one way or another: regulating the ceiling price for gas to take the gouging out, to take the unpredictability out, to provide that weekly price where people know what to expect when they wake up in the morning to fill up, so that they don't have to worry about filling up at the last minute before they go home, when they want to see their kids or get their kids to the soccer game or whatever, and they don't have to worry that if they wait until Friday, the gas prices might be up again.

I think it's really clear, Speaker, that this is a very modest proposal. It's one that makes a lot of sense. It's not radical. As I mentioned, it exists in many, many other jurisdictions.

What we're saying is that we already have the infrastructure to put this in place. We have something called the Ontario Energy Board. They already regulate natural gas prices in this province. They already take care of electricity in this province, in terms of pricing. It's not like we have to create a whole other bureaucracy to take care of regulating gas prices. All we're saying is, let's put

a weekly ceiling in place and let's have the OEB take on that job. It makes sense, it gives people a break, it gives them predictability, it gives them reliability in prices and it's something that is long past due.

We've raised it many times here—it was in our platform. Now we're saying to the government, take some of our good ideas. This is one of the good ideas that you should run with. You can actually show the people of Ontario that, instead of crying crocodile tears when it comes to their hardships, you're prepared to do something about the struggles that everyday families are facing in this province.

I could go on. Everybody has watched the prices go up quite a bit over the last little while. They've stabilized—mind you, at a high rate—but we're really concerned that this is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. And it's something that is very, very simple.

I have many, many more notes, but I also have many fantastic MPPs from across this province who want to bring their voices to this issue.

Speaker, I'm going to end with one final thought, which is that sometimes doing something a little bit differently is exactly what we need to do. We have to get out of our old way of doing things. We have to actually look at new ideas and remember what it is that we're here to do. We're not here to represent oil companies. We're not here to make sure that their profits are the highest they could possibly be because they have people on the ropes over a holiday weekend or because they have people on the ropes in a small town, whether it's Woodstock or whether it's Hearst, right? It's a matter of making sure that we are actually paying attention to everyday families for a change: to their need for predictability, to their need for household budgets that they can manage and that they can keep an eye on.

That's what New Democrats want to do. We want to make life more affordable. Let's hope that the Liberals and the Conservatives do as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Reza Moridi: I'm pleased to rise in this House today to speak on the motion brought forward by the leader of the third party. It reads, "that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to task the Ontario Energy Board with establishing a weekly ceiling on gas prices in order to reduce price volatility, regional price differences and tackle price gouging and other anti-consumer industry practices."

1610

Madam Speaker, as Ontario families work hard and go about their busy lives, our government has been hard at work too. We are making thoughtful choices to build a stronger economy that supports families and creates jobs across this province, and we are taking strong action for Ontario's economy.

As I understand, the motion we are debating today is aimed at achieving the same goal. However, Madam Speaker, I certainly beg to differ. We believe in taking

strong and decisive action to strengthen our economy, but we do not believe in the regulation of gasoline prices.

It has been shown that provinces that regulate the price of gas end up paying more. In the long run, this will increase the price at the pump for all Ontarians. It is important to note that this proposal is in line with the billion-dollar, gas-guzzler giveaway the NDP suggested during the campaign.

The third party wants to reward Big Oil with no mechanism to ensure companies pass savings on to consumers. They will take Ontario back to the days of dirty air and dirty water. Once again, the NDP is abandoning the health of Ontarians and their own party's progressive roots, and their plan won't work for Ontario's families.

Regulated prices will not allow consumers to immediately benefit from overnight drops in wholesale gas prices. Instead, gas and oil companies will make more profit from the overnight drops. This is another example of the NDP's irresponsible economic policy.

Madam Speaker, let's spend a couple of minutes and clarify exactly how gas prices are determined. A number of factors contribute to the determination of retail gas prices, including crude oil prices, wholesale gasoline prices and local price competition. We have no control over world oil supplies or prices. Crude oil and fuel prices in North America are highly influenced by world oil markets.

It's imperative to note that the federal government has responsibility for ensuring competition in gasoline markets. The Competition Bureau is an arm of Industry Canada. It administers the Competition Act, which among other things bans predatory pricing, collusion and abuse of dominant position. The Competition Bureau continues to investigate gasoline prices to ensure that gasoline prices are fair, as shown by the recent conviction and sentencing of three independent gasoline marketers for price-fixing in Kingston and Brockville.

The federal government held hearings in 2008 to look at (1) the applicability of the Competition Act in the gasoline market and (2) the influence speculators and investors have had on volatile commodity prices.

Three independent gasoline marketers were fined a total of \$2.035 million in March 2012 for conspiring to fix gasoline prices in Kingston and Brockville from May to November 2007. Canadian Tire, Pioneer Energy and Mr. Gas were found to have exchanged information on price strategies and agreed among themselves to follow price changes by matching major branded stations when they increased or decreased prices. In addition to the fines, the companies have been put under a court order for 10 years and are required to educate their employees on the Competition Act.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take some time at this point to discuss the potential outcomes of regulating gasoline prices. Regulating gasoline prices is not in the best interests of consumers. Historically, provinces that regulate prices tend to have higher prices than Ontario. More recently, on an ex-tax basis, prices are comparable between regulated and unregulated markets.

The five eastern provinces—Newfoundland, PEI, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick—all regulate their gasoline prices. Here are the respective prices at the pump per litre: In Newfoundland, it's 140.7 cents in the city of St. John's; in PEI, it's 134.4 cents in Charlottetown; in Quebec, it's 140.3 cents in Montreal; in Nova Scotia, in Halifax, it's 140.3 cents; in New Brunswick, it's 137.5 cent in Saint John. In BC, where they don't regulate gas prices, the price is 139.2 cents in Vancouver. More interestingly, in Ontario, in the city of Toronto, where we are, it's 130.4 cents per litre, which is the cheapest among all these major cities across the country.

The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies published a report in February 2009 that estimated that gasoline price regulation costs the Atlantic provinces from one to 1.5 cents per litre.

A March 2007 study, prepared by Gardner Pinfold Consulting Economists, estimated that regulation in Nova Scotia increased gasoline prices by 0.8 cents per litre.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to reducing the burdens on Ontario families. We understand the struggle to make ends meet. I have a household myself to balance the budget and I know that when the price of one thing goes up, I have to make up for it somewhere else. That's why we are going after every possible investment that will create new jobs in Ontario and that's why we are working hard to reduce the burden on Ontario families.

The Ontario clean energy benefit reduces electricity costs by 10% for families, farmers, seniors and small businesses. We brought in up to \$1,025 in annual tax relief for seniors through the Ontario energy and property tax credit. And our northern Ontario energy credit is providing up to \$200 for families, helping more than half of all northerners.

At the same time, our government is committed to building a clean energy economy and making Ontario's air safer to breathe. We have closed eight coal plants and coal use is down by 90% compared to 2003, when we came into office. We'll be closing all coal plants by 2014. That is the equivalent of taking seven million cars off the road.

The opposition parties don't care about keeping Ontario's air clean and healthy. The PCs want to keep coal plants open indefinitely, have no plan to deal with climate change and don't believe in—

Interjections.

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

The member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Conservatives voted against the Ontario clean energy benefit.

The NDP's former leader, Howard Hampton, wrote to the Premier and asked him to keep northern coal plants open for another 25 years. The NDP cancelled all energy conservation programs and voted against bringing them back. They voted against—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me, point of order.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: She's not in her seat.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll go to my seat, then.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Oh, I'm sorry. You're not in your seat. No point of order. Continue.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, I'll do it. Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes?

Mr. Paul Miller: Madam Speaker, I would suggest that we're talking about gas prices and we're talking about what our leader said. The member is way off topic. He's attacking the Conservatives on coal, he's attacking us on other topics. Could you ask him to speak to the agenda?

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The conversation continues on the opposition day motion. You have the floor.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The NDP cancelled all energy conservation programs and they voted against bringing them back. They voted against the Clean Water Act and against banning the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment.

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order, Madam Chair: I don't want to be disrespectful, but are you listening to what he's talking about? He's talking about water. He's talking about stuff that has nothing to do with what our leader stood up and talked about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would ask the member to go back to the opposition day motion in his remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Reza Moridi: And when they were in government, the NDP cut the budget for the Ministry of the Environment, and now they oppose renewable energy and the feed-in tariff program. The NDP are waffling in their support for clean energy and clean air. I would suggest this motion brought forward by the leader of the third party is another example of poor choices and direction made by the party opposite.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Over the years, under this Liberal government, Ontarians have seen their lives become more and more difficult. They saw their hydro costs skyrocket 100% with no credible explanation from this government. Failed policies have created more red tape and made it more and more difficult to start or run a business in Ontario.

Interjection: Get to the gas.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm getting to it.

The unemployed are seeing no action to create jobs and on getting this province back on track to prosperity.

Whenever we hear new announcements, we can't believe the figures any more. Thirty thousand green jobs that turned out to be temporary, each one killing four per-

manent ones, is just an example of this government's lack of credibility on the energy portfolio.

So we come, then, to gas—what everybody's been waiting for. Gas prices have been climbing, and everyone feels the effects. We use our cars every day, and for many in rural areas a car and the gas for it are some of the largest line items in the household budget.

I was the mayor of a rural township and I know first-hand the challenges that we faced on a daily basis. Unlike their urban neighbours, rural residents don't see a cent of the provincial gas tax collected from them every day. OMPF funding has remained the same since this government took office in 2003, and in some cases, like in South Glengarry, it's even less. Instead of tackling the real energy and financial issues affecting our province, this government delights in disrupting everyone's lives with wind turbines and other fanciful policy disasters.

Villages like Martintown, Williamstown, Green Valley, North Lancaster, Bainsville, Summerstown, Glen Norman and St. Raphaels used to have gas stations. Today, they're all gone. One has to drive all the way to the 401 highway in the south just to fill up—and that's just in my former township.

We know that gas prices are going up, and for many people it's proving to be a challenge, but is this NDP motion an answer? Sadly, no. The NDP motion seeks to abolish the laws of economics and takes on common sense as well. Their aim is to abolish regional differences in gas prices, which is either impossible or will just drive the prices in southern Ontario through the roof. It seeks to give unelected government appointees the power to determine how much we will pay at the pump. The Ontario Energy Board's remit is very broad and they have many active files in their portfolio. Are we seriously considering handing them the weekly assessment of the Ontario gas market and world gasoline prices, and the power to decide the maximum price we will pay that week?

Let us consider this for a moment: If there was ever a maximum cap, it would have to be sufficiently high to justify supplying gas to Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and other communities. If it isn't high enough, no one will supply gas or sell it at a loss, and stations will close.

So what difference would that make in southern Ontario? Absolutely nothing to keep the prices down, as we already pay less than people in provinces where gas is regulated. A one-size-fits-all ceiling is not a solution that fits our province and will only drive our prices up to the maximum, like it does everywhere else.

Four provinces have enacted full regulation of gas prices. They are PEI, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The effect of their regulation is not to decrease prices, and I will provide evidence of that. They regulate the profit margin that wholesalers and retailers can mark up their gasoline by. PEI sets it every two weeks, and the rest on a weekly basis. All maintain some system by which they can change the price at any time if the market dictates it.

Unlike what the NDP would do with this motion, all four provinces I mentioned base their retail gasoline price on the so-called New York Harbor price. That isn't the price of oil; it's the price of actual refined unleaded gasoline traded on the international market. The technical term is the New York Harbor RBOB gasoline future. Try as they may, the NDP can do nothing to alter how that price is set, unless they plan on conquering the world and shutting down the gasoline trade—hard to do with an army of 17, however passionate. To this world price, provinces add 10 cents per litre federal excise tax; a wholesaler's margin; provincial tax, if applicable; retailer's minimum and maximum margins; and the regional markups, if applicable.

Speaking of regions, the last time I checked, Nova Scotia was tiny. They have six zones. Depending on the distance from Halifax and its port, the difference between the maximum price in zone 1 and zone 6 is one cent. In the space of 180 miles, the price difference is one cent.

There is a map of Ontario on the ground floor in the east wing, right by the NDP offices. If they are so bent on regulation, how many extra cents will it cost to send it to Sudbury, Nipissing or Thunder Bay?

On average, the wholesale and retail margins in the four Atlantic provinces are close to 12 cents a litre in total. This week's Halifax price was 131.6 cents a litre. The maximum profit made by the companies on that litre is 12 cents, give or take.

Speaker, let's look at Toronto. On May 11, according to some sources, the gas station at Dupont and Ossington posted a regular price of 127.6 cents; less the HST, that becomes 112.9 cents; less the gas tax, 98.2 cents; and less the federal excise, 88.2 cents. The world price or RBOB price was 79 cents, so less than 10 cents.

My NDP colleagues may not be strong at math, since they would clearly see that in some parts of Ontario, companies are making a smaller profit on every litre of gas than they would make in a regulated province.

Timing is not on the NDP's side either. When they came out with their idea of a price cap back during the election, Quebec had done the number-crunching and analysis for them. A report from the Quebec Energy Board in 2011—which is on the Internet—examined the proposal to regulate gas prices in Quebec, based on the same arguments used by the NDP today. Quebec's board looked at every aspect of the provincial regulations already enacted elsewhere and found something very interesting: Regulation didn't do one thing to reduce prices. Average weekly prices in Montreal and any given regulated provincial capital tracked each other perfectly over the past few years. Moreover, when world gasoline prices decreased, consumers were left overpaying for their gas until the regulator changed the price. When prices increased, suppliers were left selling at a lower margin until the regulator intervened.

This may shock some of my colleagues in the chamber. The same province that regulates font sizes on billboards and advertisements decided against regulating gas prices. I have to repeat myself: Quebec decided

against regulating something. The board said that Quebec is too big to enact anything meaningful, and the market was too large, and there was no added benefit to regulation. Quebec's only contribution to regulation is a decades-old provision to set a floor price, which is something that we don't want to get into.

The minimum prices this week are 129.5 cents in Halifax; 124 cents in Charlottetown; 133.4 cents in St. John's, Newfoundland; and 129.7 cents in New Brunswick, plus 2.5 cents delivery. Most of these prices were set on May 11. On that same day in Ontario, we had gas stations selling regular in Cornwall at 122.9 cents, 127.6 cents in downtown Toronto, 125.4 cents in Kitchener and 131.9 in Sudbury.

I'm sure my colleagues will let you know more about the details of various regulations, so let me tell you about gouging. Real gouging occurs when consumers do not know what the real price is. It takes two to tango, so for gouging to occur, we must have a dishonest retailer. Only recently, three gas providers in Brockville and Kingston were handed fines and punishments for gas fixing. There are rules against that.

1630

The NDP wants us to believe Ontarians are being gouged by oil companies. Nothing could be further from the truth. In 2000, the Ontario PC Party sent a travelling commission across this province on the topic of gas prices. People were anxious and wanted answers. My colleague from Durham will be able to give us more details later, as he was on that commission and drafted some of the recommendations, which are still excellent policy.

This province must strive to have the best-educated consumers in the country. The NDP will pander the easy fixes without regard for the consequences. Nobody in this chamber can change the price of RBOB gasoline at the New York harbour, or the world price of oil. What we can do and should do is ensure transparency in how fair prices are set across the province. A consumer who knows what a truly fair price is for today will spot a gouger from a mile away.

Smart consumers? Any day. More pen-pushers and bureaucrats running our lives; more government bungling? No thanks.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I must say, I've been amazed with some of the statements that have been going on in this House. It's just overwhelming.

But I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, they say they can't do anything about it. Isn't this special? The federal government in Ottawa under Mr. Harper—I'm sure he has people who represent him who go to talk to OPEC, the oil producers of the world. Why is the cost so high? Well, we'll start in Ottawa and work our way west.

The reason it's high is because we are making people in Saudi Arabia, Libya and all the other oil-producing countries very, very rich. A very few people are very, very rich, and most of their population is suffering in

poverty. We are doing that. We go along with this all the time.

How do we correct this problem? They're not the only people that can produce oil. There are enough oil reserves and enough gas reserves and other sources of energy in Canada to last us about 500 years. All we have to do is tap into it. Then, other than the fact that we're making them rich, the sources in North America are huge; our alternative energy sources are plentiful. We're even working on new ones.

Now let's talk about maintenance costs. Maintenance costs in the old days in the refineries, when I was a tradesman, were very labour-intensive and expensive, but now the refineries are run with maybe four or five guys. They have computers; they have technology. Where it would have taken 200 or 300 guys to run a refinery, a handful can run it now: more profit for the shareholders, more profit for big business, more profit for the rich guys. That's what's going on.

When people stand up here and say that the NDP is trying to lead the public in a different direction that's going to cost them more money, that's absolute nonsense. We are trying to save the people of this province and this country money.

Why aren't we developing our own alternative? They want to build a pipeline in Alaska down here, and now the President of the United States has done a 180. He didn't want it at first because he didn't want it going through their prime lands, North Dakota, South Dakota. He didn't want it to go through, that pipeline. Now he's done a 180, realizing that he's being gouged by all these other countries. He wants to be self-sufficient, so what's he doing? He's going to okay the pipeline to go through those cherished areas, the Badlands and all that in the northern United States. So there's a lot of stuff going on here, really.

Now, how does it filter down to the province? Now we're moving west towards Toronto. They talk about the prices. Our leader is simply saying that if a person in Toronto gets a week's notice on prices that may go up because somebody burped in Libya or something happened in Venezuela—well, I've got news for you, Speaker. The bottom line here is this: Do you know that on all the oil crises and all the problems we had in North America the last four times, they didn't even tap into their reserves? The Americans did not even tap into their reserves. Who's getting gouged? We are. Who's getting rich? Very few. That's what's going on here.

Then, yes, there is the odd retailer that may take advantage of the situation. You tell me how it can go up six to 15 cents a litre at 11:59, and at 12:01 it goes up. How? What happened? Did somebody's refinery break down in Libya? Did a few tankers overturn on the 401? I don't think so. It's called gouging, and it goes on all the time, and we keep taking it and taking it.

The government in Ottawa does nothing. This government does nothing. The people wonder, "Why am I paying \$1.40?" Then you go up north, and it's even more.

What's going on here? Someone's playing games. We've got a shell game going on here between the oil-producing countries, between our governments and between the manufacturers of the oil in Canada and the States.

We actually ship it away, too. We ship it down to the States. They're saying—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: I remember when it was like 50 cents a litre. I remember when it was 32 cents a litre. Now it's \$1.60. Their maintenance has gone down, their production levels have gone up, and their reserves are intact—never been touched. Then they stand up and say, "Oh, they're trying to create a problem here."

I'm going to let other people speak. It is extremely frustrating, Speaker, to have people stand up here and stand up for the oil companies, stand up for big business, stand up for the people gouging the people of Ontario. You people should be ashamed of yourselves.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a delight to have the opportunity to get a few words on the record about gas prices across the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Well, to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, I want to give him that information. The time is 4:45 p.m. I just want to let everybody know in this House that the price of a litre of gasoline close to my home, at Pioneer on Lansdowne Street East, four blocks from my home, is \$1.216. Peterborough has some of the lowest gasoline prices in the province of Ontario, and we're very proud of that.

Applause.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Last Friday, I was in beautiful Stirling, Ontario. I got a standing ovation from the nice crowd with my friend the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, and this afternoon I got a standing ovation from the caucus of the third party, so we must be doing very well.

Speaker, Ontario has always asked the federal government to put some teeth in the Competition Act. Just today, I asked legislative research to take a look at something. There's a great letter that was presented by a former, very distinguished member of this House when he was the Minister of Government Services: the Honourable Gerry Phillips. I just want to quote from this letter. He sent it to Ms. Sheridan Scott, the commissioner of the Competition Bureau of Canada. He said in this letter, "Hurricane Katrina was a tragedy and had a deep impact on all of us. While the disruptions experienced in the wake of Katrina and speculation about Hurricane Rita are bound to impact on fuel prices, it fails to explain why prices in Ontario rose more than those in neighbouring states in the US. It fails to explain why prices are varying so severely between various cities, towns and regions across the province. It fails to explain why prices were so quick to go up, yet are so slow to go down, especially in some regions of the province."

This was in 2005. "Prices in the Windsor-Chatham corridor have been seen as high as \$1.80 per litre, completely counter to the current market trend. There are reports of gasoline charges in Waterloo as high as \$1.99"—hopefully not for the by-election. "These do not reflect the market as a whole and give consumers the false impression that there is a shortage of gasoline.

"The federal Competition Bureau needs to exercise its authority to ensure that Ontarians are paying a fair price for fuel across the province. We need to be sure that consumers are being protected from an excess of market power that is concentrated in the hands of a small number of energy companies.

"To that end, I am requesting that the Competition Bureau investigate the refining, wholesale and retail gasoline markets in Ontario, and report its findings promptly as this is a concern that affects all Ontarians" and everyday households.

"Sincerely.

"Gerry Phillips

"Minister of Government Services

"Government of Ontario."

Mr. Phillips was right, back in 2005, and that sound approach is just as right today.

I am very, very pleased that we have a new commissioner of competition in Ottawa, a person I have great respect for, Melanie Aitken.

I want to quote from what she said on April 13, 2012, commenting on price-fixing that occurred in 2007 in Belleville, Ontario:

1640

"'We are committed to pursuing those who engage in anti-competitive behaviour that harms Canadian business and consumers,' said Melanie Aitken, Commissioner of Competition. 'Illegal agreements between competitors to fix prices deny consumers the benefits of competitive prices and choice.'

"On March 20, 2012, Pioneer Energy LP, Canadian Tire Corp. and Mr. Gas pleaded guilty to fixing the price of retail gasoline from May to November 2007 in Kingston," Brockville and Belleville "and were fined a total of \$2 million.

"Price-fixing conspiracies are difficult to detect and prove. High or identical prices are not in and of themselves evidence of criminal activity. There must be evidence that competitors have made an illegal agreement to set those prices. When there are substantiated allegations of wrongdoing in the marketplace, the bureau will not hesitate to take" firm action."

Madam Speaker, you can certainly see that this is the purview, of course, of the federal Competition Bureau. I certainly encourage—

Hon. James J. Bradley: What are the prices in Nova Scotia?

Mr. Jeff Leal: In Nova Scotia, the prices are high. The Minister of the Environment just asked me a question here with Darrell Dexter and the NDP government. In Nova Scotia, the prices on April 24,

2012, were \$1.03 a litre of gasoline. So that compares to 121.6 cents in Peterborough.

What the NDP is telling me is that they want to fix prices in Ontario at 140.3 cents and gouge the little guy. You know, what have you done for the little guy lately? When you see the concept of fixing those high prices at 140.3 and the little guy in Peterborough who can get it at 121.6, this is not to the time to regulate gas prices at a provincial level.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Yes, it's interesting enough that the Minister of the Environment—I think we should ask the new federal leader of the NDP, Mr. Mulcair, the former Liberal environment minister of the province of Quebec, to stand up in Ottawa and demand that we have a select committee, perhaps, to look into price-fixing in Ottawa, take the evidence from the federal competition commissioner and get to the bottom of the price of gas. Don't regulate it. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to participate in this important debate. I just want to make sure that the viewers are familiar with what the opposition day motion is: "That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to task the Ontario Energy Board with establishing a weekly ceiling on gas prices in order to reduce price volatility, regional price differences and tackle price gouging and other anti-consumer industry practices"—a laudable goal and a topic that's been talked about by almost every party that's ever served in public office. I think there's a lot of contradiction in that. I think the marriage between the McGuinty government and the NDP is coming to an end.

Now, let's put it this way. If I look at my riding of Durham, I can tell you right now that I've had several calls in the last while on this. Over my 17 years, I would say every year it fluctuates, and the number of calls is usually an indicator of, are we reaching a threshold where the government should do something about it? I want to thank Tracey Richards, Dena and Larry Thompson, Tim Smith, Kevin Kuipers, Brian Hammond and Ronald Mitchell, who have recently been in touch with my constituency office.

The reason I mention that is that I often refer them to the fine work that was done under the leadership of then Minister, now Senator, Bob Runciman. Senator Runciman has been very ably replaced by the next speaker on the Conservative side, on the Tim Hudak team, Steve Clark, so I look forward to his remarks. In fact, his remarks are going to be longer than he thought.

I think it's important to look back at the study commissioned by then Minister Runciman, the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. On June 29, 2000, the task force report was issued. I was privileged to be the co-chair of that task force in June, and it was a knowledge experience; I'll say that. I was privileged to serve with Joe Tascona, Ted Chudleigh and the Honour-

able Dan Newman, who then became the Minister of the Environment. We heard from a litany of consumers here. I would say the CAA was certainly there, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute—I could go on, but there are pages and pages of people that we heard from.

At the end of it all, we actually consulted with other jurisdictions. We actually ended up going—Mr. von Finckenstein was the head of the Competition Bureau at that time, and we appeared before the Competition Bureau in Ottawa.

We came up with 14—with the help of the delegations we heard from and the experts we worked with, we came up with a very convincing report. Laughingly—I mean this humorously—we felt that we wrestled the price to the ceiling, because the longer we consulted, the higher the price went. It's a fact. It was quite—the headlines at the time are a bit disarming. In fact, Minister Runciman was somewhat disappointed with our work, I should say, at the time.

On a serious matter, though, this is a chronic problem. If you put it into some context, we came up with 14 recommendations that I'd like to just briefly review, and I'll tell you why. The recommendations, I believe, are a good piece of advice for the current government. They don't respond to the motion by the NDP, but I would say that the 14 recommendations did talk about day-ahead pricing. That was one of the issues that would take some of the perception of volatility when people fill up their car.

What you find out—actually, government revenue is made of really two parts of tax, and it's important to put that in context. Of the price of gas, about 30 cents a litre is tax. Now, what the McGuinty government did in a stealthful manner is that they increased the price of a litre of gas overnight by about 6 cents. That's with harmonizing of the HST. That's what they did.

Now, in fairness, the federal government, at the time this was going into place, were in the process—the GST was 7%. They had an election promise—Tories keep their promises, unlike Premier McGuinty—that they were going to reduce the HST. A lot of people were upset with that decision. I personally applaud the decision that Minister Flaherty made and Prime Minister Harper, and I'll tell you why.

This is a very good example of how it affects the lowest income the most. That's a tax on consumption. A consumption tax affects people. The lower the income, the more of their income is spent. In fact, anything under \$40,000 is all spent. It's actually taxed more than somebody who's putting \$100,000 in a trust fund that is never taxed until some future date, and that could be when they're in Italy on some wine tour spending the money. Do you understand? It's tragic, really, when you look at the unfairness of the tax system in that respect. But he did the right thing. He reduced it over the time.

The Liberal plan, I believe, in the long run—they're going to slip this in, I don't know when. Probably they're going to harmonize the HST to 15%.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, that's what they're going to do. I'll bring some messaging on that.

The NDP won't escape the complications here either. I got some information today, when I looked online. It turns out there's a bit of an online discussion going on between Mr. Mulcair as well as the Liberals in Ottawa. They're actually arguing now, as we speak, to add a carbon tax to gas. Are you aware of that? Mr. Mulcair is. That's going to add about 5 cents to the price of gas.

Now, if you want it both ways, you have to look at those future considerations. The price—a lot of it is controlled in some provinces through regulation that tends to be a price drag. In other words, it's slow up and slow down. In our market, it's fast up and slow down.

Here's the real issue: The gas itself, the actual product itself without the tax discussion, is kind of a global price. It's set at the New York harbour price, and we're price takers. What they do is say the system has about 15 days of inventory from New York to the refinery and from the refinery to the retailer. In that system of inventory, they're always pricing the litre that's just being sold this minute. That's why the price is up fast. When it goes up in New York, it goes up at the gas pump.

1650

They have regions across the province of Ontario, and those regions vary. The farther you are from refining, the more there is a transportation cost component to the price. The biggest price taker in this whole thing is the province, for sure.

I could break that down. It's 14.7 cents, I think. I'm looking for my notes here. It's 14.7 cents. Now, it's cents. It's important to follow this one here, because it's not a percentage. It's 14.7 cents, the ad valorem, and it's 10 cents per litre federally. On top of all that, there's the HST, so 29.7 cents per litre is actually tax—or more. Here's the real issue: The real issue is not the tax. The one thing that Premier McGuinty has control of is actually the ad valorem tax.

If you look at the statistics of the consumption of gas, the revenue for the province actually doesn't go up with the price, except the percentage, the HST portion, because ad valorem tax—the more you buy—if it was \$5 a litre, they'd still only get 14.7 cents. Where they gained on this was the HST. That's where they gained, because if you look at the consumption, as price goes up, the consumption of gas goes down; people decide to take the bus or not take that trip on Sunday or whatever. But with the percentage tax, the HST, the provinces gain. So they really have a double gain on this one. If they want to look at it, that's their business.

Some provinces—and I have a chart here—they have a reduced, or do not charge the HST portion on gas. What Premier McGuinty has done is, you've got this provincial benefit, the Ontario benefit, which is giving you back some of the exceptionally high costs of electricity and other energy.

I'm surprised today that Mr. Bentley isn't here to hear these arguments, because these are important discussions on a file that he should be concerned—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask you to withdraw referencing someone not here.

Mr. John O'Toole: Withdraw that the minister is not here? Okay, I withdraw.

The previous minister, the Minister of the Environment, is here.

Hon. James J. Bradley: A very quick point of order, Madam Speaker: I think you would recognize that he's at estimates at the present time, and that's why he's not here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): That's not a point of order.

Continue.

Mr. John O'Toole: He's probably not answering questions there, either.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Beaches–East York on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Prue: A point of order, Madam Chair: I am the Chair of estimates, and the members of estimates are sitting behind the minister. The meeting had to be adjourned in order to accommodate the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): That's not a point of order.

Continue.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Why would you interrupt this?

Mr. John O'Toole: It is certainly cutting into my speaking time.

Let's look at the trends here. The member from Peterborough did say—and I should say that I have occasion to be in Peterborough quite often, visiting family and things, and here's the issue: Peterborough does have the cheapest gas.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I shouldn't broadcast it, but basically he's right: It's the Pioneer station on Lansdowne Street. There are about three of them that have the cheapest gas. It was 121 cents when I bought gas there on Sunday, I believe it was.

The other part is, when you look at other provinces—I have the trends, and I think our other member mentioned it as well—if you look at it in a relative sense, and this is the price by major city, basically you've got to stay away from Quebec. I don't mean that to be rude, but they have probably one of the highest prices. They have the highest tax. Basically the highest price in gas is Quebec, and I would say that Vancouver is very high too.

They are also setting the table for the next round for the consumer, called the carbon tax, and what's wrong with the carbon tax? Where's the money? What are they doing with it? Every time they say it's a tax and it's for the environment, be wary—be very, very wary, and I'll tell you why.

Originally, the tax on gas was for roads, and if you look at the general revenue, they spend about 65% to 70% of the revenue from gas on roads. I would say to

you that it's spending more on buses than roads. It's going into transit, which could be a whole other debate.

I looked at what's going on across the provinces. In Halifax, the NDP made a decision just recently—this is from the media today—they will not slash the gas tax. This is the NDP government. They need the revenue.

Most of the programs you talk about take money. Where do you get the money? Money is tax. All of the government's money is basically a tax of some sort.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Those are the decisions you want to make. If you tax the oil companies, they'll go elsewhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask you to speak through the Chair.

Mr. John O'Toole: I intend to do that.

I would say, the average retail gas price in Nova Scotia varied from—in January, it was 126 cents and now it's 144.9. So that's a raging debate. It's higher than ours by a considerable—20 cents a litre. You wonder why it's always taxed. Government intervention—“Manitoba Budget Cuts Spending, Raises Taxes.” There's another NDP government. What are they doing? Well, they are raising taxes.

Interjection: It's a mantra.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, yeah; they love it. Basically, I would say that both of the parties on the left of our position have a mantra. It's basically, “Get as much taxes as you can so you can spend it.”

I listen to question period every day, Madam Speaker. Every day in question period, we're wondering where the money went from Ornge and where the money went on some of these solar plants in Windsor to create all these jobs. They waste more money, and it's the poor taxpayer who's taking it in the ear. I can't believe it.

Here's what they're doing in Manitoba. They've decided, the NDP government in Manitoba—this is an indication here—to raise taxes by 2.5 cents a litre. That's the plan. I guess, when they summarize their debate they're going to come up with a conclusive argument that will say, “We have no alternative.” What we said in our report and I'm saying to you now: If the government had any insight at all or wanted to be respectful to the arguments being made, it would ask me to chair a commission. This would be something—I wouldn't be in the House as regularly speaking, but—

Interjections.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Are you fishing for it, John?

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, no. I'd be happy to, because I had the experience of this previous report that we issued back in 2000, and I'm sure we could appear before the Competition Bureau. I think it's appropriate, because what we're calling on here is for the Competition Bureau to make sure that there is no price-gouging, market-rigging or whatever else is going on. But you've got to assume responsibility; about 30% of the price is squarely on Premier McGuinty's desk. He's the one that is taking the biggest slice, more so than the petroleum companies.

HST—look at the gas. It's five to 10 cents a litre that they're getting. And they do nothing and get it. The oil companies—you could argue with them.

Who are the oil companies, by the way? They're shareholders. There's no Mr. Esso. They're shareholders. Who are the shareholders? They're pension plans. Who are the pension plans? They're probably unions and public sector. So you can deal with them the way you wish. They are taxing—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment. I'd ask, if you have conversations, to take them out of the chamber.

Continue, member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much. I did want to get, in the very few minutes I have left here, to the recommendations. Some of them are quite good. Recommendation one is forwarding our submissions to the Competition Bureau with a request for an immediate investigation. That was recommendation number one.

Recommendation two is that the provincial tax collection process is questionable as well—and monitoring of gas prices and publicly posting the monitoring. What's the big secret here? When I went to speak on this, I had to look a lot of stuff up. It took time.

Notice of price increases: This is some good advice. Day-ahead pricing is what it's called.

Mr. Paul Miller: Day-ahead?

Mr. John O'Toole: Day-ahead pricing. It tells you today what the price is going to be tomorrow. It's a good idea. You fill up on the way home or take transit. That's a good idea as well.

Corporate accountability: The government has the right to audit there now.

Transparency and competition in ownership: There is virtually a vertical monopoly in the large capital investment that's necessary.

Fair and accurate and clear information for consumers; put violators on the defensive; shift the burden of proof: That's another thing.

With that, there were 14 recommendations.

Steve Clark wanted four minutes, but he is going to have a bigger video tonight on YouTube, so keep your eye open.

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

1700

Mr. John Vanthof: It's been an honour for me to speak to the House today on gasoline prices. I've heard a lot of very varied views, and I'd like to bring it back to my home area, because people in Timiskaming-Cochrane say, “Well, you know what? If gas prices go up, you can use public transportation.” Well, you know what? We hardly have any. If you want to get to Toronto, soon we won't have a train, so we can't even use public transportation on the train. So it's pretty important to us. Right now, we have no guarantee what the bus prices are going to be either. Once again, we are very concerned about gas prices.

I'd like to thank the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce, who did a study last year about gas prices in my region. There were four months last year where Temiskaming Shores had the highest gas prices not in Ontario but in Canada.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: In Canada. I heard someone say, "You know what? It's all about how far you are from the refinery." But gas to the south of us is cheaper, and gas to the north of us is cheaper.

Mr. Paul Miller: What happened?

Mr. John Vanthof: What happened to the transportation part?

Now, I heard the member for Durham say, stay away from Quebec.

Interjection: Honourable member.

Mr. John Vanthof: He is an honourable man. I really get along with him well, but he said, stay away from Quebec—stay away from Quebec for gas prices.

When you live in New Liskeard, most people tank in Quebec because as of today—and it's always like this. Okay? Gas in New Liskeard today is \$1.37.9. Fifteen minutes away in that high-priced, regulated regime, taxed regime of the province de Quebec—

Mr. Paul Miller: How much?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's \$1.27.9.

Mr. Paul Miller: What happened? What happens?

Mr. John Vanthof: Someone mentioned, "Well, we fixed this with the northern energy credit." But the northern energy credit is on a lot of issues, and one other issue in our area—a lot of people don't have access to natural gas, so they heat with oil. When you heat with oil, and you have no access to public transportation, \$200 a year doesn't make a big hit.

So the one thing that we, in my area, are really pushing for is that the price—and it's in this motion—should be regulated weekly, but it should be regulated regionally, because it shouldn't be that within 20 minutes or within an hour that it makes 10 cents of difference. It shouldn't be, because it doesn't cost 10 cents to transport gas one hour.

Folks, we can all have our big plans and our big ideas, but at the end of the day, someone has to take responsibility and make sure that parts of the province like ours aren't discriminated against continually. If you're not going to give us a train, at least have reasonable gas prices.

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

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm happy to speak to this. Here's why we ought not to support this opposition day motion.

First of all, all problems, all issues, have a context, so let's see what today's actual context of this motion is to fix the price of gas. Today, this is the situation.

On April 24, 2012, Newfoundland—they've got regulation there—in St. John's, Newfoundland, \$1.40.7 a litre; Prince Edward Island—they've got regulation—April 24, 2012, \$1.34.4 in Charlottetown; Quebec, which

has a partial ban on cost-selling in Montreal: on April 24, \$1.40.3; Nova Scotia pump price, April 24—yes, they started their regulation in 2006, and they're up to \$1.40.3 today. New Brunswick started some regulation in July 2006 also, and in St. John on April 24 they were up to \$1.37.5. British Columbia, which doesn't have any oil—it has to bring it in from the west or from other parts of the North American continent—no regulation, \$1.39.2 in Vancouver. Here in Toronto, Ontario, on April 24, 2012, at the pump in an unregulated market, \$1.30.4, the lowest in the country. They are the lowest in the country. And I'm told today by my good colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt that an hour or so ago, the price here in Toronto is now—

Ms. Soo Wong: It's \$1.28.

Mr. David Zimmer: It's \$1.28 a litre. We are collapsing—so I ask myself the question: Why is the NDP bringing this motion forward? Well, you know, they're just trying to grab some cheap headlines in the paper that the NDP is going to stand up for people and they're going to freeze gas prices, because it's the start of the long weekend. It's the start of the long weekend, and people are going to be filling up their tanks. They're going to be paying \$1.30, or maybe they're going to be paying \$1.32, maybe \$1.28. Nobody likes to be—I get annoyed when I've got to fill up my tank. I'm going to be driving north this weekend, and if gas is \$1.30 or \$1.32, I'm going to fill it up and I'm going to say—

Interjections.

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

Continue, member.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm going to say, "This is really annoying." Just out of losing my temper and being a little annoyed, and if I don't think the thing through, I might even say, for a nanosecond, "I wish they'd freeze prices." But, you know, it's a bad idea. It's a bad idea.

Do you know why it's a bad idea? It's a bad idea because all of the academic studies, all of the economists, all of the independent think tanks, to a person, throughout North America say that freezing gas prices, regulating gas prices, does not work. What it does is it drives down production and in fact ultimately ends up driving up prices.

So I say to the NDP, if you want a real headline grabber now, in addition to this standing up and trying to fuel the fires and saying, "We're in favour of freezing gas prices," maybe if you really want some headlines you should bring in an opposition day motion to freeze the price of milk. That would get you a real headline. Maybe you should bring in an opposition day motion that you're going to freeze the price of bread. Think of the headlines that that's going to get you. How about chocolate bars? The NDP is going to freeze the price of chocolate bars. There's some headline grabbers for you. Ah, but here's one that will appeal: Freeze the price of beer. Freeze the price of beer.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I'd ask the member to keep his remarks to the purpose of the opposition day motion.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm just giving some comparables. If they're going to freeze the price of gas, there are lots of other things. It's the thin edge of the wedge. Once you freeze the price of gas, maybe they're going to freeze the price of toilet paper. Maybe you should think about freezing the price of men's and women's underwear. Think of the headline that would—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I've asked the member to keep his comments within the context—

Interjections.

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

I've asked you to make sure that your comments are within the context of the opposition day motion. I'd remind you of that. Make sure that they're within the context of the motion.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Anyway, methinks the opposition, to paraphrase Shakespeare, doth protest too much.

Anyway, the reality is that gasoline prices are a federal responsibility. The Competition Bureau, under the Competition Act, handles the regulation of gasoline. The Competition Bureau is an arm of Industry Canada. It administers the Competition Act, and one of the responsibilities is to ban predatory pricing, collusion, the abuse of a dominant commercial position, and the like. Of course, the federal responsibilities are quite clear, and they have been regulating the price of gasoline—not regulating the price of gasoline, but stepping in where they have found abuses.

1710

In some of the debate this afternoon, we heard about some issues in Kingston and in Brockville involving Canadian Tire and Pioneer Energy, where the Competition Bureau stepped in and brought down the hammer. They brought down the hammer because there were isolated cases of collusion, price fixing and so on. To keep an eye on the price of gasoline—

Interjections.

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

To the member for Willowdale, to continue.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you. So it is a federal responsibility and the federal government is on to this like a hammer.

The other issue is how the price of gas is determined. The opposition party—they're arguing this motion and supporting it—somehow think that Ontario, all by itself, and Queen's Park, this Legislature, can somehow control the price of gas through regulating the market and so forth and so on.

You know, there is no gasoline that comes from Ontario. It comes from offshore. It comes from the Middle East. It comes from western Canada. The factors that go into calculating the price of a litre of gas here in Ontario, for the most part, are largely, if not completely, deter-

mined elsewhere: in the United States, in the Middle East, in Nigeria, in western Canada.

What would the effect of this NDP motion be? Well, it would somehow create some extra-territorial authority that they think this province has; that we will somehow pick up the telephone, we will pass a piece of legislation, and we will dictate the pricing of gasoline as it comes from the Middle East or as it comes from Alberta or as it comes from the US.

This is just pie in the sky, and I come back to my original remarks. The only reason to bring this motion forward today is to catch some cheap headlines. It seems to me they've been doing it every year at about this time, at the beginning of the summer, typically at the beginning of a long weekend, to grab some cheap headlines.

I'm going to vote against this because this is the thin edge of the wedge. I know the Speaker didn't like me referencing this, but you know, if you're going to do it for gasoline, do it for men's and women's underwear, do it for chocolate bars, do it for bread. This is a silly motion.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It has been some riveting debate this afternoon, hasn't it?

I'm very pleased to be able to provide a few comments on the record in regard to the motion from the third party. Right off the top, I want to say that I'm not going to be supporting this motion. But you know, I'm pleased that the leader of the third party tabled it, because I think it's important that we have this debate. I think the people of Ontario want us to have some dialogue and debate.

You know, we mentioned today—my leader, Tim Hudak, and our energy critic, Vic Fedeli—we tabled a white paper, Paths to Prosperity, because I think we need to be able to put some of these bold ideas out in front of people and have that discussion. That's part of being elected to this place.

And in the spirit of the member for Peterborough—he spoke earlier about gas prices in his riding—I want members of the House to know that just around the corner from my home, at the Real Canadian Superstore in Brockville, I can buy, if I was in my riding, at my home, a litre of gas for \$1.288 today in Brockville.

The other thing I want to put on the record, Speaker, is that I know a number of members have referenced the March 2012 federal Competition Bureau charge for some gas stations in my area and in the city where I live, in Brockville. They were fined \$2 million. But what seems to be lost in this debate is that they were actually charged for gas below the price, so they were charged for giving people a break at the pump. I think some of the media reports have missed that point.

Again, I am pleased to join in the debate today. I'm glad that it's being discussed. Quite frankly, I had a desire to start the conversation on gas prices, based on concerns from people in my riding, and I want to thank a number of them: Adrian and Michelle Starkey, who

wrote me; and also, I think the original one I referenced a few weeks ago in the House, Steve Connors from Kemptville. Many folks have sent me messages on Twitter, posted messages on Facebook, sent me emails and called my office expressing that concern.

The dialogue I wanted to start was actually a couple of weeks ago, on April 23 and 24, based on those comments from my constituents, where I posed a couple of questions to the Minister of Consumer Services. I'm still actually waiting for the minister to utter the word "gasoline." She did say a lot during those two days, but primarily they were discussions about cellphones and funerals and trips. Again, she didn't actually ever mention the word "gasoline."

I've had lots of comments from constituents in my riding. I know the member for Durham mentioned some of the YouTube clips. One constituent who viewed them the other day wrote to me yesterday, and he said he "never heard anyone work so hard to avoid an answer in those two clips."

However, the minister's responses, I think, spoke volumes on how the government has their priorities. As long as they keep collecting taxes on motorists when they fill up at the pump, I think everything is just fine, in their opinion, over on that side of the House.

A number of speakers have spoken about the Victoria Day weekend. When you're involved in a long weekend—in this case, the official start of the summer season—we're all waiting for, and some of us are dreading, that inevitable spike at the gas pumps. Like every motorist, I have to say that I have scratched my head when, out of the blue, the price shoots up, like it did last week in my riding. In Brockville, one day last week, the prices went from 121.9 cents to 130 cents in a matter of a few hours. That, as we all know, is nine cents a litre. But all my constituents who write also point out what that means for a gallon, and when you look at the increase in Brockville last week, it was a staggering 40-cents-a-gallon fluctuation just in that one day.

I'm afraid, though, from our perspective and from my perspective, that while it's great for us to debate this NDP motion, I don't have the confidence that it's going to fix the problem that many members have discussed. It could provide some short-term insulation from price swings, but I think, when everything settles out, which is the case in some other provinces, we're going to be faced with that higher price. I just don't think that that's what consumers want from their government and from their politicians. The unethical behaviour of some of the retailers—to try to implement the regulations that are proposed—I don't think that bureaucracy and more red tape is going to solve this problem.

I certainly think that the motion misses the mark when you involve the Ontario Energy Board and have it responsible for the price at the pump. I cannot imagine going back to Leeds–Grenville and saying to them that I supported a motion that gave the people who are overseeing our electricity prices the opportunity to now set gas prices. You know what? I think what I'd have to do is

I'd have to stop at the Superstore gas bar, fill up my car and get the heck out of town, because I think they'd drive me crazy with all the phone calls. That's the problem. We have to look at consumer protection. When I asked the minister to look at what the federal Competition Bureau was doing—what's the problem with the minister engaging the federal government and having that discussion? The member for Durham made some exceptional points today on the results of his commission, and I know that the member for Durham and some of the other members—my predecessor was involved with that discussion. They sent some recommendations to the federal government.

1720

Folks expect that we've got a minister. The federal government doesn't have a Ministry of Consumer Services. We have a minister. We have a minister who's supposed to look at consumer protection. That's why, when I stood up in the House, I directed my questions to her.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What did she say?

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, as I said, she spoke about cellphones and funerals and a bunch of other things—never uttered the word "gasoline." So while I appreciate the issue and the fact that the timing is geared towards the Victoria Day weekend—again, as politicians, I know our federal counterparts get the same phone calls we get. I would hope they would get more than we do on this issue. But we're the ones that are accessible. We as politicians all attend events in our ridings. I'll tell you, I heard loud and clear from my folks last weekend after that nine-cents-a-litre spike.

Again, we have a role that I think the Minister of Consumer Services can play in terms of engaging the Competition Bureau about what role they can play. Some of my constituents have called the federal Competition Bureau to engage them. They essentially say that we're silent here in the province. So I think there is a role for us to play.

There's also, I believe, a role at the ministry because they do provide education on some other consumer protection issues, yet they are silent when it comes to the fluctuations in gas prices. I do believe that if we are going to have a minister and a ministry that are supposed to stand up for consumer protection, the very least that they can do—the very least—is to help provide that education and understanding on how prices are provided in the province of Ontario. I would hope that, regardless of what the vote is today, the ministry would still engage the federal Competition Bureau to at least open that dialogue on the subject.

As I said, Speaker, I'm not going to support this motion, although I am glad that we are having this discussion. I tried to spark the discussion at the end of April, and I have to tell you, I was extremely frustrated.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Since October, I have learned a lot of things in this House, in this Legislature, but today is maybe one of the more telling learning experiences. I learned today that there is only one party in this Legislature that's willing to stand up for consumers that are being faced with gas gouging in this province, and it's right here: the Ontario New Democratic Party. That's maybe the most telling thing that I have learned since October. The proof is in the pudding.

To the viewers at home, they don't want me to tell you that. They do not want me to showcase that they are not willing to stand up, don't have the guts to stand up, to the oil and gas companies in this province, and never will, really. We've heard it from not only the government side but also the official opposition—not a backbone in their bodies to stand up once and for all.

I'll point to some history here. In 1994, guess what gas prices were? Forty-nine cents a litre. In 2000, when the Harris government took over, it jumped to 72 cents a litre. So today in Windsor it's about \$1.28.

We've heard nothing on either side of this House, the opposition or the government side, of any willingness to tackle the gouging and collusion that goes on within our international gas pricing structure. Yet here we are, the small party that punches above its weight, no doubt, each and every day, ready to propose a modest reform, something that's being done across the country that would call on the Ontario Energy Board to apply a weekly ceiling, as it currently does, the same way it does today, with natural gas and electricity.

I heard one of the members speak about the fact that they wouldn't want the OEB to be the regulatory body, but they do want the federal government to provide some oversight.

I'll tell you something: The federal Competition Bureau has absolutely no legislative teeth to call on the oil and gas companies to provide any rationale for their prices—not one iota of power. They have no strength whatsoever to call on Exxon and BP.

Let's talk about BP's massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Guess what happened to their stock prices? They exploded through the roof after they devastated the environment in the Gulf.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They're doing okay.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They're doing all right, while consumers in this province continue to pay more and continue to get gouged at the pump.

Here is what we are proposing to the viewers watching and tuning in today. We are proposing a weekly gas cap. So, on Monday morning, when you wake up, let's say it's \$1.27 a litre, as it is today in Windsor—for the rest of the week, whether you're a soccer mom or a hockey dad or a grandparent who carpools with their grandkids to take them to various classes, music courses, whatever you're doing, you know the price of gas throughout the week. Here's the beautiful thing: If the price goes down, if the price goes to \$1.24, then we'll take it there, but it cannot rise above that set ceiling on Monday morning.

You're going to vote against that. I'll tell you, I am looking forward to going back to my riding and letting the members of my community know that you guys are going to vote against one simple amount of fairness, something that has never been done because no one has the guts to do it.

Are you scared? Can you not stand up against the oil and gas companies? Here we are, the New Democrats; we're ready to do that.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The member across the way said, "Should we regulate beer and milk?" We already do regulate beer and milk, so why not regulate another fundamental aspect of our economy, gas prices, so that consumers are protected?

I am so proud to stand as a New Democrat today to protect the consumers of the province—something that is probably one of the most contentious issues in our ridings, the price of gas, the volatility.

This long weekend, we know—I'll buy your next tank of gas if it doesn't go up next weekend, Mr. Zimmer. I will. If it doesn't go up, I'll buy your next tank of gas.

I would ask you to consider this modest amount of consumer protection to ensure that the people in our ridings aren't getting ripped off at the pump. Come on, you can do this. You can have the guts to do it. I know the member opposite does have the guts to do it.

Here's something that really escapes the fundamental model of supply and demand when it comes to gas prices. We know they're regulated by the oil-producing nations of the world. It's not supply and demand with the gas prices across the world. It doesn't matter if supply is high and demand is low, or demand is high and supply is low, or they're both equal. It's an economic model of greed that only benefits the massive oil and gas companies.

Who gets ripped off at the end of the day? It's the moms and dads in our ridings. You guys should be ashamed. You have the ability today to stand up and protect them with this modest proposal. Cap gas prices, give people the certainty at the beginning of the week that they can afford to pay the price to get to work or to go about their business on a day-to-day basis.

You can do it, but you've got to have the guts to do it. Today will show your merit in this House. Will you have the will to actually provide some protection for consumers in this province or won't you?

You, too, on the opposite sides, you can do it, too. I'll tell you, the Conservative members, I always appreciated your sincerity, but I always thought you would stand up for consumers, consumer protection. You've got an opportunity to do that here today. Cap the price at the pump. On Monday morning when we wake up, we'll know what it's going to be. If the price goes down, we'll take it, but we're not going to allow it to go up and we're not going to allow people to get ripped off at the pumps.

Madam Speaker, I really appreciate your time, and I appreciate the viewers tuning in today. I expect that if this bill gets voted down, the members opposite and the

official opposition will be absolutely bombarded with letters asking them why they did not support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Certainly, it has been a very interesting debate this afternoon on the opposition day motion brought forward by the leader of the third party. I listened intently to what she had to say. She certainly conveyed the sense that she was very concerned about affordability for consumers, certainly something that we share on this side of the House. However, in bringing forward this motion, which is superficially attractive, which may have some popular appeal, I think the member for Essex will find that sometimes when things are very simple, that is only on the surface.

1730

In fact, this is really a very complex matter. I would suggest that this opposition day motion is a very simplistic approach to a complex problem, because what we know from looking across this country where there is regulation of gas prices, in the five eastern provinces, that in fact it doesn't work. As my colleague from Richmond Hill has shown, as well as my colleague from Willowdale, prices are higher in those provinces.

Prices do vary in terms of some tax differences, but the vast majority of that variation relates to day-to-day fluctuations that we here in Ontario do take advantage of. Studies have shown—the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies published a report back in February 2009. They estimated gasoline price regulation cost the Atlantic provinces some 1 to 1.5 cents per litre. That had also been previously looked at in March 2007. A study prepared by Gardner Pinfold Consulting Economists estimated that regulation in Nova Scotia increased gasoline prices by 0.8 cents per litre.

The problem with this approach is that it simply does not work. Regulated prices will not allow consumers to immediately benefit from overnight drops in wholesale gas prices.

I think it's important to again talk a little bit about how gas prices are determined. We have—let's be frank about it—no control over world oil supplies or prices. Crude oil and fuel prices in North America are highly influenced by world oil markets. International politics plays a very large part and, literally, world oil prices can fluctuate on a daily basis.

We also have heard from my colleague from Peterborough about the federal government's responsibility for ensuring competition in gasoline markets. The Competition Bureau is an arm of Industry Canada and it administers the Competition Act, which, among other things, bans predatory pricing, collusion and abuse of dominant position. We know they've been successful, in fact, with a major prosecution. A number of independent gasoline marketers were convicted for price-fixing in Kingston and Brockville. So the feds are doing what they can in that regard.

Getting back to this issue of affordability that the leader of the third party talked about, we are very con-

scious on this side of the House of the need to ensure that all Ontarians can continue to budget and look after their daily affairs in a reasonable fashion. This is why we have taken so many measures over the past number of years to make life more affordable for Ontario families. People, I'm sure, will remember our tax reform package, cutting income taxes for 93% of Ontario taxpayers, saving the average family about \$355; the Ontario clean energy benefit, reducing electricity costs by 10% for families, farmers, seniors and small businesses; and we brought in up to \$1,025 in annual tax relief for seniors through the Ontario energy and property tax credit. We've been doing a lot in that regard.

Of course, we'd like to do more. We have the home renovation tax credit for seniors, unfortunately being held up because of bell-ringing; our Landlord and Tenant Act, where we're going to regulate rent increases—something else that is being held up. All these efforts are clearly to make life more affordable for Ontario families.

The leader of the third party also talked a little bit about having to use your car. In York region, traditionally a very suburban area, I must commend the regional government for the strides they've made in terms of York Region Transit and Viva. In fact, the town of Markham has established a really remarkable network of bike trails and hiking trails so people can actually access their convenience store on foot or by bike.

There are alternatives. We need to be mindful. We would be far better putting our efforts into solutions like that than this simplistic approach to a complex problem.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to take you on a ride through my riding. It's quite a vast riding, quite large—just finished doing a search. Just to give you an idea, you start through the southern part of the riding, which would be in Killarney, Nairn Centre, Espanola; you'd have your Manitoulin Island. Work your way towards the north end towards Chapleau, Wawa and my furthest end, which would be Manitouwadge and Hornepayne. There's a 14-cent difference in between, travelling in Algoma–Manitoulin.

Just to give you an example, in Espanola, the gas is selling at \$1.307. In Elliot Lake, it's at \$1.349. Then you go into Mindemoya, which is on Manitoulin Island, the central part of Manitoulin Island; it's sitting at \$1.389. Then let's head up towards Wawa, which is the northern part of the riding—which is normally where a lot of the people leave from the southern part of the riding to go enjoy some of the lakes, the benefits, the travel, the scenery that you have there. Once you get into Wawa, you get hit with \$1.439. Then let's take it a little bit further. You get into White River—there's excellent fishing up there. You've got to come up to White River. There is great pickerel fishing up there, but I won't tell that—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Oh, yeah, it's just great fishing.

But for somebody who's going up there, guess what? You're going to be surprised with \$1.479. Then at the furthest tip into Manitowadge, which is close to—as the crow flies away from Hornepayne, it lowers itself at \$1.39.

The point that I'm trying to make here is that just in my riding, you're looking at anywhere between 12 to 14 cents' difference, which is very difficult for some of these communities to survive and to even attract individuals to come to their community to benefit from the scenery they have there.

The one member a while ago said that we're looking for headlines. This happens every weekend. These are the prices that we are here with today, today being—oh, jeez—the 15th. Well, you know what's going to happen on Friday morning? I will love to come back and give you an update on these prices, because they're going to go up.

I enjoyed hearing what my colleague from Essex here had indicated in his speech. If you're tuning in late, you've got to tune in to what the member said. He just eloquently explained as far as this is a very small step which is a big step for people back home, as far as what we're trying to accomplish here.

With that, I'll leave it with others to speak. But I hope you enjoyed your trip through Algoma-Manitoulin because it's going to be a costly one for you if we don't do something about these gas prices.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to speculate on how the vote might come out on today's opposition resolution. I was surprised the other day when there was a motion before the House to, in effect—you may not agree with me—gut the Endangered Species Act. The member for Haliburton brought that motion. I thought—well, I'm thinking today, “Will those two parties vote together or not?” Then I saw the NDP and I said, “Don't worry, because I know Ruth Grier was a strong environmentalist, and Bud Wildman.” I said, “Don't worry. The NDP will stand up for the endangered species of this province”—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I'd ask the member to restrict his comments to the opposition motion for today.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As with gas, Madam Speaker, I'm wondering how the vote is going to go, because most of the NDP caucus on that occasion—who knows what will happen today—voted with the Conservatives to gut the Endangered Species Act. I won't tell anybody in the environmental movement until next week about this. There's a shock out there. So when I look today, I'm speculating. Will the Conservatives and the NDP, on a matter of this kind, be on the same side again? I just cannot speculate on that.

1740

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You digress.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know, I digress. I understand that.

I used to think that this was controllable. But I remember every Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, as it was called then, or energy, no matter what party, had the same page in the book. I'd always say, “Go to page 46,” and the answer would be, “We are now looking at the price of gas, and it's a federal responsibility.” That same book went through the Conservatives, it went through the NDP, it went through the Liberals.

Actually, one Conservative gave an honest answer one day. He was a very nice man, Mr. Saunderson. I had to go over to him because he was really in trouble for doing it and say, “That's not the answer that's in the book. I know it's the real answer, but it's not the answer in the book.” He was talking about how it's really very challenging to be able to deal with gas prices. Largely, they're controlled by speculators in New York City, who probably support the Conservatives somehow.

You know how they're talking about the environmentalists getting money from offshore? I have a suspicion that the anti-environmentalists get the same kind of money.

I just hope this vote doesn't go the same way as the endangered species vote, where the NDP and the Conservatives voted to gut the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Beaches-Woodbine.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I listened intently to the minister who just spoke, and I want to assure him, I don't think there was anyone in the NDP who was voting to gut the Endangered Species Act. Certainly our caucus was, I admit, divided on a private member's bill.

In any event, I want to get back to this motion. This is a pretty simple motion. It calls for a one-week cap. It isn't going to cap it for all time. It's going to cap it every week so that people know during the week, “Do I rush out to fill up tonight? Do I get in a long, long lineup?”

What happens now is that when I'm driving home, the radio comes on and says, “You better gas up your car tonight, because at midnight it's going up four cents a litre,” and I see all the people lined up in a panic to save two bucks on a 50-litre fill-up. I see this. People know that it's going to happen, but they don't know why. They don't know why because world markets don't fluctuate that much.

Look at the world markets. Every time there is a crisis, the cost of a barrel of oil goes up. It spikes. I remember in my lifetime all the big spikes. The OPEC oil crisis was the first one, and then you had the Gulf War, and then you had Hurricane Katrina, and every single time the price of a barrel of oil spiked because it was more difficult to obtain that oil. But even in all of those spikes, we never paid \$1.32 a litre. Today the cost of a barrel of oil in Canada for West Texas crude is \$97, or perhaps even today \$96 a barrel. Oil has spiked as high as \$140 a barrel, and we did not pay \$1.32 at that time.

So you have to understand, it's not the cost of the barrel of oil; it is the cost of many things—perhaps

refinery; perhaps the hated HST, which added 8%. You have to know that that happened too. You have to know that that's part of the cost.

It's also because the oil companies are filthy, filthy rich. They make more money in this country than the banks. You have to know that that's true. And you have to know that we need, as consumers, protection from people who have a virtual monopoly on the cost of crude. There are only the five big sisters. That's all it is. That's what they're called: the five big sisters. They're all foreign-dominated, foreign-owned. One of the members asked earlier—it's all owned by hedge funds and groups of retirement funds. It's all foreign-owned. None of it is controlled in Canada. The last oil company that was controlled, Petro-Canada, was sold off. It's now foreign-owned too, and all the money flows out of Canada. Even though the oil is ours, the refinery and everything that goes with it flows out of the country, and the only people getting ripped off are consumers.

I also have to think about how many times—and I've been here now 11 years—people in this Legislature stood up and tried to do something about it. I remember when the member from York West, Mario Sergio, had a couple of bills on this very thing, trying to stop gouging. He still sits here as a Liberal, and I'm sure he's going to vote against this today or at least absent himself when the vote comes.

I remember when the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, Michael Colle, introduced two or three bills on this identical topic when he was in opposition. I remember when he did that and how strongly he felt about price gouging and how strongly he felt about protecting consumers.

I remember the former member from Barrie, Conservative Joe Tascona, who stood in this place. He was really quite brilliant, and he really wanted to talk a lot—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The gas-buster.

Mr. Michael Prue: The gas-busters. He talked a lot about that. He was a Conservative, and he wanted desperately to do something.

I remember when Jim Brown was here and all of the things that Jim Brown talked about: protecting the consumers and doing something about the multinational companies ripping off consumers.

Last but not least—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Member, continue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Last but not least, I remember when the current Minister of the Environment, when he was in opposition, talking about gas prices and putting in his own bill to control and to help consumers.

I was here. I've been here 11 years. These are the five that come to my mind. I could have researched and found more because there have been any number of people standing up in this House when they are in opposition, and nobody's standing up, when they're in government, to protect the consumer. That is the absolute reality.

All this bill does is try to protect the little guy who has to fill up his tank if he drives a taxi, who has to drive around the city or some city every day on a tank of gas. That person needs to be protected. We need to protect ordinary people who drive their kids to and from school and who go shopping. We need to protect salespeople who need their car to go from place to place to earn their living. We need to protect the truckers. We need to protect the people who drive buses, all of those who earn their living in transportation, by saying, "At the start of the week, you know the cost, and while you're going around during that week, we guarantee you it cannot go above that line."

This is all this says. The consumer needs some protection. We are not trying to protect the consumer against the world price per barrel of oil. That does not need to happen. That's set on about a weekly basis or so. It goes up or down a little every day, but that is not the key cost. The key cost is the profits being made by the five sisters.

The point has already been made about regional variances. My friend from Willowdale talked a little bit about that and wanted to have a price on underwear or something. I don't understand what he was trying to say.

I will tell you, as you travel around this province, if you travel around a lot, you'll know that there are places to buy gas and places not to buy it.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Peterborough.

Mr. Michael Prue: Peterborough's cheap. Belleville's cheap. Kingston's cheap. Windsor's pretty cheap. I'll tell you, when I—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Dunnville's cheap.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yeah, Dunnville's cheap. But there are places that aren't cheap, and I'll tell you, most of those are in isolated places and in the north. If we can sell beer and we can sell alcohol for the same price in Toronto as we sell it in Moosonee, then there is no reason that people who live in more isolated places can't pay the exact same price as we pay here in Toronto or we pay in—

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

Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 5. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1750 to 1800.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 5.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bisson, Gilles
Campbell, Sarah
Craitor, Kim

Horwath, Andrea
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
Miller, Paul

Schein, Jonah
Singh, Jagmeet
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique

DiNovo, Cheri
Forster, Cindy

Natyshak, Taras
Prue, Michael

Vanthof, John

Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Elliott, Christine

MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McMeekin, Ted
McNaughton, Monte
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine

Takhar, Harinder S.
Thompson, Lisa M.
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Those opposed will please rise.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael

Fedeli, Victor
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoskins, Eric
Jackson, Rod
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Leone, Rob
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLaren, Jack

Milligan, Rob E.
Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Oraziotti, David
Pettapiece, Randy
Piruzza, Teresa
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 17; the nays are 68.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This house stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1804.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
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
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
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	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development and Innovation / Ministre du Développement économique et de l'Innovation
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
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
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
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	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
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
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
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
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
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	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
Vacant	Kitchener–Waterloo	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Bob Delaney
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Teresa Piruzza
Bob Delaney, Victor Fedeli
Cindy Forster, Monte McNaughton
Yasir Naqvi, Teresa Piruzza
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: David Oraziotti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: David Zimmer
Sarah Campbell, Michael Coteau
Joe Dickson, Rosario Marchese
David Oraziotti, Laurie Scott
Todd Smith, Jeff Yurek
David Zimmer
Clerks / Greffiers: Tamara Pomanski (pro. tem), Sylwia Przezdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Bill Mauro
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Phil McNeely
Donna H. Cansfield, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Jim McDonell
Phil McNeely, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Présidente: Laura Albanese
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Shafiq Qadri
Laura Albanese, Teresa J. Armstrong
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Mike Colle
Frank Klees, Jack MacLaren
Paul Miller, Rob E. Milligan
Shafiq Qadri
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Gilles Bisson, Donna H. Cansfield
Steve Clark, Garfield Dunlop
Jeff Leal, Lisa MacLeod
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Reza Moridi, Jerry J. Ouellette
Liz Sandals, Jagmeet Singh
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Michael Coteau, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Mario Sergio
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Ted Chudleigh, Dipika Damerla
Cheri DiNovo, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Ernie Hardeman, Tracy MacCharles
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 15 May 2012 / Mardi 15 mai 2012

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Strong Action for Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2012, Bill 55, Mr. Duncan / Loi de 2012 sur une action énergétique pour l'Ontario (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 55, M. Duncan

Mr. Jack MacLaren	2363
Ms. Cindy Forster	2364
Mr. Yasir Naqvi	2365
Mr. John Yakabuski	2365
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	2365
Mr. Jack MacLaren	2365
Mr. Paul Miller	2366
Ms. Soo Wong	2367
Mr. John Yakabuski	2368
Mr. Michael Mantha	2368
Mr. Yasir Naqvi	2368
Mr. Paul Miller	2369
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	2369

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Jim McDonell	2369
Hon. Michael Chan	2369
Mr. Joe Dickson	2369
Mr. Tim Hudak	2369
Mr. Bob Delaney	2369
Mr. John O'Toole	2369
Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield	2369
Hon. Laurel C. Broten	2369
Mrs. Teresa Piruzza	2369
Hon. Glen R. Murray	2369
Hon. Michael Gravelle	2369
Miss Monique Taylor	2370

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Hydro rates

Mr. Tim Hudak	2370
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2370

Energy policies

Mr. Tim Hudak	2370
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2371

Gasoline prices

Ms. Andrea Horwath	2371
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2372

Energy policies

Ms. Andrea Horwath	2372
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2372
Hon. Christopher Bentley	2372

Energy policies

Mr. Victor Fedeli	2373
Hon. Christopher Bentley	2373

Anti-bullying initiatives

Mr. Peter Tabuns	2373
Hon. Laurel C. Broten	2374

Nurses

Ms. Soo Wong	2374
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2374

Energy policies

Mr. Monte McNaughton	2374
Hon. Christopher Bentley	2375

Privatization of public services

Mr. Paul Miller	2375
Hon. Dwight Duncan	2375

Business support programs

Ms. Tracy MacCharles	2375
Hon. Brad Duguid	2376

Air ambulance service

Mr. Frank Klees	2376
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2376

Horse racing industry

Mr. Taras Natyshak	2377
Hon. Dwight Duncan	2377

School nutrition programs

Ms. Helena Jaczek	2377
Hon. Eric Hoskins	2377
Hon. Laurel C. Broten	2378

Mining industry

Mr. Norm Miller	2378
Hon. Rick Bartolucci	2378

Ontario savings bonds

Ms. Cindy Forster	2378
Hon. Dwight Duncan	2378

Tourism

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza	2379
Hon. Michael Chan	2379

Continued on inside back cover

Continued from back cover

Air ambulance service

Mr. Frank Klees	2379
Hon. John Milloy	2379

Member's birthday

Mr. Michael Prue	2380
------------------------	------

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS**

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	2380
-------------------------------------	------

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Dave Steckle

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	2380
----------------------------	------

Calypso water park / Parc aquatique Calypso

Mr. Grant Crack	2380
-----------------------	------

Suicide prevention

Mr. Robert Bailey	2380
-------------------------	------

Anti-bullying initiatives

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	2381
------------------------	------

Roger Conant

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield	2381
-------------------------------	------

Property rights

Mr. Randy Hillier	2381
-------------------------	------

Mining industry

Ms. Sarah Campbell	2381
--------------------------	------

Ajax Bomb Girls

Mr. Joe Dickson	2382
-----------------------	------

Visit of Polish Prime Minister

Mr. John Yakabuski	2382
--------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	2382
Report deemed adopted	2382

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Helping Ontarians Enter the Skilled Trades Act,
2012, Bill 91, Mr. Dunlop / Loi de 2012 visant à
faciliter l'accès aux métiers spécialisés en Ontario,
projet de loi 91, M. Dunlop**

First reading agreed to	2382
Mr. Garfield Dunlop	2382

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Police Week / Semaine de la police

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	2383
-------------------------------	------

**Sexual Assault Prevention Month / Mois de la
prévention de l'agression sexuelle**

Hon. Laurel C. Broten	2383
-----------------------------	------

Public works and infrastructure

Hon. Bob Chiarelli	2384
--------------------------	------

Police Week

Mr. John Yakabuski	2385
--------------------------	------

Sexual Assault Prevention Month

Ms. Laurie Scott	2385
------------------------	------

Public works and infrastructure

Mr. Frank Klees	2385
-----------------------	------

Police Week

Mr. Taras Natyshak	2386
--------------------------	------

Public works and infrastructure

Mr. Taras Natyshak	2386
--------------------------	------

Sexual Assault Prevention Month

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	2386
------------------------	------

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Water quality

Mr. John O'Toole	2387
------------------------	------

Family caregiver leave

Ms. Soo Wong	2387
--------------------	------

Suicide prevention

Mr. Robert Bailey	2387
-------------------------	------

Taxation

Ms. Cindy Forster	2387
-------------------------	------

School facilities

Mrs. Laura Albanese	2388
---------------------------	------

Horse racing industry

Mr. Steve Clark	2388
-----------------------	------

Anti-bullying initiatives

Mr. Toby Barrett	2388
------------------------	------

Ontario Northland Transportation Commission

Mr. John Vanthof	2389
------------------------	------

School facilities

Mrs. Laura Albanese	2389
---------------------------	------

Air ambulance service

Ms. Sylvia Jones	2389
------------------------	------

Dog ownership

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	2389
------------------------	------

Aggregate extraction

Mr. Jim Wilson 2389

Tourism

Ms. Sarah Campbell 2390

Protection for people with disabilities

Ms. Sylvia Jones 2390

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION

Gasoline prices

Ms. Andrea Horwath 2390

Mr. Reza Moridi 2392

Mr. Jim McDonell 2393

Mr. Paul Miller 2395

Mr. Jeff Leal 2396

Mr. John O'Toole 2397

Mr. John Vanthof 2399

Mr. David Zimmer 2400

Mr. Steve Clark 2401

Mr. Taras Natyshak 2403

Ms. Helena Jaczek 2404

Mr. Michael Mantha 2404

Hon. James J. Bradley 2405

Mr. Michael Prue 2405

Motion negatived 2407