



No. 54

N° 54

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 16 May 2012

Mercredi 16 mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 16 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 16 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES
AMENDMENT ACT (RENT
INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 9, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak this morning on Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Say something nice, Laurie.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I don't know if I can.

Over 1.3 million Ontario families live in rental accommodation of one kind or another, which is quite a large number. Many of these tenant households are struggling to meet their household bills, and I don't think there's a member of the Legislature that hasn't got calls in their constituency office about the struggles that their constituents are having. One in five of these households is paying more than 50% of their income on rent, leaving barely enough for sustainability.

The guideline that people used to be told was that your housing cost should not be more than 25% of your monthly income. I remember when I sold real estate in one of the many jobs that I had before entering the Legislature, when I was helping people qualify and they were looking at houses, that was kind of a guide: 25%, 30% of your monthly income for your housing. Unfortunately, in Ontario that no longer reflects reality. In addition to the difficulties which half of these households are having in

paying their bills, nearly one third of them are living in accommodation that fails to meet the basic standards of adequacy, suitability and, of course, affordability, as I mentioned.

Some 142,000 Ontarians are currently on the waiting list for affordable housing units, and that list is growing. I know it's certainly a large, long list in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. With the price of hydro, how could they afford to stay in their houses? This bill does nothing to address any of this, and these are really serious issues. But this bill does not address it.

I think since the government was first elected in 2003 we've seen a staggering array of tax increases which have deeply affected all Ontarians. It has just been compounded and compounded and compounded. We all remember that within a few months of its election in 2003, the government broke its first promise of "I will not raise your taxes" by introducing the health levy, which turned out to be the largest single tax grab in Ontario's history.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Wasn't that a scandalous thing?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. The imposition of the HST at a time when the Ontario economy was so fragile—people were already struggling and suffering. They introduced the HST when people could least afford it. As my colleague from Leeds-Grenville so aptly pointed out in his remarks on March 28 when he addressed Bill 19, there was a time, not so many years ago, when rent geared to income or some other forms of affordable housing were considered temporary measures until a family got back on its feet. Now it can take families many years to even hope to improve their residential standard of living, and more and more of them are losing hope that they can.

Under this Premier and this government, Ontario has become unaffordable to an ever-increasing number of our citizens. We have hundreds of thousands of people who are unemployed, while the HST increased fees, and soaring hydro rates have eaten away at what little disposable income is left. I hear it every day in my riding. A frightening number of these families are living paycheque to paycheque, and I certainly know that money left at the end of the month is a dream for them. The reality, for more and more people, is that money left at the end of the month is not a dream that they can realize.

My food banks are overwhelmed. In January I was up to Haliburton, to the FoodNet up there, which is a great group of people—Barbara Davis with FoodNet, Rosie Kadwell from the Haliburton health unit; the United Church in Haliburton, who have a food kitchen. They give me updates every once in a while, and they almost cry on the phone, they're so overwhelmed. There are so

many people they need to help, and they just can't meet it.

This current legislation, Bill 19, limits annual rent increases in accordance with a guideline which is linked to the consumer price index for Ontario as reported by Statistics Canada. The bill would amend that to provide a guideline that rent increases would not be less than 1% and not more than 2.5%. We ask, why did the government feel it was necessary to amend that formula? Over the past 10 years, the average rent increase in Ontario was 2.1%. Over the last five years, the average rent increase has been just 1.8%. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the current formula has been working just fine. The government obviously reacted to this year's increase of 3.1%. However, last year, the increases were 0.7%, for a two-year average of 1.9%, well within the range of the current legislation that we're discussing here today.

There is no question that parts of the Residential Tenancies Act are broken and are in desperate need of attention. However, the government has chosen to go after low-hanging fruit and focus its attention on a part of the act which is easy to deal with but has been working fine and doesn't need the attention. As I've said before in this House, this government has mastered the art of illusion, projecting an aura of activity. There's an aura of activity where there is no substance. The Liberal side wanted me to say a compliment, so I congratulate them on being masters of illusion on actually doing something for the people of the province of Ontario.

This government brings in a bill like this, trying to present it as a boon to Ontario's tenants. I don't see them jumping up and down outside, saying, "Yes, pass this bill." It doesn't seem to be happening out there. But the McGuinty government certainly has no reservation about wiping out over 60,000 jobs that are dependent on a healthy horse racing industry. They don't seem to care that those people are going to be unemployed, that they can't pay their mortgages, can't find a place to rent, let alone pay the rent if they do find one.

You have no reservations, in the Liberal government, about perpetuating the disastrous green energy experiments that have driven up our hydro rates to an insane level—and I say that, an insane level—forcing people out of work, out of their homes, looking for affordable housing which isn't available. It has no reservation about ignoring our appeal on this side, the PC Party appeal, to modernize the apprenticeship system, bringing it in line with other provinces in order to generate thousands of new skilled jobs that are actually needed. They could make changes, because our young people want to get into skilled trades, but they're not making that easy, for sure.

It has no reservation about its relentless pursuit to have a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt on the backs of hard-working Ontario families of today and tomorrow—and it goes on for more than a generation, which is very sad. And it has no reservation about its blatant lack of oversight that led to the appalling and disgraceful goings-on at Ornge, and its continued refusal to accept responsibility or permit a full investigation and accounting of this scandal.

This government fritters away billions of dollars on various boondoggles, and who picks up the tab? Who does pick up the tab? I think we all know the answer to who picks up the tab: It's the generous people of Ontario. The buck always stops there. We have millions of them living in rental accommodations that are inadequate or that they simply cannot afford, and this bill, Bill 19, does nothing to address those problems. It's a vicious cycle, and it has been created by this very government that now wants to present, again, this window dressing of a bill to prove that it's actually doing something.

0910

I don't think you can fool the people of the province of Ontario much further. This bill does absolutely nothing to make rent more affordable. It will do nothing to shorten the waiting lists for affordable housing. It does nothing to alleviate the pain that Ontarians are experiencing from the weight of the financial burden this government has placed on their shoulders. It does nothing to stimulate jobs so that the people who are forced to live in or at least seek affordable housing can hope to better the lives of themselves and their families. The bill does nothing to alleviate the distress caused to so many of our citizens who are forced to choose between paying their heating bill and putting food on the table.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Attorney General.

Mr. Laurie Scott: People in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock—they're hurt. Whether it's the high unemployment rate, which is higher than the provincial average; the lack of doctors in their communities; inadequate transportation infrastructure, which stifles investment; the threat to the horse racing industry and its multitude of spinoffs and jobs that they're going to lose; or the unacceptable child poverty levels in Haliburton county, none of this will be eradicated by passing Bill 19.

As my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton said the other day in his remarks, "There's such thin gruel in this bill, I couldn't even find anything to talk about." I really couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker. The present government has put their head in the sand—it seems deeper every day—ignoring what hard-working Ontarians are saying out there. They can no longer afford to live in their houses. They literally are leaving their houses in my riding because they can't afford to pay the bills. So when a piece of legislation like Bill 19 comes up, it's not helping them at all.

Mr. Speaker, you can gather that I'm not going to be supporting Bill 19. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I agree with a lot of things that the Conservative member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock says. In fact, many are saying the same thing, God bless. What does she say? She says rents are very high, which is true. All the three million people who live in rental accommodation earn a third of those who own homes, which suggests there's an income problem.

Wages are very low—at least for those who live in rental accommodation—and the list of people who are waiting to try to get into affordable accommodation is 152,000 long and getting longer every year. I agree with the member from Haliburton that the HST has added an additional burden on that whole income-level category of people who are facing a very difficult time, particularly in an economy where wages are very low.

I agree with her as well that the cap on rent is simply not going to do anything for anyone, because there's still vacancy decontrol, which allows the landlord to increase the rent as soon as somebody moves out—the Conservatives don't speak to that point—and it still allows the landlord to apply for above-guideline increases, which means that they will still get the money they're looking for, and the Conservatives don't speak to that. There's no new housing stock, which is equally true—the Liberals have been quite bad on this front—and the bill doesn't tackle that.

But here's where I have difficulty with the Conservatives. Their solution to all the problems we face is privatizing our hydro agenda, which will increase prices as opposed to decreasing them, and reducing corporate taxes, which is not going to help us at all.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I've been listening to the remarks by the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Let me say, Speaker, that you weren't here, but I was here. The member wasn't here and I was sitting in her place, and I could see Minister Leach on this side here. The day after they came into power, they stopped every building, every construction. Therefore, under their government not one unit of affordable housing was provided.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The Liberals are better.

Mr. Mario Sergio: My friend Rosario Marchese from Trinity–Spadina—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member knows that we don't use names; we use ridings. He almost got it right. Secondly, we don't have cross-dialogue. You go through me, okay? Thank you.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you, Speaker. Trinity–Spadina—is that the right—

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: It is?

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, absolutely.

We have a special relation with my colleague from Trinity–Spadina, Speaker—through you—and I have to say that their record doesn't even come close to the record of the Conservatives when they were in government. Let me say that if it wasn't for our government, a lot of people would be without reasonable accommodations. We have done a lot.

The reason why we have this particular bill at this time is to give tenants in the province of Ontario peace of mind, so they know now that for four years, they know what their rent increase is going to be. We don't leave

them stranded like you did. Therefore, now they can look at things other than concentrating on paying their rent.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. She always delivers a reasoned and thoughtful address here in the Legislature.

I'm a little more concerned about the comments from my friend from York West. He likes to talk about other people's records. He doesn't like to talk about the Liberal record. Well, in that Conservative government, 1.088 million net new jobs were created in that eight-year term of office.

Yes, this bill establishes a floor and it establishes a ceiling for rent increases in the province of Ontario. Whoop-de-do, because people will know that the rent increase won't exceed 2.5%, I believe it was. However, that's not what they're concerned about. They're concerned about 150% increases in their hydro under this government. They're concerned about the bevy of new taxes that have been foisted upon them by the decisions of this government. Oh, wonderful, the rent increase won't exceed 2.5%. What about the millions of seniors who happen to live in their own home, I say to the member from York West, who own their homes but can't even afford the property taxes because when they pay for their hydro and they pay the other taxes that you've put on them—rent increases are immaterial to them.

Whether this bill is passed or not, we still have legislation in place, and by regulation, the government can set the rent increases based on the CPI in the province of Ontario. So they're going up and down, like this is the best thing since the wheel, when in reality they're doing nothing to lessen the burden on struggling families in this province, and that's shameful.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: Good morning, Speaker. Good morning, folks. It feels like Wednesday breakfast club here in the Legislature. We've been debating this bill, Bill 19, for weeks now, it seems, and I feel fortunate to be one of the folks in Ontario who has a job, who had breakfast this morning. I'm really actually concerned that there are too many people who are going to work today without breakfast, going to school without breakfast, or in fact don't have jobs, don't have employment, and won't be eating this morning.

I would like to make sure that we get this bill into committee and bring in folks who are concerned about the high cost of rent, the high cost of their bills in this province, because we need desperately to have that debate. In fact, we need to have that debate with people who are actually struggling, with people who can't pay their rent each month, who can't feed their families every day. They need to be part of this conversation because all of us had breakfast this morning.

This bill does not go nearly far enough. The Metro federation of tenants says that in the last two years, this

bill would only have saved families \$3 per year, and that's simply not enough.

We need real legislation. We need things that do more than make people feel good in here. We need bills that make people feel good in Ontario, that put food in their stomachs. We've had wages frozen in this province, and now we have both sides of the House, the Liberals—the government—and the opposition talking about freezing wages, but we don't talk about freezing rents in this province.

Yesterday, our party brought forth a motion to cap gas prices each week, to provide a bit of reliability on the cost of gas, and both the government and the opposition voted against that. Ontario needs a government, it needs advocates in this House, that are going to make life more affordable for people in this province, and we can't get started soon enough. So I'm hoping that this debate will end soon, we'll send this to committee, and we'll bring people in to talk about this.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has two minutes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the members from Trinity–Spadina, York West, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Davenport, who responded to my comments.

The only reason that we're discussing this bill, as I mentioned earlier, which is Bill 19, is that the minister noticed the 3.1% increase in this year's rent. I mean, she said that's the only reason. The reason the ceiling and the floor have changed to 2.51% is because of this year's rent increase.

The members of the opposition have highlighted the fact that people are struggling in the province of Ontario. It does nothing to address the burdens that they're facing, which I have mentioned: the hydro rates, the HST, the health levy. They're being forced out of their houses because they don't have jobs for various reasons, mostly because of bad government legislation over there. It's ironic that this government has tried to portray itself as kind of the benevolent overseer of its subjects, who unfortunately are the taxpayers of Ontario, while at the same time it does everything in its power to make their lives more difficult and oppressive through this misguided and paternalistic approach to governing.

This bill, Bill 19, is window dressing, as I said. It is nothing more. It has no substance. It doesn't address any of the real problems associated with residential tenancy in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They don't want to address the real problems.

Ms. Laurie Scott: "They do not want to address the real problems," my colleague from Northumberland said. It does not. You know, we have a responsibility to our constituents to address the real problems in the province of Ontario, and we stand up here in opposition and fight every day to make this government aware of them and to say, "Create some substantial legislation that is going to help people in the province of Ontario."

One person in my riding said to me, and I think it summed it up very well, that we are creating a poorer and a meaner province of Ontario under this Liberal government's leadership.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

I just want to point out, as has been pointed out by previous speakers, that in fact, really, this bill does very little except put a cap on any particular year based on the consumer price index. As you know, currently, the annual amount that a landlord can increase the rent is based on the consumer price index of Ontario, which is a measure of inflation, calculated by Statistics Canada. The consumer price index includes items like food, shelter and transportation. I want to point out that an important part of this is the shelter, and obviously the cost to people who have to pay for that shelter.

One of the problems that the McGuinty government is facing is that their policies have resulted in a rapidly increasing consumer price index. For 2011, the consumer price index was 3.1%, so as a result, landlords can increase the rent in 2012 by that same amount—and I think that's very important: why it went up so much that year. There are two ways that the government could have addressed the situation. They could have chosen to address the problem by looking at the cause of the consumer price index going up, or they could ignore the problem and just cap the increase, which, of course, Mr. Speaker, you know is what the government chose.

This bill doesn't solve the problem, it just creates a new one. The consumer price index isn't just a number; it is the percentage that the cost of living is increasing for the people across Ontario: for seniors on fixed incomes and young families who are struggling to make ends meet. These are the people who dread receiving their hydro bills in the mail. These are the people who had to decide what to give up when the government introduced the HST and eco fees and raised the cost of government fees like drivers' licences and other licence fees.

If you went to a tenant in Ontario and said, "I'm going to give you a choice. Option A is I'm going to drive up the cost of items you use every day, but I'll put a cap on your rent increase so at least the landlord can't pass their costs on to you. Or option B: As a government, we are going to look at the impact of our legislation before we pass it, to ensure that we aren't recklessly increasing prices for things you use every day, and driving jobs out of the province. That way, we will make sure that not only will your rent increase stay low, but we will stop the spiralling increases of hydro costs and the extra government taxes and fees." Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, the tenant would choose option B, lower costs, every time. So would the Progressive Conservative caucus. The Liberals, on the other hand, would clearly choose option A. They have shown that, by doubling provincial spending, by signing unrealistic contracts through FIT and micro-FIT, and by introducing the HST.

The calculations of the consumer price index include sales tax, because obviously taxation levels can have a significant impact on prices in the consumer index, when you add the 8%. This government's decision to introduce the HST resulted in provincial sales tax being applied to hundreds of items and services that had previously been exempt, items like electricity, home heating fuel, gasoline, newspaper advertising, haircuts, magazines, postage stamps, dry cleaning, snow removal and legal fees. It was an immediate 8% increase on the cost of hundreds of items. That's a huge impact on the consumer price index and the budgets of families across Ontario.

Just over a year ago, the McGuinty government released the fact that hydro rates are forecast to increase by 46% over the next five years—46%, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the most recent increase went into effect on May 1. That's a huge cost for the consumers of Ontario. It is a huge cost for seniors on fixed incomes, and for families. It's also a significant impact on the consumer price index.

Statistics Canada breaks down the consumer price index in a number of ways, including calculating it without taking into account energy costs. Last year, the rate in Ontario would have only been 2%. That means more than one third of the increased cost of living in our province last year was due to the increased cost of energy. The government wants to cap rent increases at 2.5%. If it wasn't for the increase in energy costs, the consumer price index would have been well below that 2.5%.

Government documents are quite clear that the majority of the increase in hydro rates is due to green energy projects. Taxpayers understand that you can't sign contracts to buy energy for 80 cents, or even 40 or 50 cents, a kilowatt hour without driving up the cost of hydro for everyone and, as a result, driving up the cost of living.

It's clear there is no real plan for energy, Mr. Speaker. We saw that with the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants that the government insisted had to be placed in those locations, only to cancel them later for political reasons, at huge expense. Think of what we could have done with that money: the hospitals we could have built, the schools; the debt we could have paid down. Instead, it cost taxpayers billions of dollars and resulted in lawsuits against the government.

The increasing costs don't just impact consumers; they also impact businesses and landlords. The government is creating problems for landlords that will eventually impact the tenants. The government is increasing costs for landlords, then telling them they aren't allowed to increase the rent to cover the costs, and instead they just have to accept it as a loss. I think protecting the tenants is important, but the government is going about it in the wrong way. To keep rents lower, the government should be addressing the spiralling costs of operating and maintaining buildings, not putting arbitrary caps on increases.

A few weeks ago, I had an opportunity to speak to a landlord who operates a number of apartment dwelling units in Oxford. He said that if this bill is passed, he would be forced to increase rents by the maximum allowable every year, just to protect himself against the

years when cost increases are higher than the allowable rent increase. I don't think that's what the government intended with this legislation. We're also going to have landlords who can't afford to invest in upgrades or even perform proper maintenance on their buildings, because the costs are increasing faster than their rents. Again, I don't think that's what this government intended with this bill. If landlords are losing money, there is no incentive to invest in new buildings to ensure that we have sufficient rental properties available; eventually, that will lead to rent increases.

0930

I wonder whether the government side even tried to talk to landlords about solutions they could introduce in this bill. I worked with the Federation of Rental-housing Providers when I did my private member's bill, Mr. Speaker, and I found that they were a great source of information and very helpful in dealing how it would impact the people that were involved.

Mr. Speaker, this bill addresses the symptoms of the problem and not the cause. It's a little like taking your car to a mechanic because the engine is making a strange noise and he fixes it by modifying your radio so you can turn up the volume louder so you don't hear the noise. Well, we know, Mr. Speaker, if you don't deal with the problem in the engine, it will get worse; just making the sound go away will not fix it.

If the government doesn't address their policies that are putting extra costs on consumers and businesses, there are going to be consequences—like seniors who can no longer afford to stay in their homes, like parents who have to make a choice between buying themselves a winter coat or letting their kids play on a sports team, like businesses relocating to less expensive jurisdictions and taking their jobs with them. The McGuinty government needs to be honest about the impact that their legislation is having on the people of Ontario. It isn't enough to have a piece of legislation, a great-sounding name and have a couple of photo opportunities. The government needs a real plan to get this province back on track. They need well-researched and thought-out policies that will encourage economic growth and jobs. They need to take real steps to fix the financial problems facing this province.

Yet this government seems to be doing the opposite. They introduced a budget that actually increases spending. They don't have a jobs plan, and they aren't addressing the problems, like the increasing cost of hydro, that are driving businesses out of the province. They need to stop treating taxpayers and Ontario businesses like bottomless piggy banks. Whether it's increased taxes, new fees or driving up the cost of essentials like hydro, it all comes from the same place, the same taxpayers who are going to be stuck with the fiscal mess this government is creating, and simply capping rent increases isn't going to fix the problem. I think that we need to be much more involved in making sure that the impact of the legislation is acceptable in dealing with the cost. I want to point out that when the cost of living goes up more

than 2.5%, the cost to run the establishment goes up more than 2.5%. What are the landlords going to do to deal with that?

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's my pleasure rising this morning, as I did in the past, to talk about G19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act. I talked a little while ago about the fabulous young lady from here in the Toronto area—her name was Claire—and the challenges that she faced as a single mother with the concerns with rent, and the challenges that she faced as a single mother not only to find affordable rent, but actually find good care for her child.

But let's put this into perspective as far as what this bill will do. Basically, this bill puts a small dent into—it's a good initiative. It will help some, but it will definitely not help the masses, and that's something that I've said repeatedly on many of the government's bills that have come forward through this Legislature.

We really need to look at improving affordable rents for all of our tenants and protecting their rights. This is something that is essentially missing, but let's just put this into context. How many individuals are affected by it? Over 1.3 million tenant households in Ontario and 125,000 residents living in housing co-ops, accounting for almost one third of the province's population. That's a huge number. When you're actually looking at this bill and what it actually is going to do, for an individual paying \$1,000 a month in rent, we're looking at a \$3 savings at the end of the year.

If we're going to do something, do something serious. Put some teeth in this bill. Really look at some of the proposals that have been coming from across the way. Look at maybe eliminating the HST and how much that is going to be saving. Look at what we proposed yesterday in regard to capping gas prices. That is an immediate savings for these individuals that would help them. Please, I urge this government, put some teeth into what you're proposing.

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

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is my pleasure to speak today in support of Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (Rent Increase Guideline), 2012.

Our government has consistently shown a strong commitment to protecting tenants across Ontario. We've proved that commitment with our Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, which was established to provide strong rent regulations and to keep rent affordable for tenants. We've afforded tenants across Ontario the lowest year-over-over increase of any government in recent memory, at 1.9% on average. Last year's guideline increase was 0.7%, the lowest on record.

The legislation, as written, worked well in the recession period. However, it no longer reflects the current economic circumstances for those who rent, and that's why our government is stepping in to address that. We believe we have to revisit the legislation so that

future increases are in line with what's happening in the real world for tenants in Ontario. That's why we introduced Bill 19. If passed, Bill 19 would ensure that the annual rent increase guideline would be capped at 2.5% and would not fall below 1%.

I must say, in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, this is becoming increasingly important. It's a riding that didn't have a lot of apartments and condos, but that's changing. We have a new development called San Francisco by the Bay on the Frenchman's Bay harbour. So this is becoming increasingly important to folks in my riding and in Durham region.

The proposed changes, if passed, will provide stability and affordability for renters during these uncertain economic times, while continuing to recognize that moderate rent increases allow landlords to maintain their rental properties.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important bill today.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I stand today in total support of my colleague from Oxford and my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, because when you take a look at this bill and you think about the real world that was referenced earlier, the fact of the matter is, people in Ontario are drowning. They're sinking in water, and Bill 19 is nothing but a rock skimming the surface of the water. It isn't comprehensive; it does not go far enough. The fact of the matter is, people are getting their hydro shut off. People just can't afford to live any longer in Ontario as it stands today.

We need a government that's ready to take some bold steps, that's listening to the folks in Ontario and is prepared to do right by them. Doing right by them means making life more affordable; it means lowering the cost of heating their home, making sure life is affordable so that families can enjoy a quality of life that everyone deserves in Ontario.

We're in a sorry state of affairs. I thought it was very interesting to hear that a constituent from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock referred to this province as being meaner. We don't want that. Ontario used to be the economic engine of this wonderful nation, and we're spiraling here. As I said, people are drowning in debt. This province is drowning in debt. It's a sorry state when our government chooses just to skim across the surface.

We need to have policy. We need legislation that will take us in the direction of recovery. We need affordable living under a government that listens, consults and fully understands that we need a comprehensive approach that benefits all Ontarians, as opposed to picking winners and losers. This just doesn't go far enough, and I support my colleagues.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: The United Nations has declared that all people have a right to decent and affordable housing, and that's a principle that our party, the NDP, stands

firmly behind. Canada has ratified this treaty, but the Liberals, in their recent housing strategy, voted down an amendment to make housing a human right, and that's hugely problematic. We have so far to go to create affordable housing here in Ontario.

I was talking to folks from ACORN this weekend. There's real concern about the growth in slum housing in Toronto and across Ontario. Too many landlords are getting away with delaying repairs. They're treating tenants unfairly. They're renting out units with bedbugs—and we need a bedbug solution here, but I don't hear any talk about bringing that forward.

0940

Interjection.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Yes. The Liberal government has absolutely failed to stand up to slum landlords in Ontario.

So we've got tens of thousands of Ontarians who are stuck in rundown and unaffordable apartments because they're waiting for years for affordable housing. During the election, we said we'd build 50,000 new affordable housing units over the next 10 years. The Liberals have promised and not come through with an affordable housing plan. We need to make rent more affordable in this province. We have one in five tenants who pay more than half of their income in rent, and this is why we see a huge growth in food bank use across this city and across this province.

Members here have mentioned it today, but bills keep on going up. The HST on people's home essentials, on their heating and electricity costs, is adding to their expenses. I feel like we have a government that's content to let everyday, regular, low-income and moderate-income people continue to pay extra for the bare basics to live.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the members from Algoma–Manitoulin, Pickering–Scarborough East, Huron–Bruce and Davenport for their comments.

I think it's rather interesting that the comments are generally about the challenges we are facing in the rental market, shall we say, or rental accommodation in the province of Ontario, but that's not what this bill is about. As I mentioned in my original presentation, if it wasn't for the government's actions, this bill would not be needed because, in fact, the rent increase under the present legislation would have been less than the 2.5% that's being proposed in this bill if it hadn't been for the increased cost of the things that government controls. The challenge that I think we face is that that challenge, what the government is doing to the people of Ontario, is not restricted to people who rent accommodation; that same problem exists for the people who own their own homes. Their cost of energy goes up; their cost of heating oil and everything that they buy, their property taxes, are all going up at the same rate that the consumer price index is going up, and this bill does nothing for them, Mr. Speaker. It just does one small thing, which will have very little impact on anyone, because that's not where the prices are going as we speak. What we need is a government that stands up and looks after all the people.

Mr. Speaker, when I get calls in my constituency office from people who can't pay their hydro bills, it's just as likely to be a senior living in their own home as it is someone who is renting accommodation. The challenge is not the cap that's going on there; the challenge is what the government is doing in increasing the cost of living in this province for people who can't afford it. That's why I made that presentation based on that.

I don't object to putting that there. I don't think the 2.5% will have much impact. If you look over the past five years, there would be absolutely no impact. It's a PR bill, as opposed to a government action bill. That's what I think is wrong with this.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate this morning on Bill 19, because, as has been the habit of the government of late, they don't want to speak to their own legislation. Oh, they do what we call a "hit." For those out in TV land, that's when you have a two-minute question or comment on the speech of another member in the House. But they don't seem to want to speak to their own legislation, yet they're calling this a priority piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock earlier today referenced my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton, who described this as pretty thin gruel. Well, this is not a prop, because this is the actual bill. It's one sheet of paper. I'd have to fold this many times to level my chair, Mr. Speaker. There's not much to it, yet the government is calling this a priority piece of legislation.

Priority: They've got the first two letters right, as my colleague from Oxford referred to. Priority: the first two letters are "PR." This is a PR piece. It's not about rental increases. It's not about low-cost housing. It's not about tenants. It's not about landlords. It's another public relations exercise on the part of this government. Each and every time they bring in a new bill, particularly in this Parliament, it is designed by the politicians in the corner office. The message is sent down to the bureaucrats to write a bill that is going to knock off one more of the dominoes, as they say, one more check in the box, to say, "We've now done something to get this group of people on our side." That's what this is about, Mr. Speaker.

All this bill does is establish a floor and a ceiling. Rent increases cannot be less than 1%; rent increases cannot be more than 2.5%. Based on the rent increases of the last five years, the bill would be irrelevant. But one thing that it does do, and it does actually cause me some concern, is that it codifies this for the next four years.

I know that economists make a living forecasting what might happen in this province and any other jurisdiction over a longer period of time. Sometimes they're right; many times they're wrong. It isn't just in that, it's the forecasting business. The guy who's right sometimes gets his articles published in the Wall Street Journal. The guy who's wrong finds out that there's another career out

there other than as an economist. And even the ones who are wrong—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, if you're here, you're likely to become the finance minister. I thank my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West for that witty insertion into my speech this morning. He's not far from the truth.

Speaker, what if, in year three, something happens in our economy and the inflation rate is 4%? Is anybody going to be building new housing if they're legislated at 2.5%? Is anybody going to feel that there is an incentive to fill the gap in the amount of housing that is required versus the amount of housing that is in the queue or that is in the roster that is available? At 2.5%, if the inflation rate exceeds that, there is no incentive. I don't think they've really considered that possibility. I'm not suggesting that the rate will be exceeding 2.5%, but it could. I don't have a crystal ball; I don't know what it's going to be like in three years.

Having said that, it's like they want to take this issue off the table for four years and hope that they don't have to deal with it. But I never heard from anybody in the province of Ontario clamouring to say, "You know what we need here? And I hope this is a priority of the government. We need a bill that sets the rental increase guidelines on a four-year basis, not an annual basis." Because we have a CPI that in fact is based on a year-to-year measurement, it would seem only practical and sensible that the rent increases would be determined on a year-by-year basis. But this government—it's hard for me to explain what goes on in the cerebral areas in that corner office there. I don't even want to risk going there, Speaker, because it's a bit like an old Vincent Price movie: It scares me at times. But there are those who may want to—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm dating myself a little bit, eh? Anyhow, it is what it is. They brought it forth and they consider this a huge priority.

0950

What scares me, Mr. Speaker, is what they don't consider a huge priority in this province, and that is the ability of a family, the ability of a small business, the ability of a widowed senior to get by in this province. Could they have put a little PR—and I don't mean public relations, but priority—on to that issue? Maybe that's where their priorities should be, because all we've seen from this government is a constant—just one issue after another, one bill after another, one regulation after another, for eight years, that have made it more expensive and, as a result, more difficult to live in the province of Ontario.

I just think of one of the first things they did when they got elected: They brought in—I think they called it the health premium. They called it the health premium and refused to consider that it was further taxation, but you know what? It went to court, and the court says, "You can call this whatever you want, but we're calling it

a tax. It's a health levy; it's a tax." You know, it's that age-old saying that I heard from my father on occasion, but it still rings true: "You can slice it and dice it in any way you want, but baloney is still baloney," and a tax is still a tax. You can call it what you want, you can give it a fancy name, you can try to make it sound easier, you can try to make it sound compassionate, you can try to make it sound soft, but at the end of the day, it's a tax. And there's one thing common about a tax: It means that when I put my hand in my pocket after the government has put their hand in it first, there's going to be less in it. There's going to be less in it than there would otherwise have been.

But we don't get to say very much, as a citizen in this province, about how that government spends those tax dollars, so let's see how they have spent it or how they're about to spend it. How about the legal challenges to the gas plants in Mississauga or Oakville? How much is that going to cost those people, and whether they do it through a taxation or whether it goes on to the hydro bills, the energy bills—and my good God, don't get me started there, Mr. Speaker. I've only got 42 seconds left. But can you just imagine how much of the hydro bill that people are paying in this province is as a result of mismanagement and misdirected policies of this government?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to remind the member that he's drifting from Bill 19, and to get back to Bill 19, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: In the 16 seconds—I wish I had 19 seconds, because it would have matched the bill. Nineteen seconds is about all you would have needed for this bill, but I can do it in eight: What an unbelievable, thin piece of gruel, as my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton said.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: You know what? There is one good thing that I can agree with my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke about: This is a feel-good bill. It makes you feel good. It gives you the headlines that are supposed to be out there. An esteemed colleague of mine, and a benchmate from Hamilton–Stoney Creek, referred to this as a feather bill, and that's exactly what it is. It's something that looks good.

Let's go through the bill. I'll go page by page. So Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act—

Interjection: It's only one page; that's it.

Mr. Michael Mantha: So I'm done. So if this is the long-term plan that this government has in order to address affordable housing—I'm sorry, I don't mean to laugh about this, but it is almost laughable. If this is the long-term housing strategy that this government has—well, wait a second. I'll go through it again. Let me go through it again.

Okay, so there is no funding, there are no targets, and there are no timelines. There's really nothing in this bill. There's not a penny in it. If this is what's going to rescue us and stimulate jobs and give us the structure that we

need to really help communities and go through—wait a second. I'll go through it again.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Take your time.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Take my time? Okay.

Okay, let's stop this. Let's get this to where it needs to go. Unfortunately, in the entire one page of it, it's difficult to go back home and say, "This is really going to save you." We need some substance. Put some teeth behind your bills.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: This is a routine bill, and I believe that we all believe it's a necessary bill. Our government has consistently shown a strong commitment to protecting tenants across Ontario, and I believe we have proved that commitment by establishing strong rent regulations to keep rent affordable for tenants. We have afforded tenants across Ontario the lowest year-over-over increase of any government in recent history and in recent memory, at 1.9% on average. Last year's guideline was 0.7%, the lowest on record.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Wow, that's an accomplishment.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: That is. However, the legislation, as it was written, worked well in the pre-recession period; it no longer reflects the current economic circumstances for those who rent. We believe that we have to revisit the legislation so that future increases are in line with what's happening in the real world for tenants in Ontario.

That's why our government has introduced Bill 19. If passed, Bill 19 would ensure that the annual rent increase guideline would be capped at 2.5% and would not fall below 1%. The guideline would continue to be based on Ontario's consumer price index.

What does this mean? It means that in years when the current guideline formula results in a guideline below 1%, the guideline will be determined to be 1%. In the years where the current formula results in a guideline above 2.5%, the guideline will be determined to be 2.5%. This will give stability and affordability to renters and moderate rent increases to landlords. Thank you.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's always a pleasure to join in the debate when my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has provided this Legislature with a presentation. I think all members would agree that he adds a great deal to the debate whenever he discusses any topic in this chamber, and we certainly appreciate his efforts on Bill 19.

As my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke stated, this bill is "thin gruel," to steal a line from our colleague from Sarnia–Lambton, Mr. Bailey. We expected that this government would take significant action on the economy so that we could actually ensure that there's affordable housing for everyone, because they could actually afford to live in a rental apartment or to own their own home.

There have been a lot of suggestions on how to improve this piece of legislation. My colleague from Toronto—what's your riding, Mr. Schein?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Davenport.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod:—from Davenport talked about a local issue that he is concerned with in his community, in his city of Toronto. In the city of Ottawa, I represent one of the fastest-growing communities in all of Canada, where home ownership is a very significant and important investment in one's life, yet at every step of the way, this Liberal government is making it much more difficult for people to either own their own home or rent a suitable living environment. That, my friends, is what is at stake here. This Liberal government, with their one-page Bill 19, certainly does not do that.

We are facing job losses each and every month here in Ontario. That should be the focus of that government. That should be the focus of how we help the people of this province. And that is why I stand with my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: I was listening to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and listening to him talk about who picks the pockets of folks in Ontario. I think we have a small—well, a rather large—disagreement about this. To him, it's government. I would hope that we would become a government, and that's not what we would do. But when I look around, I see people whose pockets are feeling light, who feel like they've been robbed, and they're being robbed by big oil companies. They're being robbed by insurance companies. They're being robbed on their hydro and electric bills.

1000

These are things that we're standing up, defending here, as the third party, to make life more affordable, and yet the other two parties here refuse to stand up for Ontarians. They like to call them taxpayers; I like to call them residents or citizens of this province. We need to make sure that we stand up and make renting an apartment not a luxury but a human right in this province.

Last year, we had a one-time commitment from the province to work on the bedbug strategy in Ontario. This is the kind of thing that we need. We cannot continue to have bills introduced that don't have a dollar of resource put behind them. So, when we talk about bullying in this House, there's not a dollar of support for a teacher or a social worker to support that bill. When we talk about rent control, there's not a dollar put towards fighting bedbugs. This is about people's health. This is about people's mental health. This is about the prosperity of Ontario, because nobody is going to want to come to this city in a few years if we allow bedbugs to run this province.

So I would like to see a housing discussion that included real resources to make sure that tenants and folks across the city and across this province have safe, affordable, decent housing. That's something that we haven't heard, and we need to hear some bills that have real substance behind them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has a two-minute reply.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to thank the members from Algoma–Manitoulin, York South–Weston, Nepean–Carleton and Davenport for their comments. Some of them spoke to what I said, and some really didn't.

But what I didn't have a chance to—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Is that unusual, John?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not totally; totally not unusual, I say to my friend from Trinity–Spadina.

But let's talk about the non-rental population in this province, those who do own their own homes. Home ownership is something that most people aspire to. Particularly for those people who do not live in the downtown core of major cities, home ownership is something that they cherish. Some, of course, in the cities become homeowners in a condominium building.

But the homeowner in this province feels like they're under siege by the McGuinty Liberals. To my friend from Davenport who thinks that it's the private sector that picks the pockets of the residents of this province, it's the government that legislates what you pay them. You don't have a choice but to pay your levy to Caesar, as they say in the Bible.

It is the decisions of government that have made it so difficult and uncomfortable for those homeowners to live in this province, and particularly the decisions of this government. If you look at the government side of the cost of living, when you've taken your spending in this province from \$68 billion to \$126 billion in this term of office, you know you're taking an awful lot more money out of the pockets of those homeowners.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: A great pleasure to enter debate on Bill 19 today. I would respectfully submit that we change the short name of this bill to "Oops, I did it again."

This bill is a result of the Liberal acknowledgement that the HST has had a catastrophic effect on everyday Ontarians. Families, seniors, small businesses and, in this case, renters, people who live in downtown Ottawa, who live in downtown Toronto and who live elsewhere in rental units, have seen that it's become very difficult to manage their everyday budget, and it's become very difficult for landlords as well. So this bill is really an acknowledgment that the Liberals failed when they implemented the HST.

Let's just have a little history lesson on how we brought in the HST here. Well, I shouldn't say how "we" did; we fought it, Mr. Speaker. This Liberal government took about six weeks to bring in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history. Let's talk about why they did that. They saw a greedy \$3-billion tax grab opportunity. They felt that it was within their right to look at Ontarians as an ATM—cha-ching, cha-ching—because they have a spending problem. What happened then was that they brought in the HST—they harmonized the provincial sales tax with the federal sales tax—and when every other single province in Confederation either brought in substantial changes to what would be covered

or brought in exemptions, these guys kept that on everything, including home heating.

They also decided to raise the tax increase. Where most provinces, when they harmonized, effectively decided to reduce a number of the costs that would be associated with the HST, this greedy government over here decided they were going to raise an extra two points. So they actually took in \$3 billion more than any government would have because of harmonization. It wasn't tax-neutral, it wasn't revenue-neutral, and it hit people. It hit, for example, landlords who had to deal with things like snow removal, landscaping, home improvement services—I'm talking about plumbing and electrical. All of those service sector arrangements then saw the HST come into play. That has then gone on to be passed on to consumers. This is simply an acknowledgement that they got it wrong with the HST and how they implemented simplifying the taxation process.

I actually believe, as a result—in the last election, we saw several Liberal cabinet ministers go down to defeat, and I would humbly suggest to you that many of those seats were lost as a result of how they implemented that greedy 13% HST tax grab without making it revenue-neutral. It had a significant impact on the people they represent. In this case, they have left landlords no option other than to raise the rent because of that snow removal, because of that plumbing and electrical work that needs to be done on top of that landscaping work. There needed to be someone to pay for that extra percentage as a result of the HST, so who better to pay it than to let it trickle down? What this government has done is forced landlords, and then of course their tenants, to pay for the additional costs as a result of the HST.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is yet again an "Oops, I've done it again," because this is the first time that they've acknowledged that the HST has had a very negative impact on Ontario constituents, particularly as a result of the high HST rate, that 13%. They did it with home heating, remember? They brought in that 10% benefit. They said that was going to fix everything and it would just negate the HST.

Well, you know what? I think Ontarians are smart enough. They get their bill; they know that there is that 13% charge on their home heating. They know that on the debt retirement charge, they're paying HST. They know that this Liberal government is getting anywhere between \$3 billion and \$5 billion extra a year as a result of the harmonized sales tax. And there has been no relief anywhere else in the system. There have been no exemptions. Their rent is going up. Gas has gone up. For heaven's sake, funeral arrangements have gone up.

This is what this Liberal government has done, because, as my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke stated earlier, this isn't the first tax that they increased. They brought in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history with the HST, but they brought in the single largest income tax increase as well, and that was the health tax. They tried to tell people in this Legislature and in this province that it wasn't a tax,

as my colleague said. They pretended it was a so-called premium. These guys are the worst insurance salesmen in this province. No one believes them. Why would you buy insurance from them? You don't want to.

In fact, that's why people like Moody's and Standard and Poor's have put them on credit watch and put them on a downgrade, because this government can't manage people's money. And now they want to force us to pass their budget by June, so that they can prove to the world they have a plan. They haven't had a plan in nine years. All they see is every single soccer mom, grandmother and small business owner as their personal ATM, to spend more money and keep spending more money, and they have nothing to show for it—nothing—with the exception of a deficit and a ballooning debt.

Let's talk about that for a moment, Mr. Speaker, and how Bill 19 impacts that. We're looking at the trickle-down effect of the HST. It goes to the landlord, then it goes down to the tenant—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the members on the government side, if they want to talk, to not yell to each other. You might want to go outside to talk about it or at least sit beside each other. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. You know what? I think it's an important history lesson for them as well, because they weren't here for some of the catastrophic choices that government made over the past nine years with respect to our economy. Just to simply let them know, what this government has done and why people are paying more and getting less in this province is because they continue to spend.

I want to cite something, and I'll actually summarize something that Dwight Duncan said in his speech: The first priority of this government to spend money is health care. The second is education. The third-largest spending priority of this Liberal government is servicing the debt and the deficit. With the exception of health care and education, it is higher than every other ministry combined; it is the highest of every other government department combined, with the exception of health care and education. Every single dollar we spend on serving the debt and the deficit is a dollar taken away from health care and education—and we still are raising taxes. So what's happening here, ladies and gentlemen? They have a spending problem.

This is no surprise to anybody. This morning I woke up, and I was listening to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member to stick to Bill 19. She's drifting into other areas.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker, but my main contention here is that the HST was so fundamentally flawed when it was brought in that it has created this trickle-down effect and Ontarians are paying more. My thesis here, Mr. Speaker, is that the folks are paying more as a result of the HST. They're getting less of it. What they see with their tax dollars when they send them to Queen's Park is not better rental facilities, it's not better

health care. You know what they see? They see Ornge. This morning, I was listening to a radio station here in Toronto, Newstalk 1010. They were talking about Ornge and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This will be my last suggestion to you to stick to Bill 19. Now we're on Ornge?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, the HST is what caused this bill. There is a correlation between the amount of taxes we pay to this government and what they've done with those taxation dollars. That is why it's a fundamental concern to the people who are either landlords or tenants in this province, on where their tax dollars are going.

I think that's a significant question that this government needs to answer. I think that they have taken a significant amount of revenue that they've raised off the backs of taxpayers, tenants, landlords, small business owners, families and seniors across this province and they've wasted it. Now we're talking about a bill that was brought in as a result of the HST because this bill doesn't go far enough in actually addressing the real problem here in this province, which is making life more affordable. What they did is they raised taxes. Now they're raising rents and they're hurting landlords at the same time.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They're hurting everyone.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: And they're hurting everyone, as my colleague from Northumberland-Quinte West says. So the question before them now becomes: How do they make this province more affordable and how do they get a control on the economy? Because, ladies and gentlemen, they haven't shown in the past nine years that they're capable of that. That's why we don't have confidence in this government.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm very pleased to introduce, sitting in the west members' gallery, the family of a page from Thornhill, Andrew Mohan, who I had the pleasure of having lunch with the other day: his mom, Deborah Mohan; his dad, Timothy Mohan; his grandfather William Broadhurst; and his grandmother Arden Broadhurst. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to introduce the interns from OLIP who are here today: Evan Akriotis, Patrick DeRochie, Belinda Ellsworth, Lauren Hanna, Humera Jabir, Sylvia Kim, Diego Ortiz, Sylvia Pena, Craig Rutan and Monika Wyrzykowska. They are here to watch the proceedings, but also to make sure that the members know that there is an OLIP reception tonight from 4:30 to 7 o'clock in room 228. They hope all the members of the Legislature will attend.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's my pleasure to introduce some very good friends of mine in the members' east gallery this morning: Dr. Steven Franklin, the president and vice-chancellor of Trent University; Dr. Neil Emery, the vice-president of research at Trent University; and Mr. Don Cumming, associate vice-president of public affairs and government relations. I invite all members of the Legislature to join us from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in committee room 2 to celebrate Trent University.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce four guests from North Bay Police Service. We have Staff Sergeant Mike Tarini, Sergeant Ken Rice, forensic information officer Ivan Ryman, and Constable Aaron Northrup here today, and I'll be joining them for lunch later.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to welcome from the city of Timmins and the Timmins Police Association the president who is here, Mike Fortin, along with their vice-president—I was going to say Lisa; my God, I don't believe I did that—Lindsie Durepos. How's it going?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a page here—the last session—from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Sarah McPherson. Visiting Sarah here and visiting Queen's Park this week are her mother, Tracy Shields, and her cousin Halle Kunjah. I welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know they've been introduced as a group, but I want to introduce, joining us in the public galleries this morning, my intern from the OLIP program, Craig Ruttan. I've got to tell you what an amazing addition he's been to our office. He's doing a fine job, as they all do, but I want to single out Craig because he is the intern working for me.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm really pleased to introduce some representatives from the Niagara Regional Police who are here in the members' gallery. I'd like to introduce Cathy Portolesi. As well, I'd like to introduce Rick Gordon and Vince Wong. I want to thank them for the great service they provide to the Niagara region as police.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome some honoured guests from the Halton Regional Police Association to the Legislature today: Duncan Foot, Kevin Neufeld, Lesley Martin and Rick LoStracco, who I met with earlier today and who are visiting Queen's Park as part of Police Week.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: In the east members' gallery I'd like to introduce my daughter, Natasha, and her friend Erica Beasley visiting from Whitehorse in the Yukon. We also have a grade 10 class from St. Augustine Catholic High School in the public gallery, and also my intern, Diego Ortiz.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome some people from Belleville that are on the way to the Legislature today, likely stuck in traffic. Alan and Donna Corrie, and their grandsons Ben and Will Smith, will be arriving shortly.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Dr. Ken and Lori Lee from London are here. Welcome, Dr. Ken and Lori.

Also, Speaker, the Personal Support Network of Ontario, the voice of PSW professionals in the province: I've got Maureen Hylton, Derrick Harrison, Connie Xoliswiwe

and Jane Clarkson here, as well as Lori Holloway, Sarah Blakely and Chris Holcroft. Welcome to all our PSWs.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Today, obviously, police from across Ontario will be joining us. I'd like to make a special mention to those from the Ottawa police force who are joining us. In the gallery today is another Ottawa police officer, but he is with the OPP. I'd like to introduce Todd Provost. How are you today, Todd? Thanks for coming.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce members from the Police Association of Ontario: Jim Christie, Ron Middel and Ed Parent. I invite all of you to join us at 5 o'clock for the reception at the St. Lawrence lounge in the Macdonald Block.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I join the minister, Speaker, on behalf of the PC caucus, in welcoming all members of the PAO here today, and I invite the members and encourage them to join them at the reception later this evening.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to introduce two police officers from the Greater Sudbury Police Service, Danny Zymbrowski and Brian MacRury, and thank them very much for their incredible dedication to the people of Sudbury.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just a point: When we get to strictly introducing everyone, we give them a good round, and I appreciate the members staying to that process. Most people can introduce everybody, but for those who have not been invited, we welcome you here to the Legislature, the people's place.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. For months we've been warning you that if Ontario doesn't get its economic fundamentals right, our province faces continued job losses and high unemployment. A look at Greece and Italy today shows you the consequences of the path that you are on. No company is interested in investing or creating jobs in those countries today. For months, you've ignored our pleas for the urgent action required to restore Ontario. We have been giving your government viable options to rein in spending. What are you prepared to do today, right now, to take us off this current path?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question from my honourable colleague, and I'm pleased to join in what I think is a very important debate about the future of Ontario's economy. But I would respectfully suggest to my honourable colleague that it is both inappropriate and, I would also say, irresponsible to compare the great province of Ontario, with our wonderful foundational strength in terms of our economy, to less fortunate places around the world. I think that while we might debate the best way to get there, surely we can begin by agreeing that we

have a wonderful province, that we have a strong economy. Our shared responsibility is not to castigate it, it is not to undermine confidence in it, but to find a way to make it even stronger.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Premier, it's unfortunate that you continue to ignore the problems that our province has. Since you won't act, we will. Later today, on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I will introduce legislation that will bring in a mandatory wage freeze for the public sector. Such a wage freeze would save Ontario \$2 billion annually and be a major step forward to getting our economic fundamentals right. It would send an important signal to investors, entrepreneurs, companies and rating agencies that we are serious about dealing with our spiralling debt.

Premier, will you help us restore Ontario as the economic engine of Confederation and support our mandatory wage freeze?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm coming from the side opposite, but we actually have some common ground here. Where we differ is in terms of how to get there.

We have said in our budget very specifically that there is no new money available for newly negotiated collective agreements. We've made that very, very clear. But we've also drawn lessons from the experience in other provinces. None have adopted the approach advocated by my honourable colleague; neither has the federal government.

We intend to negotiate firmly and fairly with our collective bargaining partners. If we fail to achieve the result that we need that will maintain our fiscal plan, then we'll take additional steps in this very Legislature to ensure we arrive at that. I think that's the sensible way, I think that's the most guaranteed way, of arriving at our destination.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Premier, you tried that two years ago and failed. It's not good enough anymore.

Seven months ago, the people of Ontario sent us back here to deal with our jobs crisis and our high unemployment, but all you've done is make things worse. It's clear the Premier is happy with Ontario being a have-not province, with anemic economic growth, and saddling our future generations with his debt.

1040

On this side of the House, we know we can do better. We know Ontario can do better. Today, we are tabling legislation that enables our province to realize that bright future. Ontario can be strong again. Why won't you change course and support our mandatory wage freeze?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Maybe there's a leadership contest under way over there, Speaker.

Again, we have some common ground here. We both understand how important it is for us to restrain the growth in compensation. More than half the money that is spent as a government goes into compensation, and that, of course, Speaker, is money well spent when invested in doctors, teachers, nurses, water inspectors, meat inspectors and the like. We think that's a very important investment that we make on the part of Ontario families.

But we also think it's very important that today we hit the pause button for a couple of years. We're going to do it in a way which we believe is responsible and, ultimately, effective. We'll do it in a way that has been adopted by the other provinces and the federal government. We will work with our collective bargaining partners.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday you missed a golden opportunity to have an adult conversation with Ontarians about their rising hydro bills. Instead, you chose to play politics with comments about Niagara Falls.

Well, let's talk about Niagara Falls and what you allowed to happen there last year. In addition to the rich subsidies we pay for wind producers, we also make guarantees to buy their power at any time it's made. This happens mostly at night, when we don't need the power. So, Premier, you allowed water to spill over Niagara Falls without harnessing that power through infrastructure we've already paid for. That cost taxpayers \$300 million last year. Premier, do you plan to continue to spill water over Niagara Falls next year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague, secretly at least, is very supportive of renewable energy policy in the province of Ontario. He was an active champion on behalf of the great city of North Bay in that regard, and we were pleased to partner with him in that very important initiative, Speaker.

But I will say, and I think it's important to keep in mind, that while our electricity bills have been going up, it's important to understand that 5% of the bill is related to renewable electricity in the province of Ontario. The overwhelming majority of that is related to the investments we've been making: billions of dollars, 9,000 megawatts in new generation, 5,000 kilometres of new transmission, expanding our capacity at Niagara Falls and the like.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, in addition to the \$300 million spilled over Niagara Falls, let's look at some of the other high-cost items that are causing our families' hydro bills to soar: smart meters, \$1 billion; the politically motivated gas plant closures in Oakville and Mississauga, another \$1 billion, or maybe more. The Auditor General told us the feed-in tariff subsidy cost \$4.4 billion more than through the existing standard offer. We're talking about serious money here, Premier.

Yesterday, our PC Party rolled out our Paths to Prosperity plan. Premier, will you adopt our plan to restore

the power sector to its rightful place as an economic development tool in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That horse ran out of the barn a long time ago.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have an ally, Speaker. For the day, anyway, we have an ally.

I would say to my honourable colleague that—it's interesting. I think this is eighth question, if my count is right, with respect to their new plan related to energy, but they refuse to talk about the particulars in this House about their plan.

I think it's important that we devote at least a little bit of time to understanding what they're proposing. They want to sell off our hydro assets. They want to take us back to a time 10 years ago where, within the span of seven months, electricity rates went up by 30%. They then responded by putting in place an artificial cap. That cost us \$1 billion. That's a debt that we continue to struggle with to this very day. That's a failed experiment, Speaker. I think it's time for us to understand that and to keep moving forward.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, your legacy now includes the doubling of our hydro rates in addition to the doubling of our debt. Not only has Moody's downgraded the province's credit rating, now Hydro One's credit rating has been downgraded too. That, too, is going to cost ratepayers more money.

Companies like Fabrene in North Bay, who I introduced in this gallery some weeks ago, who now pay \$1 million in global adjustment on top of their hydro bill, can now expect to pay even more, thanks to your flawed strategy.

Premier, it's evident that everything you touch in the energy sector costs taxpayers and ratepayers even more money. Our party has developed a 13-point plan, a plan to make energy an economic development tool. Will you adopt our plan and put Ontario back to work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker—

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's you guys; that's not them.

Again, I think it's important we understand that my honourable colleague is secretly a champion of green energy—green, clean and renewable energy—in the province of Ontario. As the mayor of North Bay, he was relentless in the pursuit of putting solar panels on the rooftops of some buildings there, which speaks, I think, of—it's been said, Speaker, that actions speak louder than words. I want to assure my honourable colleague that he has been most eloquent with respect to his actions. I am mindful, and I have taken those actions to heart. I know he continues—secretly, at least—to champion our plan to bring more renewable energy to the province of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Reliable, affordable electricity is vital if Ontario is going to succeed in bringing jobs back and making life affordable for people. Can the Premier tell us how much of Ontario's electricity generation is currently publicly owned and operated?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As the members would know, well over 70% of Ontario's generation capacity is publicly owned, publicly operated, owned by all of the people of the province of Ontario—well over. Those would be our nuclear stations, which generate about half; our hydroelectric stations, which are over 20%; and then a number of gas-fired facilities and some coal that we're getting out of. It's well over—well over—70%.

That's going to remain unless the PCs get their way, when they're just going to sell off hydros, nukes and everything else that isn't nailed down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In fact, in 2003, about 72% of the province's electricity was produced by Ontario Power Generation. As of 2010, that figure had dropped to 62%. Over that same period, the price has climbed by 75%.

The government says they're focused on the best way to keep prices affordable, but prices keep rising dramatically. Is the government ready to consider that private power schemes may in fact be a big part of the problem?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, not only do we continue to run, through OPG, the generation facilities, but Bruce Power, which is a private company, the assets are owned by the people of the province of Ontario. We have a very strong public footprint—always have, and always intend to.

What we've said to all of those who generate electricity in the province of Ontario is that we're determined that it be done as efficiently and effectively as possible. There are cost containment and cutting measures in place in OPG and Hydro One. We're moving to international benchmarking. We're taking a look at all the local distribution companies, and we're saying, can it be done more effectively? We reduced the feed-in tariff rates for green energy at the top end by 30%.

We're looking everywhere to find the most effective way to deliver power to the people of the province of Ontario.

1050

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For people worried about good jobs and the cost of everyday life, the arrival of the monthly hydro bill can actually be a pretty traumatizing experience.

The debate is very clear: Some are arguing that repeating the same old private power experiments that haven't been working is the solution; we're saying that it's time to look at what is actually working in provinces like Manitoba and Quebec, where people are paying literally

half of what we pay here. Will the government commit to an open and transparent review of the entire electricity system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: You know, we'd all like to commit to the geography in Quebec and Manitoba, but we haven't found a way to do that.

I think the party opposite should be clear. A substantial part of the publicly owned generation assets are nuclear, and they've consistently said they oppose nuclear and the almost 80,000 jobs in the province of Ontario that go with it. A substantial part in the change of the energy mix over the last eight years is that we're getting out of coal. It was 25% when we came; it's less than 5% today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It was 25% when we started in 2003; it's less than 5% today.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Simcoe–Grey, come to order.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I hope the leader of the third party is supportive of that. Green energy is part of the new mix: wind, solar and bio. When will the leader of the third party stand up and support clean green energy?

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Last week, the government assured this Legislature and the public that First Nations partners were being properly consulted about development in the Ring of Fire. Today, we're hearing a very different story from the Neskantaga First Nation, whose legal counsel asserts that the government breached its legal duty to consult. Why has this government shown no serious willingness—and those are the First Nation's words—to address the concerns of Neskantaga and other Matawa First Nations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I'll speak to this at the outset and then refer it to the minister.

I just want to say that we take our responsibilities very seriously when it comes to consulting with our First Nations partners. We understand there is both a legal obligation there, but we also feel a sense of responsibility, on behalf of all Ontarians, to make sure that we are working with our First Nations partners, especially when it comes to exciting new opportunities to be found in the Ring of Fire. I know that specific efforts were made to reach out to those communities in the past. We will continue to find ways to move forward.

None of this is going to be easy, but more than anything else, I think it does represent a hopeful, bright opportunity, especially when it comes to resource benefit

sharing with our aboriginal partners to ensure that they can participate in economic growth as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, according to media reports, Neskantaga Chief Peter Moonias is afraid to say hi to the minister for fear that the McGuinty government will interpret that as meaningful consultation.

It's clear that the government is bungling this, and thousands of jobs in the Ring of Fire for northerners actually hang in the balance. When will this government stop putting the cart before the horse and have a full discussion with First Nations partners that includes a proper environmental assessment and the creation of a regional decision-making forum?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said in this House, we are very clear that in order for the Ring of Fire development to go forward—and remember that the Ring of Fire is the most promising economic mineral development opportunity in the north that we've seen in a generation. So in order for it to go forward in the best way possible, we know that this is a partnership: the federal government, First Nations, the provincial government and the companies working together.

So we've been very clear that the formal process of engagement will begin. There was a business decision that was made, and in order for First Nations not to discover this the day of the announcement in the newspaper, we reached out to many of the communities the day before. We had a conversation with them.

But we've been making investments for a year. We've invested \$8 million in the Ring of Fire communities. We will continue that engagement now.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The promise will not be realized unless this government gets serious about doing right by First Nations in northern Ontario.

New Democrats have long called, in fact, for a stand-alone Minister of Aboriginal Affairs who can devote their full attention to the priorities concerning First Nations. The mishandling of the Cliffs announcement only underscores this need. It is very clear: This has to happen in Ontario.

When will this government take their duty to consult with First Nations seriously and dedicate resources to do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that set up a stand-alone Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, not that party when they were in office. We set up the ministry and we are working in conjunction with First Nations. We are very clear that there will be a formal engagement, there will be a discussion.

I say to the leader of the third party, she has a choice right now. She has a choice—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Calm down. Calm down, lady.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did not find that appropriate.

Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite who shouted out “Calm down”—I really believe that there’s a need for an emotional engagement on this issue. I think that this is an important moment in Ontario’s history. The importance of it is that we work together and that we not undermine the process.

There is a history of neglect and of conflict that we have to overcome in terms of working with our First Nations people. It is our commitment to do that. It is our commitment that the 1,100 jobs that are available will be shared with First Nations, and we are going to work to make that happen.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. I’m appealing to the Premier this morning to bring in line his government House leader, who has motions before him from this Legislature, as well as from the public accounts committee, requesting additional time and flexibility so that we can get to the bottom of the Ornge scandal.

We now have no hearings for this coming week because the government has refused to allow us to have them. We have two more days of hearings before the summer break. We specifically requested to be allowed to sit into the summer. Dr. Chris Mazza has yet to testify.

This morning, we heard that Ruth Hawkins, a senior person within the Ministry of Health, has a great deal of information. We need the additional time. Will the Premier agree to give us that time?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I’ve been following the committee hearings on Ornge carefully, of course, and I’m very pleased that so many people have participated in a meaningful way at those hearings. I myself was very happy to be there for two and a half hours, about an hour and a half longer than I was asked to attend.

There is important work that is being done at that committee. If the member opposite wants to conduct the hearings here on the floor of the Legislature, I tell you, I would like to know more about a \$7,000 invoice that Kelly Mitchell, a top Tory insider, expensed to prepare a strategy for engaging the Ontario PC Party. I’d like to know more about the work that he did with Lynne Golding, a top Conservative lawyer; and Perry Martin, a top Tory lobbyist, to lobby the opposition.

Speaker, there are questions that need answers and we’re happy that the committee is meeting.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I can’t even believe what I just heard from the mouth of this Minister of Health. Serious issues: Two people died this past week; ambulance services couldn’t respond to a call. There are serious issues at Ornge ambulance and this minister has the gall to stand up and talk about a consulting agreement that someone received from Ornge.

Minister, I’m going to ask you directly: Will you stand in your place, stand with us, help us get to the bottom of the issue that you should be at the bottom of? Give us the

additional time. Give us the hearings so that we can restore confidence in our air ambulance service.

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can assure you that the changes that have been made at Ornge and the changes that continue to be made at Ornge are not waiting for any process that the member opposite wants to champion.

While they’ve been busy ringing the bells, we’ve been busy fixing the problems at Ornge. We have new leadership, we have a new performance agreement, a much stronger performance agreement, and we have legislation before this House that I would very much like to get passed. This is legislation that entrenches in law the oversight and transparency that we all agree we need at Ornge. I’m asking the member opposite to stop ringing the bells and let’s get this work done.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Today, former Ornge vice-president Jacob Blum testified that he had weekly meetings with officials at the Ministry of Health. He said the ministry was happy with the reports they were receiving and noted that the ministry was fully informed of all things going on at Ornge. But despite these regular meetings, the minister “never asked” about salary disclosure.

How can the minister claim that her office didn’t know what was going on at Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know that the former executive assistant to Dr. Chris Mazza did testify today. I tell you, I take the word of the Attorney General over the former executive assistant to the former president and CEO of Ornge.

What I can tell you is that we are moving forward with legislation that addresses the issues that were raised by the Auditor General. We’ve already taken significant steps that even the member from Newmarket–Aurora characterized as being aggressive changes. So we are making those changes. We continue to watch with interest the hearings, but we do need that bill to be passed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, Mr. Blum, one of the original negotiators of the original performance agreement, told the committee what we already knew: The ministry had many tools that they could have used to check up on Ornge. He said the minister could “audit and check files within any aspect of Ornge ... whether that was the left or the right side of the organizational structure,” referring to the for-profit or the not-for-profit.

Has the minister been blaming the performance agreement because she’s hesitant of blaming herself?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me begin by correcting myself: I said Attorney General; I should have said Auditor General in my first answer.

But I do take the word of the Auditor General over the former employees under the old leadership at Ornge. The Auditor General said the performance agreement was weak, it was not adequate, it needed to be significantly strengthened. The Auditor General, in a March 21 press conference, said, "The ministry has stepped in and taken concrete actions." The Auditor General's report says the performance agreement has only two specific and measurable response time requirements relating to requests for air ambulance services.

The Auditor General did a thorough review. We are acting on each and every one of those recommendations and we are going further by introducing legislation. I ask all members to support Bill 50.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Minister, those of us who live in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area know that GO Transit is a critical provincial service that binds our communities together while taking cars off our roads and highways. Many of my constituents depend on reliable, economic service on three different GO corridors: the Stouffville, Richmond Hill and Barrie lines. With five GO train stations and another to be added soon in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, many people in my community, as well as places like Aurora and Newmarket, use these lines as vital links between home and work through the GTA.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is being done to enhance this service to make it as attractive an option as possible?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I want to thank the member for Oak Ridges–Markham for raising an important issue for GTA travellers. GO Transit is an essential part of daily life for more than 219,000 Ontarians who depend on a reliable service to get them to and from work. That's why we're proud to confirm that beginning in late June, GO will be running an additional train during the morning and afternoon rush hours on the Milton line, and will be initiating a new weekend pilot service of six trains daily each way on the Barrie line.

Likewise, as this week marks the 45th anniversary of GO Transit, I was also pleased to reveal that we will be moving forward and implementing our 15-minute service guarantee, beginning this fall. This kind of action, Mr. Speaker, is an essential part of building stronger and more dependable public transit to serve the greater Golden Horseshoe area.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Minister. Indeed, providing a timely and reliable commute is important, but as we enter the summer months, GO Transit has the potential to play a key role in facilitating regional tourism, which largely occurs on weekends. Whether it's someone

from King City coming into Toronto to attend a concert or a Blue Jays game, or a Torontonian spending a weekend up on Lake Simcoe, this kind of internal tourism is so important for our regional and provincial economy. GO Transit helps make that happen, but only if it's available where and when people want to travel. Tremendous progress has been made, given the neglected service the government inherited.

Mr. Speaker, again through you, what are the next steps being taken in the near term as we move progressively towards two-way, all-day service?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. GO Transit is so important in moving people across the region. The expansion of a transit system as large as GO is an ongoing process, but with more than \$6 billion already invested, we've made significant headway. Not only did we restore service to Barrie after it was cancelled by the NDP and left cancelled by the Conservatives, but as I mentioned, we're expanding that service to Barrie. We brought GO train service to Kitchener. We're expanding service north of Richmond Hill. We brought summer GO train service to Niagara Falls. And for the first time this summer, we're introducing GO bus service to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Mr. Speaker, the Tories downloaded GO Transit onto the backs of the municipalities and cut capital funding to zero. We're taking a different approach because this service is so important to so many Ontarians.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Speaker, the minister has repeatedly claimed that Ornge lied to her, but it's become clear at public accounts that Ornge, in fact, made a great effort to keep both the minister and the ministry fully briefed. In fact, we learned that the Ministry of Health and Ornge met and received a briefing every Friday. So I ask the minister, can she tell us who specifically lied to her and what they lied to her about?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I have to confess that I'm pretty surprised that the member opposite is now leaping to the defence of the former leadership at Ornge. I can tell you that the Auditor General found it very difficult to get information from Ornge. My ministry officials found it very difficult to get information at Ornge. It was only when I made it very clear to the former board chair and COO that I expected them to cooperate with the Auditor General, that I expected them to reveal salaries, that they in fact did reveal that information, and shortly after retired en masse. So if the member opposite wants to take the word of the former leadership at Ornge over the Auditor General, I'm very surprised.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The point is, Mr. Speaker, that the minister was very clearly aware of the disastrous mess at Ornge and chose to take no action about it. She also claims that the original performance agreement didn't allow her to intervene. That is not correct. She also claimed that the federal incorporation of Ornge prevented

her from acting. That had nothing to do with anything. That also isn't correct. She has repeatedly abdicated her responsibility on the grounds that Ornge misled and lied to her. However, both Alfred Apps and Jacob Blum, who appeared in public accounts this morning, have stated that the Ministry of Health had been fully, truthfully and painstakingly briefed on matters at Ornge.

So it's clear that no one lied to the minister, that she had the power to intervene and simply chose not to do so. As a result, the mess at Ornge is now costing patients their lives. Minister, will you do the right thing and resign?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the first thing I must do is caution the member opposite from jumping to any conclusions about any incidents. There's a full investigation under way, and I would just caution all of us not to jump to any conclusions.

I can tell the member opposite that I do have some questions that I think—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The interjections from both sides are not helpful.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I would like to know more about how it came to pass that Ornge established a new satellite operation at Oshawa Municipal Airport.

Here's what we do know: A former Ornge executive said he opposed the move and that it was a very poor choice for a host of reasons. We also know that the member for Whitby-Ajax not only lobbied to get a base at the airport in her riding; she also, of course, posed for that famous snazzy photo in Ornge.

Interjection.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we look forward to learning more at Ornge. These are important questions we need answers to, and I'm happy we are having those—

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

The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke: second time.

New question.

Interjection.

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

New question.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. Yesterday, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities wrote that the anti-bullying bill would likely go to court. If he's right and students are denied the ability to use the name "gay-straight alliance" in a school, will your government back those students?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to talk about an important piece of legislation that is now before committee in this Legislature. I have set out very clearly the expectations, and our government has set out very clearly the expectations, of the support that will be available to students in the document of the Accepting Schools Act. My expectation, Speaker, is that every board in every part of this province will abide by the policies, that are clearly stated, that the school needs to support student-led initiatives such as a gay-straight alliance. We've been very clear since the beginning.

What we know is that we need to see this piece of legislation passed, so that we have the tools we need to ensure that students across this province have the support they need. Let's get this bill passed. Let's have these rules in place. Let's have support for our students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is very simple: If students are denied the right to use the name "gay-straight alliance," will this government back the students and their own law?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: My focus is on listening to the advice that we receive at committee. My focus is on getting Bill 13 passed so that we can have the tools in place to ensure that this bill, which requires support for students in the form of gay-straight alliances or single-issue clubs, can be enforced across this province.

I ask the members opposite, on all sides of the House, especially those calling: Will they support us? Will they see this legislation passed? Will they see support in place for students across the province? Are they with the students, or are they with others in this province that don't want to see students be supported? That is the question that all of you must answer.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before I recognize the member, I want to make a quick point: You're always referencing your questions and answers through the Chair.

New question.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, Ontario Power Generation is one of the most important public assets in the province. They are responsible for producing most of Ontario's base-load generation, and they manage many of Ontario's large generating facilities. I know that Niagara hydro facilities produce close to 2,400 megawatts; that's enough electricity to power over 1.2 million homes. Furthermore, they account for close to 7% of Ontario's total supply. These important OPG assets are providing Ontario families with safe, clean, reliable power. Ontario families and businesses have a vested interest in OPG and all of our generating facilities in the province.

Minister, can you please provide this House with an update on the status of OPG and its generating facilities in the Niagara region?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Orléans for his question. He has long been an advocate of environmentally conscious approaches to energy policy.

He'll be pleased to know that there's a new tunnel going in at Niagara Falls that's going to provide enough additional water to the generating facilities to power 160,000 homes—more clean, green generation. The great thing about that is it's all owned by the people of the province of Ontario, as public power has been in place for about a century.

It's important that we all have a stake in this, because our power facilities are part of our economic foundation. All families in Ontario want to have a piece of this province. If the PC plan is implemented, they're not going to have that. It's going to be auctioned off. They'll lose part of their heritage. They tried this in the late 1990s; it didn't work. Let's not go back; always look forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister. I know that my constituents are pleased to hear that this government will protect these vital facilities from being sold off.

We often focus on the generation of electricity. However, an equally vital part of our electricity system is the distribution of electricity from the generating facilities to our homes and businesses.

Hydro One, another vital public asset, is responsible for ensuring that Ontario families and businesses get the electricity they need when they need it. Just last month, you informed this House that Hydro One continues to rebuild our electricity system, and they have built over 5,000 kilometres of new transmission lines. This is an accomplishment that my constituents are very proud of.

Minister, can you please provide this House with an update on the status of Hydro One and their efforts to modernize our electricity system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member is right, because Hydro One has been doing a lot of work to modernize and upgrade a transmission system that hadn't had the upgrades it needs—5,000 kilometres-plus of new line, enough to take us from here to the Yukon. That's an enormous investment on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

I know that others in this House, the party opposite, the PCs, want to sell off Hydro One. They tried this once before. It resulted in rocketing, rocketing electricity prices. In fact, it was so bad that I have a quote from back there—I have a quote from 2003: “Consumers want to be assured their hydro bills are reasonable. First, it was by freezing hydro rates, and secondly, by maintaining full public ownership of Hydro One.” Who said this on January 21, 2003? Who said it? The Leader of the Opposition.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, many MPPs are receiving a significant number of complaints from constituents

regarding the Ministry of Natural Resources' electronic licensing system. We all know that when the system was introduced on January 1, there were significant delays and operational problems with it. However, today, when you call the ministry's 1-800 number, you are greeted by a recording that says, “Personal information may be stored outside of Canada and is subject to the laws of the jurisdiction where it is stored.” Ontarians are pretty outraged at this.

Minister, do you think it's right that a ministry of the Ontario government would ship the confidential information of Ontario citizens to another country, where it is subject to its laws, and how can you assure Ontarians that this information will not be accessed by another government or third party for their own purposes?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are rolling out a new, modern system that will make it easier for anglers and hunters to get their licences, and we've been working through some of the challenges associated with that. I think it's working in a very positive way.

In terms of the privacy issues, let me be very straightforward. Obviously, we take privacy issues very, very seriously. We've raised those concerns with the company and reminded them of their obligations to protect Ontarians' privacy. We also have built extremely tough protections into the company's contract. They cannot disclose any information without prior approval from us. And may I say, the very tough provisions of Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act absolutely apply.

I can confirm to you that indeed we are watching this very closely. It's very important to us that we maintain the privacy provisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, your 1-800 recording says that the personal data is collected for purposes of identification, enforcement, research, marketing and administration—that pretty much covers everything—and you claim that this personal and confidential information is being protected. So why does the ministry have this disclaimer on the 1-800 number, which again says, “Personal information may be stored outside of Canada and is subject to the laws of the jurisdiction where it is stored,” not Ontario?

1120

Can you and will you cancel this contract and ensure that this data is retained in Ontario, or do Ontarians have to live with this bad decision?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Obviously, there was a company that was the successful proponent in a competitive procurement process as we moved forward on this new automated licensing system. Again, we take the privacy provisions extremely seriously, which is why we have built very those tough provisions into the company's contract. It's also why the very, very clear and tough provisions of Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act apply.

We are taking this very, very seriously, building in a very strong contract agreement with the company that was the successful proponent of this as we move towards the system that will actually make it easier for people to access hunting and fishing licences across the province.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The annual report from the Cancer Quality Council of Ontario paints a picture of unequal access to care in cancer hospitals across the province. Patients in Ottawa are waiting longer for radiation treatment than almost everywhere else in the province, with only 66% of patients treated within the recommended 14 days compared to a provincial average of over 80%. Many are questioning whether quality care is being compromised.

Can the Premier explain to Ottawa's patients how they could have fallen so far behind?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thanks to the leader of the third party for the question. I want to say, first of all, thank you to the Cancer Quality Council of Ontario for this report. We have learned that if you measure and if you publicly report, you can actually improve performance in the health care system. This report shows that we have made significant improvements to cancer care, but there is still more to do.

Ontarians are living longer with cancer. Our cancer survival rates in Ontario are very high compared with international jurisdictions. But we do need to improve the care. With this report, we can continue to improve care. We are very pleased that we're meeting the targeted wait times 80% of the time. That's up from 69%. There's much good news in this report, but there's also indication of further work to be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ottawa is regrettably not the only region that has fallen behind. Windsor has the unfortunate status of having the longest wait time in the province for radiation treatment, with only 55% of patients receiving radiation treatment within the recommended 14-day period. Families in London are also seeing long waits.

Can the Premier explain why Ontarians' access to life-saving cancer treatment depends on where you happen to live in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Addressing those inequities is, of course, a very high priority for us, but whenever you rank, some will always be at the bottom and some will always be at the top. I do think, though, that equitable access to care is something we should all be striving for.

We have come a long, long way since 2003 when it comes to cancer care. We've got 13 cancer centres that have been opened, expanded or are now under construction. We've got an additional 65 cancer drugs that we are funding. We are looking forward to also implementing a personalized cancer risk profile online, where

people will be able to enter information about their family history, about their own history, be identified at what level of risk they are and take appropriate steps to prevent cancer.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Crown wards are often at a disadvantage when it comes to successfully transitioning to adulthood in terms of acquiring higher education, employment and emotional support. In November 2011, youth currently and formerly in the care of children's aid societies worked with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth to organize two days of public hearings at the Legislature on their experience. On Monday, I was very proud to attend the release of their report that was produced, entitled My Real Life Book.

Speaker, through you, I ask the minister how the government has helped to improve the child protection system in recent years.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank my colleague from Windsor West for the question and for her ongoing advocacy on this important issue.

I also want to extend my sincere thanks to the Youth Leaving Care team and the provincial advocate for their report, which I know was the result of an incredible amount of hard work.

I was privileged on Monday, as well, to accept this groundbreaking report and hear from many of the courageous youth who played a big part in creating it.

Through this government's Building Families and Supporting Youth to be Successful Act, 2011, and other important reforms, we've made it easier for prospective parents to adopt a child. This is helping to provide permanent homes for more crown wards. In fact, since 2003, and despite a rising population, we've seen a 3% decrease in the number of children in care and in the past few years alone a more than 20% increase in adoptions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I thank the minister for his answer. Both the youth team and advocate should be commended for their hard work. Our government has done a lot to support and improve the child protection system. Fewer kids are coming into care and more kids are being placed in permanent homes and we continue to invest in our children. Building on these reforms and accomplishments, I believe this report presents a real opportunity to continue positive change in the system. I was pleased to introduce a private member's bill in response to the release of the report.

Speaker, once again through you, I ask the minister to outline what action the government is taking in response to this report.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I'd like to thank the member from Windsor West.

Mr. Speaker, in response to the Youth Leaving Care team's report, I was pleased to announce that we are

taking immediate action on their number one priority recommendation emerging from this report. I have directed my ministry to immediately bring together a working group, as requested by the team, comprised of youth with experience living in care, along with partners from across the province.

I'm also pleased that action has been taken on another important recommendation brought forward by these youth in the report. My colleague the member from Windsor West earlier this week introduced a private member's bill to designate May 14 each year as Children and Youth in Care Day. I invite all of my colleagues in the Legislature to join me and the member from Windsor West in passing this bill.

PENSION FUNDS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last week, you claimed to have published the unfunded liabilities of public sector pensions in the budget. This is not so. What is published is how much we already know Ontario taxpayers will be paying out, which includes over \$3.3 billion worth of pensions in 2014-15 alone. The numbers in the budget only include the next three years.

The question is, how much more will Ontario taxpayers have to pay on top of these figures? Minister, as the growing deficit looms to \$30 billion, what steps is the province going to take to fill in the gaps when it comes to funding public sector pensions?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite should be aware that valuation dates vary on these pension plans. Accordingly, as valuation dates move, we provided the most up-to-date information in the budget that's clear and follows the information that has, in fact, been determined by these large pension funds.

I do want to assure the members of those funds that they are solid, they are in good shape. They have challenges, as pension funds do everywhere. I note in your Pathways to Prosperity whitewash that you cite how strong our pensions are. You've invited them to invest and to buy Niagara Falls and to buy a number of other public assets.

I would also note that the member opposite's policy on compensation in Ontario has conveniently sidestepped the question of pensions. Why don't you mention it? There's a large section in our budget about dealing with pension costs. Your party's failed to do that—

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

Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Minister, Ontarians are worried about the security of their pensions. Ontario public sector pension plans are short billions of dollars. Again, are you trying to hide the fact that there is an unfunded liability of billions of dollars? You've already admitted taxpayers are on the hook.

What is your plan to secure the future of public sector pensions, while being transparent with the taxpayers about how much they're on the hook for?

1130

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We are tackling the challenge in the pension funds with our partners. I'll remind the member opposite again that Mr. Drummond provided an analysis of where those pensions are at. The budget did that; the environment minister has that. I know how concerned he is about the Endangered Species Act as well.

I would suggest to the member opposite that you take the same serious approach to pensions that we do and read the budget, what we're proposing and where we're moving. You're silent on that in your wage-freeze information, which, candidly, does not get us to where we need to get in terms of balancing the budget in the time frames laid out.

I also note again, and remind the member opposite, that in your document released yesterday, you referred to the great pensions and the strengths of our pensions. You proposed to sell off Niagara Falls to them and some other assets, but we'll work with our partners as we move to get those pensions back into stronger shape.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, schedule 28 of your budget bill makes it possible to privatize any government service you want, by regulation, without anyone knowing what the government is up to.

Yesterday in question period, the minister claimed that the Auditor General would have jurisdiction over new corporations created under schedule 28, but when we consulted our expert legal opinions, they said this simply is not so. Will the minister retract the claim he made yesterday about the budget bill?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: That was quite informative. Thank you, Minister.

Speaker, this new piece of legislation allows the government, behind closed doors, to let private, for-profit corporations benefit from the fact that almost all Ontarians must use ServiceOntario at one time or another. These companies wouldn't be subjected to the oversight role of the Auditor General or the public accounts committee, nor would these private corporations be subject to freedom-of-information requests.

Why is the government so determined to push through legislation that sets another stage for more Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I was also referencing Bill 50, which we need to pass, that deals with the challenges we found at Ornge, applying new principles as we move forward to ensure that those goods and services operated both publicly and privately on behalf of the people of Ontario are delivered with a maximum amount of transparency and accountability. That's what this government has been about.

I remember, for instance, we applied freedom-of-information transparency to the hydro agencies. When

the previous government privatized them, gave secret contracts to their friends, we thought that was wrong.

We welcome the findings of the Auditor General and the forensic auditors from the Ministry of Finance with respect to the challenges that emerged in the Ornge situation. We welcome your advice with respect to how to improve that transparency and accountability. We think it's important. We are the government that has in fact—

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

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, there has been an extensive conversation about anti-bullying legislation, both in this Legislature and in the media, and in schools all over the province.

There are currently two anti-bullying bills before this House: Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, and Bill 14, which was originally introduced by the former MPP from Kitchener–Waterloo, Elizabeth Witmer. I know that the feedback I'm getting is that people in the community, people who are knowledgeable about bullying, would really like to see us combine those two bills so that we get the best of both bills.

But bullying is not just something that only happens within schools; it's something that is a very complex issue. I know that the government bill, the Accepting Schools Act, is part of a whole-school approach. Could you explain the whole-school approach?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I am very pleased, and I want to commend the member for her long history and advocacy on safe and inclusive schools and the work she has done in the past that has helped us get to where we are today, Speaker.

Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, is a critical part of the work that we will do in this province to ensure that our schools are safe and inclusive. But it is just one part of a comprehensive action plan to end bullying in our schools and in our communities. We bring into that the investments in the children's mental health communities and the investments in the children's mental health sector that are now making their way into our schools and into our communities across the province.

We'll create an accepting schools expert panel to provide advice on things like early intervention and prevention to make sure that the programs that we use get it right. We're also going to be working with Ontario's curriculum council to ensure that we strengthen equity and inclusive education policies—all that part, as well as a public awareness campaign, of a comprehensive strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Through you, Speaker, bullying is something—we've all heard very tragic stories about children and youth who have been affected by bullying. I

think that Bill 13 and Bill 14 genuinely do reflect the will of this Legislature to do something about bullying.

But it isn't that we're starting from zero. In fact, there are many programs in schools that already address bullying. I wonder, Minister, if you could tell us about some of the programs that are already in place in schools.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member is quite right: There is much, much great work being done across the province. In the time I have to talk about it here—I won't have time to talk about all of those programs—I do want to say thank you to our school communities right across the province, our communities as a whole, who have taken a leadership role in this area.

I want to focus on one program in particular. I had a chance to connect with this program yet again this week when they had a forum here in Toronto. It's the Roots of Empathy program. It was founded by Mary Gordon in Toronto in 1996, and it's an incredibly amazing program, Speaker. I'm so proud that the Ministry of Education supports that program. It involves bringing a baby into classrooms to teach our youngest students—a young baby as the instructor to teach them about empathy. We know empathy is at the heart of what we need to do to ensure that our students are empathetic, they will be good leaders and we will have a good province.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Burlington on a point of order.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome today Burlington Central High School and Mr. Fila. My only son, so therefore my favourite son, is here today visiting at Queen's Park, and I'm very happy to have him here: Mac McKenna.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to raise what I think is a point of order. Earlier in the session, when I was answering a question, the member from Simcoe North shouted out, "Calm down, lady." I would like to suggest that under 23(k)—although I admit I've been called worse, I believe that that language was used in an insulting manner. I would like a ruling on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is, regrettably, not a point of order. Only the member themselves can correct their own record.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to encourage all members to attend the SEIU PSW reception taking place in room 230. Come say thank you to PSWs for providing great care.

Hon. James J. Bradley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Clifford Priest, Vincent Wong, Rick Gordon and Cathy Portolesi from the Niagara Region Police Association are here. I know you'd want to have them recognized. Perhaps you could rule whether that's a point of order or not.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, it is not a point of order, but we always welcome our guests.

The member from Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: On a point of order, Speaker: I'd like to introduce two guests, Praveen Mologue and Javier Yanez, from my riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do want to make a quick point on this. I do try my very best to get everyone introduced during the time allotted. These points of order are not points of order, but I would ask you to provide me with a little leeway in giving you the time during the assigned time to introduce guests. I'll try to do my best, but we do have to keep things moving, and I would ask you to try to refrain from these things, unless there are special moments where, obviously, a spouse or a son—your favourite son—is here. I would be more than willing to be accommodating in those circumstances.

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

The House recessed from 1140 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GODERICH ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to pay tribute to the Goderich Legion and the Goderich Ladies Auxiliary on their 85th and 65th anniversaries, respectively. I was pleased to be at their anniversary dinner on May 5 to celebrate this occasion.

In Goderich, the Legion, branch 109, is an integral player within the community. They provide funding to a multitude of community groups, such as cadets, sports teams, cultural groups and seniors. They provide free-of-charge wheelchair and mobility assist programs to seniors or anyone in need, Legion members or not.

When the tornado ripped through Goderich last August, the Legion building was in the direct path of the F3. It sustained a lot of damage, but that did not set them back, as the Legion members and the ladies auxiliary teamed up to raise \$90,000 to help rebuild the community.

The Goderich Ladies Auxiliary was formed by 28 ladies in 1947. The ladies auxiliary spend much of their time supporting our veterans and fundraising for various community initiatives. Their longest-running annual fundraising event is the Snowflake Bazaar, held each November for the past 33 years, second only to the Friendship Breakfast that ran for 24 years. The ladies auxiliary will always be grateful to the 28 ladies who blazed the path for the ladies of today. They will always be proud of their motto: "Pride in our past, faith in our future."

I want to congratulate the Goderich Legion and Goderich Ladies Auxiliary and wish them many more years of continued advocacy, community involvement and success.

GILFORD AND DISTRICT LIONS CLUB

Mrs. Julia Munro: On Saturday afternoon, I will be joining the Gilford and District Lions Club as they hold

their annual fundraiser, selling fireworks at Trotter's Esso.

The Gilford lions club has held this fundraiser for 16 years and to date has profited over \$75,000, which has been distributed in the community and beyond. The profits have been invested in the community for people in need of assistance, local youth sports, guide dog training, camps for juvenile dialysis and CNIB camps as well. The fireworks fundraiser lasts four days, from Friday until Monday.

I would like to thank the lions club for their contributions to the local community, including John and Jean Hamilton, who are co-chairs and past presidents of the Gilford lions club. Also, thank you to the volunteers as well as John Trotter for hosting this special event each year.

It is my pleasure to be joining them on Saturday. I'm looking forward to purchasing some fireworks for the coming Victoria Day weekend. I wish the Gilford and District Lions Club, as well as my riding of York-Simcoe, a safe and happy Victoria Day weekend.

URBAN FORESTRY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to talk about the role of the provincial government in urban forestry. As you may well be aware, the emerald ash borer is destroying mature trees throughout the urban areas of southern Ontario. There is a call on the part of urban forestry activists for this government to actually step in and have an impact. I'll read their call.

"Whereas over 80% of Canadians now live in urban areas and have come to rely on the environmental, ecological and economic benefits of urban forests; and

"Whereas the health of Canadians is sustained by their urban forests which provide services through improving air quality, cooling city streets and buildings, acting as a windbreak, shading from harmful UV rays, and filtering storm water, as well as beautifying our communities; and

"Whereas neither the federal nor provincial governments currently include urban forestry in their mandates except in a limited role with respect to exotic, invasive pests; and....

"Whereas the emerald ash borer is expected to cost Canadians over \$2 billion in treatment and replanting;"

Urban forestry activists ask that provincial governments take this issue on, provide support to municipal governments and provide resources.

Speaker, the Ministry of Energy alone should be deeply interested in this issue because the impact of losing the urban forest on cooling will put huge burdens on electricity demand.

WINDSOR WEST INNOVATION

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I rise today to speak about the innovation and excellence that is occurring in my riding and community. As I tour my riding, I'm constantly

inspired by the creative solutions and innovations local businesses and entrepreneurs are developing in Windsor.

Yesterday, the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation recognized researchers from the University of Windsor and Hydrostor for their underwater compressed air energy storage system. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending an announcement by another research team who, in partnership with SunSource Grids, have developed a unique switch that will seamlessly take customers off the grid during sun-producing hours.

In addition to developing innovative products that will drive the future economy, Windsor will also be home to the new Raindance centre, an incubator that will house the arts and film industry and position the region as a destination point for the creative class.

We are seeing innovation take root and flourish as a new way of life, from developing new cutting-edge apps to solar energy-powered golf carts to world-class research.

I'm also proud to welcome the Startup Canada tour, an entrepreneur-led national movement, to my home next week. If there's a place that can rethink it and create it, that place is called Windsor–Essex.

I'm proud of all the entrepreneurs and innovators in my riding. Speaker, I welcome you and all my colleagues to come to visit Windsor–Essex to see all the excitement.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Speaker, since the October 6 election, the PC Party has led three initiatives to stop further development of industrial wind turbines. The goal of these initiatives was to ensure that the local voices were involved in the approval process of the establishment of wind turbines, ending the massive subsidies to the wind companies and placing a moratorium on further development of wind turbines until a health study was done on the long-term effects of wind turbines.

Despite our efforts, the Liberal government, along with the NDP, voted against all three of our initiatives. The parties opposite voted against Bill 5, which was tabled by my colleague Todd Smith. They voted against my colleague Lisa Thompson's motion and they voted against our leader Tim Hudak's opposition day motion.

Despite our disappointment, we will not give up the fight. I oppose the heavy-handed approach that the McGuinty government is taking by forcing wind turbines on our local communities. Our party are determined to ensure the people of Ontario have a say, and I'm determined that the people across Lambton–Kent–Middlesex have a say.

Speaker, this government has pitted neighbour against neighbour, family member against family member, and I say enough is enough.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr. Michael Prue: May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month. Cystic fibrosis is the most common fatal genetic disease affecting Canadian children and young adults.

The effects of the disease are most devastating in the lungs, and ultimately, most deaths related to cystic fibrosis are due to lung disease.

Today there are more than 4,000 Canadians living with cystic fibrosis. Cystic Fibrosis Canada is a national health charity with 51 volunteer chapters. The organization has its sights set squarely on finding a cure and to help people and families affected by cystic fibrosis cope with their daily fight.

I'm pleased to welcome here today a representative from Cystic Fibrosis Canada, Andrew Guzzwell, who's here in the members' gallery.

Since 1960, Cystic Fibrosis Canada has invested more than \$140 million in leading CF research and care, resulting in one of the world's highest survival rates for people with cystic fibrosis. Today, nearly 60% of Canadians with cystic fibrosis are over the age of 18.

However, despite progress, there is no cure, and each week in Canada two children are diagnosed with this devastating disease. Of the individuals with cystic fibrosis that died in 2010, half were under 26 years of age.

Cystic fibrosis takes a heavy toll on the individuals affected and their families. Canadians with this disease spend the equivalent of four months of full-time work doing life-sustaining treatments every year.

During the month of May, Cystic Fibrosis Canada is organizing many activities and events to raise awareness and funds to support vital CF research and care, and Cystic Fibrosis Canada is committed to finding a cure. Success is the only option.

1510

GO TRANSIT

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize GO Transit's 45th anniversary.

As the greater Toronto–Hamilton area has grown, so have GO Transit services. From its humble beginnings as a single-line commuter rail service in 1967 from Pickering to Hamilton, GO Transit now has seven different rail lines and numerous bus routes spanning across 53 municipalities. GO Transit ridership has gone from 2.5 million riders in its first year of rail operation to approximately 57 million rail and bus riders per year, and we expect those numbers to grow.

Just this past December, GO Transit rail service was officially launched in the Kitchener–Waterloo region. That line reaches Toronto, passing through my riding of York South–Weston. This is in addition to the GO bus service that operates between Cambridge and Kitchener–Waterloo to Milton GO Station and Mississauga's Square One.

Since 2003, GO Transit has put into service new vehicles that are modern, accessible, more fuel-efficient and carry more passengers. This includes 22 double-decker buses added to the GO Transit bus fleet.

Mr. Speaker, public transit continues to be a priority for our government. We understand the need to reduce gridlock and build stronger communities.

Please join me in congratulating GO Transit for 45 years of service in the Toronto and Hamilton area.

NORTH GRENVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AWARDS

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to rise today to salute the people and businesses honoured at the 24th annual North Grenville Chamber of Commerce Salute to Excellence awards. It's always great to be in North Grenville, one of the fastest-growing communities in eastern Ontario. This was another wonderful celebration of business success and community involvement.

Among the honourees was Paul Jansen, who was named the chamber's Citizen of the Year. Gerry Tallman, who unfailingly supports so many events and organization, was a very popular and deserving recipient of the Volunteer of the Year award. This year's Employer of the Year honour was taken by the Kemptville Building Centre. New Business of the Year was the eQuinelle Golf Club, which is quickly gaining a reputation as one of the finest courses in my part of the province, while Bill Osborne Chevrolet Buick GMC was chosen Established Business of the Year.

There were also Co-operative Education Student of the Year awards for Erick Trafford from North Grenville District High School and Samantha St. Pierre from St. Michael Catholic High School.

I congratulate all of those recognized, whose efforts make our communities a great place to live and work. I want to say a special thanks to Wendy Chapman, executive director, and her team, including board chair Mark Thornton, for organizing this special evening.

As the community continues to add new businesses and residents to its booming economy, there will be much more to celebrate when the chamber's Salute to Excellence marks its 25th anniversary next year.

IT'S ALL ABOUT KINDNESS DAY

Mr. David Zimmer: I rise today to acknowledge that the city of Toronto has proclaimed May 16 as It's All About Kindness Day, in honour of the late June Callwood. Ms. Callwood was a renowned activist, journalist and author. She committed her life to focusing and implementing change for many social justice issues, in particular with respect to women and children. June Callwood quickly became one of Canada's most famous social activists, founding or co-founding over 50 social action organizations. Some of her most famous organizations are Casey House, PEN Canada, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Feminists Against Censorship. June was inducted into the Order of Canada in 1988 in recognition of these achievements.

Today the city of Toronto will be hosting numerous celebrations in memory of her. Most notably, the CN Tower will be lit in her honour.

I ask that all members of this Legislature and residents of Toronto, Ontario and indeed Canada join in the

festivities of It's All About Kindness Day in honour of the late June Callwood and her life and legacy.

VISITOR

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. I was a little tardy getting to my place today. I did want to introduce, in the members' gallery west today, Adam Bloskie, who is a graduate of the political science program at the University of Toronto and also a summer student who's going to be working for me, splitting his time between Queen's Park and the constit. He's also a hometown boy from the best place in the world, Barry's Bay.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So that our visitor understands, it's not actually a point of order, but we let it happen because we have visitors. So thank you for doing that.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

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

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

Bill Pr1, An Act to revive Coutu Gold Mines Limited.

Bill Pr4, An Act to revive Hili Enterprises Ltd.

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

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. Yurek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector / Projet de loi 92, Loi visant à geler la rémunération pendant deux ans dans le secteur public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement. I know you didn't hear because of the heckling, but it's your turn.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to stand in the House today and introduce the Comprehensive Public Sector Compensation Freeze Act. Once enacted, this legislation will apply to all public sector employees in the Ontario public service and all employees in the broader public sector under provincial control.

For a period of at least two years, this legislation will freeze all rates of pay, freeze increases and employee benefits, freeze all movements in salary grids and eliminate bonuses. Additionally, this act provides for any monies paid in contravention to the act to become a debt due to be paid back to the employer of record, namely the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive public sector wage freeze is necessary and urgently needed to control spiralling deficits. With this bill, a zero increase actually means zero. I am proud to table this necessary legislation to impose a comprehensive freeze for at least two years on all salaries and compensation paid to employees in Ontario's public sector, including myself.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will remind all members that it is the tradition to read from the explanatory note and to be brief about it.

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT
(SERVING LIQUOR
IN CERTAIN PLACES), 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL
(SERVICE D'ALCOOL
DANS CERTAINS LIEUX)

Mrs. Albanese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act in relation to serving liquor in certain places / Projet de loi 93, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool relativement au service d'alcool dans certains lieux.

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.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places), 2012, seeks to curb the illegal sale and service of alcohol and the operation of booze cans by giving police the tools they need to deter offenders and keep our communities safe.

1520

This act would create, if passed, a new offence whereby an individual caught illegally selling or serving alcohol would be subject to new, more stringent bail

conditions and additional penalties. This would help people feel safe on their street, on their property and in their homes.

ADDRESSING ONTARIO'S DEBT
THROUGH ALTERNATIVES
TO PUBLIC SECTOR LAYOFFS
AND PROGRAM CUTS ACT, 2012
LOI DE 2012 VISANT À S'ATTAQUER
À LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO
SANS RECOURIR À DES MISES À PIED
DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC
ET À DES COMPRESSIONS
DANS LES PROGRAMMES

Mr. Barrett moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to address Ontario's debt through alternatives to public sector layoffs and government program cuts while reducing the fiscal pressure on the people of Ontario who are having trouble paying their bills / Projet de loi 94, Loi visant à s'attaquer à la dette de l'Ontario sans recourir à des mises à pied dans le secteur public et à des compressions dans les programmes gouvernementaux tout en allégeant le fardeau financier des Ontariennes et Ontariens qui peinent à payer leurs factures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Barrett moves that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to address Ontario's debt through alternatives to public sector layoffs and government program cuts while reducing the fiscal pressure on the people of Ontario who are having trouble paying their bills. 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. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker, for reading the full title.

This act amends the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993, to allow the government to act immediately to limit increases in compensation paid to employees in the public sector, while recognizing its legal duty to consult fully with those employees and the bargaining agents representing them and to negotiate with them constructively and in good faith.

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES**

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION DES POLICIERS
DE L'ONTARIO

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I rise today to pay tribute to the Police Association of Ontario and its members as we welcome them on their annual legislative day here at

Queen's Park. I would especially like to acknowledge PAO president David McFadden and chief administrative officer Ron Middel.

L'association représente plus de 34 000 agents de police et civils dans les services de police municipaux et à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario. Ce sont des hommes et des femmes qui mettent chaque jour leur vie en danger pour s'assurer que notre province demeure sûre, sécuritaire et prospère.

The Police Association of Ontario's legislative day is our opportunity to say thank you on behalf of the people of Ontario. It is also an occasion for the PAO to share with us their professional perspectives about policing in Ontario. Through these discussions, we can work together to meet the challenges we all face.

One such challenge is the future of policing in this province. In March, we convened a summit on this important subject with the active participation of the PAO, along with our other policing partners.

Ce congrès a amorcé un dialogue continu sur les défis auxquels font face les services policiers, ainsi que sur les stratégies nécessaires pour mettre en place une prestation durable des services policiers en Ontario pour le présent et pour l'avenir.

Moving forward, the ministry will be conducting a review of core police service delivery, and we will seek the expertise of the PAO, along with chiefs of police, police service boards and municipalities to complete this work. Through this review, I am confident that we will together identify new and innovative ways to manage police resources and maintain the quality of service that Ontario's communities have come to know. We appreciate the PAO's contribution to this project.

I also wish to acknowledge the PAO's guidance and advice as a key partner of this ministry in the development of province-wide policies for police services. Their participation gives us the valuable perspective of active-duty police officers in our policy deliberations.

Nos rapports avec l'association reposent sur les principes de confiance, d'ouverture et de collaboration, ces mêmes principes qui nous soutiennent pendant ces moments difficiles que passe la province. Nous remercions l'Association des policiers de l'Ontario pour son travail dévoué, pour ses commentaires honnêtes et pour le dialogue respectueux qu'elle entretient avec nous.

We will continue to do our part to ensure that our partnership thrives.

I invite all members of this House to join me in expressing our sincerest thanks to the Police Association of Ontario and its membership for helping us make Ontario a stronger and safer place in which to live, work and play.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Today is Personal Support Worker Day, a day when we recognize and celebrate the enormous contribution of Ontario's dedicated personal

support workers, and welcome to the gallery the personal support workers who are here.

Earlier today, it was my pleasure to meet with personal support workers here at Queen's Park and thank them in person for the tremendous support they provide to Ontarians in the home, in hospitals and in long-term care.

Yesterday, I was very pleased to join with the Premier to announce that we will be adding three million more hours of care by PSWs over the next three years, including an estimated one million hours this year. This investment is part of our budget commitment to increase funding for the home and community care sector by 4% in each of the next three years. That means an additional \$526 million annually by 2014-15. This is the right choice for our seniors, who will benefit from more home care as a result. And it's why we've made the difficult decision to freeze doctors' pay: so we can afford it.

There are an estimated 90,000 PSWs in Ontario, who perform essential services for their clients. They help with personal hygiene, light housekeeping and many, many other duties. The care PSWs provide for Ontarians cannot be overstated. They help people of all ages recover from illness, live with a chronic disease or disability, or live at home with independence and dignity as long as possible.

Last year, to foster better recognition of the work of PSWs while helping to better meet the needs of the people they care for, our government announced the creation of a registry for personal support workers. Various PSW stakeholders are currently working to implement the first phase of the registry. We expect it to be up and running by this summer.

PSWs play an especially critical role in providing services in the community, and they demonstrate a deep passion and commitment to providing exceptional care to their home care clients.

Our government recognizes the need to focus more in community and home care settings. That's why our recent budget provided a 4% increase in funding in each of the next three years for community care services.

In fact, we've steadily increased spending on community services, more than doubling it between 2003 and 2011. We've gone from \$418.7 million in 2003 to \$857.4 million in 2011. But we've done much more than simply invest dollars. We've worked collaboratively, in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, to transform and strengthen the home care sector. I'm very pleased to say we have always enjoyed a wonderful and productive relationship with the community services sector.

So while community services remain important, the plain truth is that we must slow down our overall spending. We have to address both a looming \$15-billion deficit and the needs of a growing and aging population. Tough times demand innovative, resourceful solutions. We have to reform the way we provide services and strike the right balance. We have to put patients and clients at the centre, focus on quality and spend only on

those services and procedures that add value. That's what our action plan for health care is all about.

1530

Part of our action plan is providing access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time. This means a shift away from acute and long-term care toward more home and community care, not only because it's where people prefer to be but because home care provides the best value for our health dollars. We need to build a continuum of care in the community so that there are more options for seniors to get the care they need, and that means doing what we can to reduce institutionalization and readmission into hospitals and long-term-care homes.

Personal support workers will play a critical role in bringing the vision of the action plan to life. The health care system will rely on them to continue providing those vital services that make such a difference to people's quality of life. No matter the setting in which they work, PSWs make a tremendous contribution, not only to their clients but to the province's health care system.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you again to Ontario's dedicated personal support workers for all they do on behalf of Ontarians.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration responsible—

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —for the Pan Am Games.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm sorry I cut you off.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I need to finish. Okay.

Hon. Charles Sousa: My apologies.

May 21 is World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, as proclaimed by the United Nations.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that connections between different cultures spark innovation and drive development. We know this to be true from our own experience here in Ontario. Ontarians come from over 200 countries, speak more than 130 languages, practise every faith and have links to all corners of the globe. In the past 50 years, Ontario has opened its doors and its heart to become a truly global village. Our province has been enriched beyond measure by the newcomers who have started new lives right here.

In addition to bringing their hopes and dreams, newcomers to Ontario bring highly valued skills that are critical to our economic prosperity. This diversity enriches our culture and is a tremendous asset for our economy.

Three of every four working-age immigrants arriving in our province have a post-secondary education. These highly skilled immigrants bring with them a wealth of skills and talents that are vital to Ontario's economic

prosperity. That's why diverse societies are more creative and more productive.

Along with sparking innovation, newcomers will be crucial in filling the gaps in our labour force as the baby boomers retire and as birth rates decline. In fact, within five years, newcomers will be responsible for all of the net growth in our labour force.

Newcomers are welcome. That's why our government invests in programs and services to help newcomers settle, become job-ready and licensed to work. It's why we're supporting the Maytree Foundation to increase the number of visible minorities in leadership positions in the GTA. It's why we support the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's Global Experience at Work program. The OCC partners with local chambers of commerce to help internationally trained professionals find jobs in their fields in and across communities in Ontario.

But we all know there's more to life than work. Every year, millions of Ontarians celebrate and support the many different traditions living among us: from Caribana and Taste of the Danforth in Toronto to the Dragon Boat Festival in Ottawa; from Carassauga in Mississauga to the Carrousel of the Nations in Windsor. We have the whole world at our doorstep to experience and enjoy.

When we share our heritage and customs, we are stronger. With this in mind, the UN has launched a global campaign called Do One Thing for Diversity and Inclusion. On this day, Ontarians are asked to support diversity. Take a walk through a different neighbourhood, visit a museum that showcases a different culture, read a book from another country or share perspectives with your friends on Facebook. Today, let's celebrate the diversity of our great province. It has enriched our society and powered our economy. It has made Ontario a beacon to the world, and it will make Ontario even stronger in the years to come. Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you for mentioning Brantford International Villages.

Responses?

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. John Yakabuski: We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the police officers across Ontario for making our communities safer and better places to live. They work with passion and commitment, help guide our young people and work with us to build a stronger Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, to personally thank you for your service to the people of Ontario and to welcome you to Queen's Park.

Police officers are a valuable and essential component of our communities. They pound the pavement, patrol our neighbourhoods and respond to our calls of distress. As part of Police Week, I welcome the Police Association of Ontario here today and look forward to further discussing with them ways in which we can work collaboratively towards keeping Ontario safer for all.

Such opportunities are key to strengthening the link between the police and our citizens, by reminding us that we all work best when we work together.

Representing over 30,000 police officers and civilian members of police services from 58 associations, I look forward to the opportunity to meet with the representatives of the PAO later today. I also look forward to further discussions with the chiefs of police and the Ontario Provincial Police Association. Listening to these police organizations provides us with the first-hand, on-the-ground information we need. Their input will ensure the decisions we make here in the Legislature will indeed be in the best interests of all Ontario's citizens, and continue to make it the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family in the safe, secure environment they have provided us all along.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's a privilege to rise today on behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus as we celebrate Personal Support Worker Day across Ontario. Personal support workers embody the very best of our communities and the future of our health care system. While PSWs play a significant role in traditional care settings, your valuable work stretches beyond the hospital into schools, community centres and, of course, the home. Simply put, these dedicated, hard-working members of our health care community provide front-line care support when and where we need it.

I would say to the members, to the PSWs who are here today, it's not just the medical care and the home care services you provide; it's the emotional support that you provide that really goes above and beyond. It really makes a difference to so many people. You're often the friend, confidant and de facto navigator of our health care system, and that's what really makes a difference and plays a critical role in the recovery of patients.

So on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, I'd like to thank each and every personal support worker from across the province for the phenomenal work that you do each and every day in our communities, and I wish you every success as you continue your noble work. Thank you very much.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm also pleased to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, to recognize the 10th anniversary of the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. Next week, people across Canada and the world will join together to celebrate different cultural achievements and engage in important conversations of the value of diversity and inclusion.

In 2001, UNESCO took the first steps to promote our diverse cultural heritage by adopting the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. To build on that achievement, the United Nations General Assembly

passed a resolution that declared May 21 to be the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. This resolution invites all UN members to raise awareness through education and the media about the importance of cultural diversity in society.

In my job as an MPP, I've been able to witness first-hand the positive role different cultures play in strengthening our society. Since October, I've attended many cultural events in the GTA and in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. Each one has given me an excellent opportunity to learn about their various customs, religions and languages among Ontario's diverse population. Through these experiences I've come to realize just how much ethnic community contributes to our province and to our common identity. So I would like to invite all members of this House and all Ontarians to celebrate the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development on May 21.

1540

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today on police association day to thank members of the Police Association of Ontario, specifically some local members—Shawn McCurdy from Amherstburg, Gerald Brun from LaSalle, Chris Matis from LaSalle and Jason DeJong from Windsor—who came and visited me today on behalf of the police association to enlighten me as to some of the issues that face our police services—I'm sure everyone in the House got a brief today—some of which are:

- the facts on interest arbitration, an issue that we're all talking about and something that we have to ensure that we know some of the facts on before we make any rash decisions;

- the conducted energy weapons, more commonly known as tasers, and investigating the expansion of use of those non-lethal weapons to our police services so that they can potentially avoid some deaths in different scenarios; and

- the expansion of presumption coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, for police officers under the WSIB system. It's a shame that not only are our police officers going through this and fighting for this in Ontario, but so are men and women in our armed forces at the federal level. It's one of the biggest disgraces, that we are neglecting those men and women in our services that need that support.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to help celebrate Personal Support Worker Day, first by thanking Carol McDowell from SEIU Local 1, Canada, for helping to organize and bring PSWs to talk to each and every one of the members in this House.

It was rather interesting that a member from the PC Party decided to celebrate by putting a bill forward that would freeze your wages. I'm not sure this is the type of

celebration you wanted, but, you know, you come to Queen's Park, you get what you get.

Then we had the minister talking about investing in one million more hours in home care. Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, the home care system in Ontario is broken. I am really happy that we will be investing in another million hours, but we're investing into a broken system.

We have a system dominated by the for-profits, that cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce. If you cannot have stability in your workforce, you cannot have quality care. Quality care is directly linked to continuity of care, and if it's different home care workers who come to your house every three or four weeks, you cannot have quality care. What happens? Those people end up in the emergency room. They end up waiting for hours. They end up in a bed in one of our hospitals, and then they're labelled "alternate level of care." None of them want to be in a hospital bed. They want to be in their home, supported by good personal support workers.

Those workers can barely do their jobs. Did you know that most of them make \$1 or \$2 above minimum wage? Did you know that they don't get paid to go from one house to the next? In my riding, the distances are huge. The average PSW will submit over 700 kilometres of travel. You know how long it takes to travel 700 kilometres on the roads in Nickel Belt? It takes a long time. They don't get paid for this. What kind of a system asks people to work and not get paid? Our home care system: It is broken.

You know how to fix the long waits in ERs? You know how to fix this ever-mounting number of people being labelled ALC and languishing in hospital beds? There's an easy fix, Mr. Speaker: Make home care jobs good jobs.

Right now you can't even recruit people to take the course for PSW because they know that they will be working for less than minimum wage. Those great women sitting there do this because they have a heart, and we owe it to them to be very proud of what they do and thank them for everything that they do. But it is still not right.

Make home care jobs good jobs, and you will go a long way toward fixing a lot of what is broken in our ERs and our hospitals, and give respect to people who, on this day and every single day, deserve the respect of this House.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Mr. Michael Prue: In the 15 seconds which I have, I'd just like to commend this wonderful opportunity for people to discover cultural diversity, particularly here in the province of Ontario. We are blessed to have people from so many places, and we need to know that cultural diversity and understanding each other's culture and each other's religion will end many conflicts before they ever have a chance to start.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on a point of order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I neglected to mention in my statement on cultural diversity that Brantford is also celebrating the Brantford International Villages Festival—35 years strong, Mr. Speaker. I encourage you, sir, to visit them this summer from July 4 to July 7—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. Here's the test of the Speaker. Well, that's not a point of order. Even though you were trying to correct your record, you didn't say it in the first place. But that's quite all right that you've mentioned the Brantford International Villages Festival. I appreciate that.

I want to remind all of our guests on an ongoing basis: We absolutely want you to be here. We enjoy your presence here, but a subtle reminder that you cannot participate in any other displays whatsoever. Whether you like what you hear, whether you don't like what you hear, the idea is, that's the place for the House to do that. I just offer us a gentle reminder of participating in the debates.

It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition, I'll affix my name and I'll send it to the clerks' desk with my friend Brady, who will only be here for two more days.

DOG OWNERSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

Yet another dog is threatened with euthanization right now as I sign this.

Of course I agree, and I’m going to give it to Safa to be delivered.

RADIATION SAFETY

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

“Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

“Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

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

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

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

I fully agree with this petition, I sign it and pass it on to page Katarina.

1550

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, I affix my signature and I’ll send it to the table with Vincent.

HYDRO RATES

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

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

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

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

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

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

“How much of the debt remains?

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

I fully support this petition and present it to page Georgia to deliver to the clerks’ table.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

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

“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 certainly support this petition, and affix my signature and give it to page Sarah.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine

development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

I agree with this petition, and I will put my name to it—

Mr. Bill Walker: And send it with William.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: —and I’m going to send it with William.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition from York South–Weston addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario 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, will sign it and hand it over to page Safa.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jim McDonell: “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 more than a dozen 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 airlifted actually declined by 6%;

“Whereas Ornge was paid \$7,700 per patient transported by land ambulance despite subcontracting this service for \$1,700 per patient, a full \$6,000 per patient less;

“Whereas, after receiving questions of serious concerns at Ornge from the opposition in 2010 and early 2011, the Minister of Health did not provide adequate oversight, ignored the red flags and reassured the Legislature that all was well; and

“Whereas, on March 21, 2012, the Legislature voted to create a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge;

“Whereas such a committee provides protection from disciplinary action against employees who testify;

“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 agree with this petition, will be signing it and handing it off to page Jenny.

SERVICES DIAGNOSTIQUES

Mr. Michael Mantha: À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que l'Ontario fait de la tomographie par émission de positons (TEP) un service de santé assuré par le régime public pour les patients atteints du cancer et de maladies cardiaques, lorsque les données cliniques indiquent que cette technique est efficace dans leur cas; et

« Attendu que d'ici octobre 2009, des TEP assurées seront effectuées à Ottawa, à London, à Toronto, à Hamilton ainsi qu'à Thunder Bay; et

« Attendu que la ville du Grand Sudbury est une plaque tournante pour la santé dans le Nord-Est, qui compte l'Hôpital régional de Sudbury et son programme régional de cancer, de même que l'École de médecine du Nord de l'Ontario;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario d'offrir de la TEP par le biais de l'Hôpital régional de Sudbury, donnant ainsi un accès équitable aux résidents du Nord-Est de l'Ontario. »

Je suis complètement d'accord avec cette pétition, monsieur le Président, et je la présente à page Sarah pour la délivrer aux clerks.

RADON

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

“Whereas radon is an inert gas formed by the radioactive decay of uranium-238, which is present in rocks and soils in the earth's crust;

“Whereas there have been many studies linking radon gas as a cancer-causing agent;

“Whereas studies have covered various aspects of radon exposure as a prevalent carcinogen in various locations, the most predominant locations being work-places and residential homes; and

“Whereas currently there is no regulation in Ontario that governs what is an acceptable level of radon in a public and/or private dwelling;

1600

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

“To support private member's Bill 36, introduced by Reza Moridi, MPP, Richmond Hill, on February 23, 2012, which would enact the Radon Awareness and

Prevention Act, 2012, and amend the Building Code Act, 1992, with respect to radon.”

I fully agree with this petition and sign it and pass it on to page William.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition to present on behalf of some residents in my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

“Whereas Bill 13 fails to provide any protection for students of faith or students of distinct physical characteristics;

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

“To vote against Bill 13 or to so amend Bill 13 as to equally protect all students, including students of faith.”

I'll send this with a page.

DOG OWNERSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

Already, 1,000 dogs have been killed. I want to prevent any more death.

I'm going to sign this and give this to Vincent to be delivered to the table.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services' Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

“Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the

care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name and send it with Sarah to the clerks’ desk.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have another petition from residents of York South–Weston.

“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 will sign this and hand it over to page Vincent.

WIND TURBINES

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

“Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

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

“That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

“That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

I agree with the petition and will be signing it.

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 15, 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. John Milloy: Oh, come on.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and thank you very much to the government House leader. I know he always loves when I get up to speak.

In seriousness, however, I think each member finds that the moment that they are able to debate the budget of any given year is an extremely humbling experience. It was one when I first made my speech in this esteemed chamber as a member back in 2006, and I’ve taken that task each and every year very seriously. I review the budget based on the values, the ideals and the dreams of my constituents. In recent years, however, it has been also the plight of my constituents, as we’ve seen our economy flounder. Here I am today, with the views and the aspirations of my constituents that I choose to bring to the floor today on this budget.

Speaker, we are in a situation where this province is losing jobs, almost tens of thousands by the month. We are in one of the most high-tax regimes we’ve seen, as I alluded to earlier today, in a position of having seen the highest sales tax increase in our province’s history as a result of the HST that came in in 2010-11.

We know that they brought in the health premium, which is actually a tax, back in 2004. That was, at the time, the largest income tax increase in this province’s history.

We know, through this government’s green energy plan, that we are subsidizing green power off the backs of middle-class families, seniors on a fixed income and small businesses that are struggling to create those jobs we need for a full economic recovery.

We know that in rural communities, which I am proud to represent, we are being hard hit, not only by a budget that doesn’t represent them but by an attack on rural values as it pertains to the horse racing industry. There are real stories, real consequences, as a result of this government’s action or, in some cases, lack thereof.

There are stories of people you visit, whom you talk to, who share their problems, who share what they hope could happen. You see, for many years Ontario was the leader in Confederation. We had the best, the most robust, the most optimistic economy. People came here from around the world. They came here from other provinces, and I should know, as does my colleague from Welland. We came here from a little province called Nova Scotia.

This was the place where you could realize that dream of having a full-time job. It was the place where you could realize the dream of home ownership. It was the place where you could realize the dream of growing your

family. That's the province that I came to—the economic engine of Confederation.

Unfortunately, with our high taxes and this government's lack of focus on government spending, we see a very different Ontario today, one that is lagging in economic growth behind the Prairies, and Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island at times. We have significant challenges in this province, and the people I represent feel it every single day. They know, for example, that every single dollar they send to Queen's Park is not being spent wisely.

They've heard over the years—and my goodness, Speaker, they are some angry—about the waste and mismanagement at eHealth. That's a billion-dollar boondoggle. At the time, we thought it couldn't get any worse. In fact, this government brought in legislation and promised it wouldn't. But then it did, Speaker. We ended up with Ornge. We don't even know the true rot; we don't know the true loss of public dollars to that massive scandal. We've been asking for months now for a select committee to find out where people's taxpayer dollars are in this province.

Speaker, I want to talk directly about how this impacts the people I represent. We have personal care workers here today. Let me tell you a story. Mr. Duncan, the finance minister, stood before this House on budget day and he told us that the third-largest spending priority of his government is the debt and the deficit. We are in massive deficit, and our debt has tripled since they've taken office. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? In Mr. Duncan's own words—let me paraphrase—every single dollar taken away from health care and education goes toward the budget. More effectively, let me say it this way: Every single dollar we spend on interest to foreign banks is a dollar less spent here in Ontario, in our hospitals and in our education sector front lines, in our schools. Let us also put this into perspective: We spend more servicing the debt and the deficit than we do on every other government department combined outside of education and health care. That's what this government has done.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to talk about a brief meeting I had at the home of one of my constituents in a small rural village in the city of Ottawa. They live in a trailer park; not a lot of insulation in their home. Their water quality is poor. I've been on the case in Lynnwood trailer park for a long time. I dropped by this family's house just before Christmas. I wanted to say thank you to them for all the things they had done for me over the year. When we got talking about Facebook, I said to them, "Just log in right now."

They looked at me across their kitchen table and they said, "We can't. We can't afford to turn on our computer during the day. You'll notice we don't have any lights on during the day either." And then they further told me that they don't put their heat on during the day. Thankfully, that was a mild day.

We have people who are being forced to choose between heating and eating in this province because this

government has levelled a tax burden on them that is simply unsustainable. Then they look back at this government spending all that money on the debt and deficit because they haven't been able to control it. We look at them spending money on Ornge and at eHealth, and they can't understand it. They can't fathom that Chris Mazza was making \$1.5 million, when \$500,000 would be more than every trailer in that park. I must say that it shocks me.

And then I speak to my constituents who are in the horse racing industry, at Rideau Carleton Raceway. Speaker, it would make you cry. I want to tell you the story of Ricky Sullivan, who I spent some time with in the last two weeks. Ricky Sullivan would break your heart. This is what he told the Manotick Messenger when I was with him: "I'm almost 50. I have cancer, I have sclerosis of the liver and I'm looking at losing everything." Sullivan owns a farm and a training centre on Stagecoach Road. I'm proud to say it's in Nepean-Carleton. He has 60 horses, three barns, a training facility and a track on his farm. The end of the slots-at-racetracks program, he says, will wipe him out. Let me read his quote to you: "When you hear something like this, at first you don't believe it. But it's real. My little farm is not going to survive this. We're going to lose everything, and then we have about a dozen people working there that are going to be out of jobs. My hydro bills are about \$1,000 to \$1,100 a month, and insurance on our farm is about \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year. We won't be able to afford either. We're screwed." That's what this government has done to my constituents.

I'm ashamed that they have gone ahead with this budget without consulting the very people that they are going to put out of business and, in some cases, put out of house and home. And they're not alone; it's the small businesses; it's my constituent who owns the electricity store in Bells Corners who says his heating bill alone will force him not to be able to hire summer students this year.

Mr. Speaker, on the backdrop of this is Ornge, and we've been calling for a public inquiry into this. We've been asking for a select committee. This government has refused, and that's why I, right now, will call for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. MacLeod has called for adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I believe the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1614 to 1644.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the debate.

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

All those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 19; the nays are 34.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I call for adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. Macleod has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear nays.

All those in favour will say “yea.”

All those opposed will say “nay.”

I believe the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1646 to 1716.

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

Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 18; the nays are 34.

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

Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Sorry. Questions and comments? I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I said thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to debate.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Are you talking—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, the NDP is not up. The member from Huron–Bruce, then.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to join the debate today on Bill 55, Ontario’s budget bill—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I’m doing the hit on you? You know what? I’m also pleased to speak on the comments by the honourable member from Nepean–Carleton, because she has done such a great job elocuting the fact that this bill does absolutely nothing to build an affordable Ontario for Ontarians, as they’ve been calling out.

Our member from Nepean–Carleton demonstrated, example after example, how local people in her riding are being impacted. The fact that they’ve had to choose whether they’re going to pay their electricity bill or their food bill is just staggering. As she very eloquently pointed out, she was hopeful in her move to Ontario, which she thought was the economic engine of Confederation, and sadly enough today we’re at the back of the train. We’re no longer the engine. I don’t even know if we’re attached to the caboose at this stage of the game. It’s just a sad state of affairs.

We need a government in Ontario that’s prepared to take bold steps and do the right thing by the good people of Ontario and demonstrate that they matter, that we understand what it’s like, that we need to have money left over in our pockets at the end of the day for those special little things for families and communities. We have also

realized, through comments earlier today, that Ontario is no longer the economic engine of Confederation. Sad to say, some folks from Brock, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes—you can say it the other way around as well—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much. There are some folks there who think this province of Ontario has become very mean, and that’s sad. We need to restore prosperity in this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions or comments? The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Nepean–Carleton for her remarks earlier today before the bells.

There are people hurting all over this province. I had the opportunity on Saturday to actually attend an event with ACORN, which is a community housing advocate group that has 23,000 members here in Ontario. They talked about falling behind, about paying 70% to 80%, some of them, in rent from their income. The vast majority of their members certainly are paying more than the guideline of 35% or 40%. They’re disappointed that there’s nothing in this budget for new housing initiatives, for new affordable housing for low-, modest- and medium-income people in the province of Ontario. The Liberals committed to a long-term strategy, but they have not put any targets or controls to that initiative. So these people are feeling kind of left out in this process. They would have loved to have been able to come and make a presentation if we had had public hearings on the budget prior to the budget speech and the budget bill being presented. They would have told you that we need some full rent controls in this province; we need some landlord licensing. Many of these people are living in buildings that are in great disrepair. Now we hear that there are municipal powers in place, but in fact many of the landlords in this province are actually paying the fines instead of doing the repairs because it’s cheaper.

One gentleman who I talked to said the elevator was broken in his 20-storey building for a period of more than two years. He received no compensation for having to travel up I don’t know how many flights of stairs to actually bring groceries into his apartment.

So there are many more things that need to be done for Ontarians.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen to the comments from my colleague from Nepean–Carleton.

I want to just tell those people in Peterborough riding, just before they sit down for dinner this evening—they’re probably just tuning in, so I want to give them a bit of a scorecard here. Of late, we’ve had 45 bells in the Ontario Legislature. We’ve had over 13 hours of debate on Bill 55.

When I was talking to my constituents last Friday, they were telling me they want Bill 11 passed; that’s the enshrinement of EODF that helps eastern Ontario, my part of Ontario. They want the healthy homes renovation

tax credit brought into being to help out those seniors. I met a number of schoolchildren who are very anxious to see Bill 13 enshrined—the anti-bullying legislation—to help out some of our most vulnerable children in our schools. We want to see that in place by the start of the new school year in September.

So that's what they're telling me when I have those great conversations with people at the East City Coffee Shop—a great spot to go. You get to see a broad cross-section of Peterborough there. That's what they told me last Friday. Healthy homes renovation tax credit—they want it passed. Bill 11, EODF—they want that passed.

If you want to talk about meanness, I'll tell you about meanness. From 1995 to 2003, what happened? The minimum wage was frozen for eight long years in the province of Ontario. The first act of their government in 1995: Slash the rates of people who were on ODSP and OW by 21%. Anybody who has been involved in the poverty reduction strategy in the province of Ontario would tell you the poverty spiral started in 1995, when those two draconian measures were taken which hurt, hurt, hurt some of our most vulnerable citizens in the province of Ontario. You want to talk about meanness? I'll tell you about meanness. They define meanness in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to rise and comment on the factual words that my colleague from Nepean–Carleton brought about Bill 55, Strong Action—that's a little bit of a misnomer, but we won't go there right now.

I want to make sure that I do compliment her, though. She moved here from Nova Scotia to what she suggested was the economic engine of our Confederation. Their loss is our certain gain, and in our PC caucus it is definitely a gain for us.

But I ask the question, if she was making that decision on behalf of her family today, would she move to Ontario? I think not. Why would she come to a province that has more debt and the largest deficit in Confederation? No jobs—600,000 people out of jobs and no prospect for the next generation, Speaker.

She brought really good words about the people in her riding and how they're struggling; it's unfortunate that they're struggling. They are leaving their lights off in the middle of the daytime because they cannot afford those hydro bills, those hydro bills that have gone up 46% as a result of this very inane Green Energy Act—very poorly thought out. There's no jobs. There's no economic benefit to this. In fact, it's driving people out of our economy and out of our province at record numbers.

This government, in this budget—the deficit is \$15.3 billion more than they're taking in, and they're spending, and yet they still added—14 out of 24 ministries are going to have increased budgets. It's ludicrous. We just can't continue—they've doubled the debt in eight years. It took the rest of our time as a province to get to this debt level, and they've doubled it in eight years.

The third-largest expense, she explained, is servicing the debt. Just think, with regard to the PSW workers who were here today, how much care we could give to those people in need across our great province if we weren't spending the third-largest expenditure on financing the deficit that they have drummed up in eight years.

Speaker, we need them to pull back spending. We wanted a jobs plan to get those 600,000 people working. We wanted them to pay down debt. They didn't, so we cannot support Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nepean–Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to, first, thank those who engaged in debate with me today, the member from Huron–Bruce and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I must say their passion has been here since they joined this Legislature. They are a wonderful addition to our Progressive Conservative caucus.

To my colleague from Welland, I appreciated her kind views of the people that she represents. Keep doing that. It will hold you in good stead the remainder of the time you are here at Queen's Park.

To my friend from Peterborough, whom I do consider to be a good adversary—however, he is wrong. If he would like to talk about scores and settling the scores, I can tell him. He can talk about 45 bells, Speaker; I can only talk about two deaths in the last week that were caused as a result of the mismanagement at Ornge. That is why we are ringing those bells. We want justice for patients who need to go on air transport here in this province to go from community to community.

I can tell you something, Speaker. I was listening to Newstalk 1010 today. They were talking about the need for Deb Matthews to resign as a result of what happened at Ornge. That is why we are ringing the bells. We want a select committee, we want that minister to resign and we want justice at Ornge. We want to know where that money has been spent.

We are facing a catastrophic debt in Ontario. If they do not take strong action, which they are not prepared to do, we will face a \$30-billion deficit in this province and a \$440-billion debt. Every single dollar being spent to service our debt is a dollar taken away from health care and education. I ask the honourable member, do you think the school in your community that is being forced for closure right now, in Peterborough, would be forced for closure if we weren't spending so much to service the debt and the deficit if you took that strong action? I ask that member.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I rise today to talk about Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various Acts. It's a very large document. It's 327 pages long. It is surely not the one-pager that we were talking about this morning, which brings me concerns, because this is a very, very large document. There are a lot of hidden and concerning articles in there and changes and amendments that I'm going to try to highlight today, but

obviously I will not have all the time that I need in the 10 minutes that I'm awarded today.

When I was campaigning last fall in Algoma-Manitoulin, people made it clear to me that they wanted to see changes, and the change they wanted to see is representation in our riding, first and foremost, right down to here in Queen's Park. I'm happy to be here, talking on their behalf. It's my privilege to be here talking on their behalf.

We saw what Ontarians wanted. They elected a minority government, one in which we all must work together in the best interests of all Ontarians, something that this government had not considered doing for many, many years. Then we were confronted with the proposed budget this spring, and in our opinion, it was unsuccessful at finding that balance between austerity and job creation. While we acknowledge the need to tighten spending, we also need to explore and develop new sources of revenue. This budget did not accomplish that. We knew that the weight of balancing the books would fall on the average Ontarian, and those who could afford to contribute a little more got off scot-free.

1730

New Democrats were faced with a decision to reject this unfair budget or to work with Ontarians and other parties and listen to their needs and get real results for them, and that's what we did. We listened to thousands of Ontarians. I spoke to my constituents in Algoma-Manitoulin and brought back their concerns to this Legislature and to our caucus.

Communities across the north have been hit hard with job losses. We have had thousands of jobs lost in the forestry sectors, with mill downsizing and closures left, right and centre. We have folks losing their jobs in the ONTC; again, northerners taking the hit to balance the books. We have an abundance of resources in the north, but we will ship the raw materials out of this province and into another country to be processed. This is a great job creation program if you live in China, but I fail to see how it benefits and delivers jobs to everyday Ontarians.

Even with the recent welcome announcement of the smelter in Capreol, the government has not been forthcoming in any agreements they may have with Cliffs Natural Resources on how much processing will be done out of the country. Again, why are jobs being shipped outside of our country? This is not a well-thought-out plan; this is not a creation plan, if you ask me.

We have the right, in front of us, and the ability to create real opportunities, good jobs, in an attainable economic prosperity plan for the north. Let's make it work for us here in the north. Let Ontarians benefit from our province's resources. This is a win-win situation that shouldn't be passed up.

Within this budget, I have been expressing issues that we are encountering with potential losses of ServiceOntario, services in northern and rural communities. Many small family-run businesses are already experiencing cutbacks on top-ups which made these businesses and services available to operate and provide these

services to a much-needed area of northern Ontario. There just isn't a demand in many of these rural communities, given the smaller population sizes. Therefore, they are not able to meet the break-even point.

Ontarians living in the north are already experiencing potential losses of services, and a privatization of these services would only worsen. Automated counters being installed in the stores to issue such things as licences for fishing will create even more problems. Let me give you an example. A lot of these businesses in northern Ontario which will have these so-called service counters will have individuals who will come in and have an automated application service for a fishing licence or a hunting licence. Well, they normally don't come alone. They come in a group of four, five, sometimes six. They will be standing at these kiosks, and apparently, from the information that has been relayed to us, they will be standing there 27 minutes at a time in order to get these licences for them to go and enjoy the outdoors that we have here. Well, 27 minutes times four, five, six individuals—I don't have to explain to you how frustrated they will be. And you know what? The economic opportunities that are there, that are slimly there, are going to be lost.

As many of you know, these kiosks and staff have a problem working in these close proximities. They are not even in our country—that's where they're coming from, which raises further questions about accountability and where this information is going to be stored. It's stored in Tennessee—Tennessee, USA. That's not even in Canada.

Mr. John Vanthof: Home of Jack Daniels.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Home of Jack Daniels, as my colleague says here.

We have already limited services. Privatization of these services almost never makes better services. Privatization could mean that businesses will operate for profit, and this is where the services are going to be lost. The objective of providing the services, essential services, to communities is going to be lost. It's not only difficult to conclude that rural areas which are not going to bring in the cash will not operate very long, again leaving those living in rural areas with no access to these services; also, installing automated machines which are serviced in the USA is doing nothing to create jobs in Ontario. If the government enters into the agreement with potential private, for-profit companies in allowing the private sector to perform services which should be managed by the province, we are guaranteed to see another Ornge. This weakness of this legislation is worrisome. We could see fees increase for public services because the legislation, or weakness of it, allows them to do so.

ServiceOntario is not a company which is underutilized; millions of Ontarians are dependent on it for services that are essential and unavoidable. With the 48 million expected transactions this year in over 80 services, including health card renewals, drivers' and vehicle services, birth, marriage and death certificates and so on, this is not a service we should be privatizing. The government needs to be accountable for these services and the privacy of the clients.

Again, I will reiterate my concern specifically for northern and rural communities. I just have a hard time imagining a for-profit company actually profiting in these less-populated areas, begging the question: Will they operate there at all?

You know, there are other concerns in this bill, like the weakening of the environmental legislation. There are many things that are hidden in this bill that will really bring concern to my constituents. Many of them have been heavily involved in environmental protection initiatives so that their children and their children to come can also enjoy the beauty that is available in northern Ontario. Unbelievably, this bill has threatened much of what we have fought hard to protect and is now being endangered. What has alarmed many in my riding is the fact that this bill implements new exemptions to habitat and species protection under the Endangered Species Act, therefore furthering the risk to endangered species on private lands by removing the protection under the ESA.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I'm just going to have to go through; I have much to say but I only have 40 seconds left.

When it comes to health care, the north has always been at the losing end. I'm constantly dealing with the loss of services in small hospitals and clinics, the lack of medical professionals in the north, and the far distances to travel and seek medical attention on dangerous roads. It is clear that northern and rural health care was not a priority for this government.

In conclusion, this is a large document. There are many things in here that I have not even been able to touch on. I have highlighted a few, and only a few, but at the end of the day it is pretty evident that this government failed to produce a budget that would effectively decrease the deficit while creating new sources of revenue for a real job creation plan in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the Ontario budget that we have put forward. It is a budget that's very focused on eliminating the deficit, as we all know. We need to again look at the facts here. Our province has been plagued with a deficit for most of the last 20 years by many different governments. So let's jointly acknowledge that; let's jointly own that problem.

However, we are committed to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18, and we're doing that not just because it's the financially responsible thing to do but because, quite frankly, the deficit is the biggest threat to health care, education and social services in this province of Ontario. We know how to fix this, and that is our plan, to do so.

In my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, I get questions about the tuition reduction program: Are we going to continue that? I say, "Yes, if the budget is passed." I get questions about improved health care. I say, "Yes. Look at our health action plan and the shifts

we want to make to make sure that we provide the right health care, in the right place, at the right time, for the right price." We have questions in my office about jobs, the economy, transit, the 407 extension, which affects not just my riding but all of Durham region and parts of Toronto as well.

1740

Last, but not least, our budget is very focused on protecting our most vulnerable citizens in our province: children and youth, our seniors—our seniors who deserve to stay at home as long as they can, as long as they are able and want to. We need to respect the seniors who built our province and we need to support our youth. We need to continue to lift children out of poverty. We need to continue to make the investments we've made in terms of social assistance. Our budget is very much about providing those protections to our most vulnerable citizens.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: This Bill 55, this budget, is just too expensive. The Liberal government has demonstrated they don't understand that we're in serious financial shape. They don't seem to read the papers about what's happening in Greece, in Spain, in Italy. They're just not paying attention to the realities of what's going on in the world and in Ontario here today.

They call the budget an austere measure. In fact, it is anything but. They're saying that it's a tough budget and it is anything but tough. Our debt is \$240 billion and growing. We have a deficit of \$15 billion; that has not changed. They're going to spend \$200 billion more. So it's an increased-spending budget.

They don't listen to the Drummond report or the Auditor General. They're telling us that we shouldn't be doing—Mr. Drummond said that there were 362 recommendations of ways to cut back and change programs to save money and try to balance the budget.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Almost half were actually adopted.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Good; glad to hear it. The other half should have been adopted, too. That's what Mr. Drummond said.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm glad everyone's ignoring me. I think the cross-dialogue can stop and the member will not do cross-dialogue with people. He'll go through me. I think we're getting a little loud on the government side, so I'd appreciate it, if you have a problem, take it outside. Thank you.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry for that.

Mr. Drummond mentioned that we should not go ahead with junior kindergarten because it costs \$1.5 billion. We can't afford it. The Auditor General said that there was no serious feasibility study on the Green Energy Act. That's going to cost us tens of millions of dollars over the next 20 years.

We should have a wage freeze, and they haven't done that. All public servants should have a wage freeze. It's not an option; it's a necessity.

We need to address the trades. We need to reduce the apprenticeship ratio from 3 to 1 to 1 to 1.

Interjections.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: You're not supposed to talk to me. I'm talking to the Chair.

Standard and Poor's has downgraded our rating from stable to negative. Moody's downgraded—

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to actually respond to my honourable colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin. He spent a lot of time talking about privatization, and we've seen the results of attempts at government privatization. Ornge is one of them.

But some people don't understand about privatization of government services. As a small businessman, when I risk my own money for profit, that's a good thing. That's how you create jobs. But when governments try to privatize things like hydro, people are risking the public's money for their own profit, and that's a whole different story.

Something else: When you privatize government services, like fishing licences processed in Tennessee—right? The service is in Ontario—it's supposed to be. It's a government service, and no one thinks that the money that is actually going to Tennessee—and, even worse, the records are going to Tennessee. Those records are under the laws of Tennessee, not Ontario.

Something else about privatization—that's really bad about privatization—I heard this morning that we're really proud there are more trains in southern Ontario, which are privatized, which are subsidized. But in northern Ontario, we can't subsidize anymore, so you have two different levels of service.

The member from Algoma-Manitoulin mentioned that there will be areas with ServiceOntario, once it's privatized, that won't have Service Tennessee, because the people in Tennessee won't bother doing it. So we'll be living in Ontario—nice Ontario flag—but we won't be serviced by formerly ServiceOntario; it'll be Service Tennessee. I'm being a little bit flippant about it, but it's a really serious problem, because once you go down the privatization road, you are no longer treating everyone equally.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to respond to my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin and my good friend and colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East.

The single most important issue that our government is taking on is the issue of the economy and how we balance the budget by 2017. At the end of the day, that's what the people of Ontario want and that's what people asked us to do.

So let me remind my colleague across about the concern he has about northern Ontario and what the government hasn't done for him. Let me remind him of the northern Ontario heritage fund that continues to build success for the communities in northern Ontario, supporting over 4,400 projects, levying over \$2.4 billion—billion dollars, not million—in additional contribution to the northern economy. And last week—you know that Cliff Resources is going to bring in new resources and new economic opportunity for your northern community. The northern Ontario heritage fund creates and is also sustaining over 17,000 direct jobs.

So to say that our government has not addressed it—yes, of course we could do more. But at the end of the day, you also have to express concern about the whole issue of health care and medical spaces. Let me remind you, it was this government that built a medical school up north. So that's not small change there. We ensured health care access is there through medical training.

I want to remind my colleague opposite that it is also your government back in the 1990s that closed off medical school spaces by 13%. I was a young nurse at that time; I remember that—very crazy. I also remember that your government, the NDP government, cut nurses—fell by 3,000; okay? So as a former public health nurse, I could tell you the pain and the suffering of my colleagues and the families—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin has a two-minute response.

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the members from Pickering-Scarborough East, Carleton-Mississippi Mills, Timiskaming-Cochrane and to the member from Scarborough-Agincourt, thank you all for your comments. They're much appreciated.

To the member from Scarborough-Agincourt, I'm really happy to hear that your government can do more when it comes to the resources and how they're going to be developed in Ontario. I look forward to hearing those ideas, because we really do have to do more with our resources here in Ontario and not let them leave the province without benefiting each and every Ontarian as much as we possibly can.

In regard to health care, it was quite evident with what this government has proposed that health care wasn't a priority; it wasn't even on the radar in your budget. It was because of the New Democrats and what we had done and the discussions that we had actually put forward that we were able to get \$20 million included for small northern and rural hospitals in northern Ontario. Let's not forget that important point.

Also, it was because of the NDP that we were able to get some type of movement from this government—which I look forward to—under your jobs and prosperity plan so that you will actually look at one of our platform ideas in regard to bringing good jobs and bringing some of the benefits that we proposed, through our proposal through the job credit creation plan, that we have in our plan. That's really good; I like hearing that, where you're actually listening. That's good. You're actually listening.

Where this government has also failed for Ontarians is that we need to make this budget fairer for everybody—which, I have to say, the NDP was quite successful in getting it done—regardless of your age, gender, ability or your economic situation. We need to make sure that there is much, much, much more. Let's not kid ourselves. There is a lot more that we can do in this budget in order to build it, to make it fairer and to make it inclusive for all Ontarians.

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

Hon. John Milloy: It's a great pleasure to stand here today and speak about Bill 55, the budget implementation bill. This bill, of course, incorporates the technical and the legislative changes that are needed to accompany the budget that was put forward some, I think, six or seven weeks ago, a budget that I think we recognize reflects the times—the times that are a time of restraint—where governments across the world are coming to terms with record high deficits that were brought about due to a global recession.

1750

What I'm most proud about our government is that it tackled the issue of restraint and tackled the issue of reducing the deficit over a time frame—the same time frame that has been accepted by all parties—and it did it in a way which is, if I can use the term, a Liberal way, a middle-of-the-road way, which represents the sort of balance and restraint that our government is known for. On the one hand, we've looked at government spending and we found ways to reduce government spending, in some instances to cut government spending, while at the same time working to ensure that the strides, that the progress that we made in a number of key areas is not hampered.

Those key areas—there's three of them. The first is health care. I'm very proud that we continue to invest more in health care and, again, to build on the successes of the last nine years. Are we going to be able to put as much into health care as we have in the past? No, Mr. Speaker. So how are going to deal with that? We're going to deal with it through transformation, through working with the system and making sure that our health care dollars are dealt with in the most productive way possible.

Then we come to the area of education—again, one of the few areas where we're making significant investments in order to make sure that the benefit that we've seen over the past number of years is not lost.

I was very interested to hear, a moment ago, our colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, who stood up and said, “We should adopt the Drummond report when it comes to full-day kindergarten.” We rejected that on this side of the House because we recognize the importance of education, not only in terms of the immediate good in terms of the children—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: —but, as my colleagues are saying here, in terms of an investment.

It was interesting. I was meeting with a group of teachers the other day, school board trustees and teachers in my riding, and they said to me that—

Interjection.

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

Hon. John Milloy: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. They're so enthusiastic about my speech on my side of the House.

Do you know what they were telling me, Mr. Speaker? This group of educators, teachers, school board trustees and others were saying that the most successful educational program they had ever seen is full-day learning. It was helping to prepare our young people, these children, as they move forward, to prepare them for grade 1, grade 2, grade 3 and onwards up through the system. They were giving them the skills and the outlook that was needed. At the same time, as we know, full-day learning has an extension aspect to it, the idea of full-day programming. In my community—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, it seems that we have a lot of exuberance in the hall today. I can't even hear your speaker because the minister's talking over him across the floor. Thank you very much. We would appreciate it if you would cut that back.

The member from Oxford is rather rambunctious. I would suggest he cut it, and the two gentlemen at the back who are doing a few catcalls—we'd appreciate it if you could be quiet, too. Thank you very much. Let's have a nice end to this day.

Go ahead, government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to be talking about the unbelievable comment, from the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, that we should have accepted the Drummond report recommendation on full-day learning. In fact, what I found very, very strange was that he stood up and said that we should have adopted all of the Drummond report, holus-bolus. But at the same time, if I recall the Drummond report correctly, it said that we should have gotten rid of the subsidy for horse racing, which we're doing. So I'm very interested that, on the one hand, the member wants to get rid of full-day learning, but he is on record, and his party is on record, to maintain the subsidy for horse racing. I think it's great to know that that's where we have the Progressive Conservative values, that it's okay to subsidize horse racing, but it's not okay to subsidize full-day learning in this province.

Full-day learning builds on other work that we've done in terms of maintaining smaller class sizes, and in terms of the 30% tuition grant when it comes to post-secondary education.

Again, it was a tough budget, but we wanted to maintain the progress we have made in terms of education. At the same time, does that mean it's a status quo situation? No. Just as in health care, we're going to be looking at transformation and ways that we can make these very, very valuable tax dollars stretch further.

The third area, Mr. Speaker, and one that I'm particularly proud of as Minister of Community and Social Services, where we are going to be making additional investments, is in the whole area of what is called in the budget the social service cluster, or social service area—my area as Minister of Community and Social Services and that of the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Again, we recognize, particularly during these tough economic times, that we have to make sure that we are reaching out and supporting those who are the most vulnerable in our society—and obviously, with my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, a special emphasis on children and making sure that children are raised out of poverty and that they get the head start they need.

Again, does that mean that the status quo will be maintained? Of course not. The budget builds upon, and anticipates, some of the good work that is being done right now by Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh, two outstanding individuals, one a former member of this Legislature. Both of them are undertaking one of the most comprehensive reviews of social assistance in decades, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Isn't that the guy that Harper fired?

Hon. John Milloy: Yes. Munir Sheikh, the former head of StatsCan, was in fact resigned from Mr. Harper's government—an outstanding public servant. He and Frances Lankin are undertaking very, very important work to talk about the transformation, moving forward.

Again, Mr. Speaker, a balanced budget—one that finds restraint, one that finds savings, one that anticipates an appropriate reduction in the deficit leading up to a balance in 2017-18, but that still places an emphasis on these three priority areas.

This is an important piece of legislation. I'm not standing here today expecting that the opposition are not going to raise concerns—perhaps, in some cases, want to speak against parts of it—that they're not wanting to go to committee and debate and discuss, perhaps even propose amendments. But that is not what has been happening in this Legislature. I think it's very important that people realize that part of the responsibility of government is to bring forward a budgetary plan, to bring forward the supporting bills, and part of the role of the

opposition is to examine and to analyze it to provide criticism, perhaps even provide praise when our two approaches intersect. But instead, what we have seen over the past number of days when it comes to this budget, and the past couple of weeks and months, is bell ringing and an inability for the opposition to engage, to take their role and responsibility to engage.

What has been their excuse for this childish behaviour? It has been because they want a committee to look into the Ornge situation. Mr. Speaker, I've told this story before. We had a visitor to the Legislature whom I met with, someone who was there making a case for their industry. They were here, and they said, "Why all the bells?" I said, "Because they're asking for an Ornge committee." He said, "But there is an Ornge committee; I saw it on the news." I think it is very important that we remind members of the Legislature and those viewers at home that we have a committee of this Legislature, a standing committee of this Legislature, the public accounts committee, which is right now looking into the Ornge situation. They are doing an outstanding job. They have held countless hours of hearings. They have called witnesses forward. They have the powers and responsibilities of any standing committee of this Legislature. At the same time, their work, of course, has been informed by a very thorough report which was done by the Auditor General, who is an officer of this Legislature. We also have a very important piece of legislation, Bill 50, before this Legislature which responds to the Auditor General's report. Again, if the opposition were to allow, instead of this childish bell ringing, this piece of legislation to be brought forward and debated, it would inform the entire Ornge debate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today in support of Bill 55, and I call on the opposition to take their responsibility seriously, to realize the fact—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the House leader.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
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McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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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	

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Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Yasir Naqvi, Teresa Piruzza
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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David Zimmer
Clerks / Greffiers: Tamara Pomanski (pro. tem), Sylwia Przezdziecki

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Steve Clark, Garfield Dunlop
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Toby Barrett, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Reza Moridi, Jerry J. Ouellette
Liz Sandals, Jagmeet Singh
David Zimmer
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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

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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

Continued from back cover

Child protection

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza.....	2428
Hon. Eric Hoskins	2428

Pension funds

Mrs. Julia Munro.....	2429
Hon. Dwight Duncan	2429

Privatization of public services

Mr. Paul Miller.....	2429
Hon. Dwight Duncan	2429

Anti-bullying initiatives

Mrs. Liz Sandals	2430
Hon. Laurel C. Broten.....	2430

Visitors

Mrs. Jane McKenna	2430
Hon. James J. Bradley.....	2430
Ms. Dipika Damerla.....	2431

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Goderich Royal Canadian Legion

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	2431
----------------------------	------

Gilford and District Lions Club

Mrs. Julia Munro.....	2431
-----------------------	------

Urban forestry

Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	2431
-----------------------	------

Windsor West innovation

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza.....	2431
--------------------------	------

Wind turbines

Mr. Monte McNaughton	2432
----------------------------	------

Cystic fibrosis

Mr. Michael Prue	2432
------------------------	------

GO Transit

Mrs. Laura Albanese.....	2432
--------------------------	------

North Grenville Chamber of Commerce awards

Mr. Steve Clark.....	2433
----------------------	------

It's All About Kindness Day

Mr. David Zimmer	2433
------------------------	------

Visitor

Mr. John Yakabuski	2433
--------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS**

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private
Bills**

Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	2433
Report adopted.....	2433

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Comprehensive Public Sector Compensation Freeze
Act, 2012, Bill 92, Mr. Yurek / Loi de 2012 sur le
gel global de la rémunération dans le secteur
public, projet de loi 92, M. Yurek**

First reading agreed to.....	2433
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	2434

**Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in
Certain Places), 2012, Bill 93, Mrs. Albanese / Loi
de 2012 modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool
(service d'alcool dans certains lieux), projet de loi
93, Mme Albanese**

First reading agreed to.....	2434
Mrs. Laura Albanese	2434

**Addressing Ontario's Debt Through Alternatives to
Public Sector Layoffs and Program Cuts Act, 2012,
Bill 94, Mr. Barrett / Loi de 2012 visant à
s'attaquer à la dette de l'Ontario sans recourir à
des mises à pied dans le secteur public et à des
compressions dans les programmes, projet de loi
94, M. Barrett**

First reading agreed to.....	2434
Mr. Toby Barrett	2434

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

**Police Association of Ontario / Association des
policiers de l'Ontario**

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	2434
-------------------------------	------

Personal support workers

Hon. Deborah Matthews	2435
-----------------------------	------

Cultural diversity

Hon. Charles Sousa	2436
--------------------------	------

Police Association of Ontario

Mr. John Yakabuski	2436
--------------------------	------

Personal support workers

Mrs. Christine Elliott.....	2437
-----------------------------	------

Cultural diversity

Mr. Michael Harris.....	2437
-------------------------	------

Police Association of Ontario

Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	2437
-------------------------	------

Personal support workers

Mme France Gélinas	2437
--------------------------	------

Cultural diversity

Mr. Michael Prue	2438
------------------------	------

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Wind turbines	
Mr. Bill Walker	2438
Dog ownership	
Ms. Cheri DiNovo.....	2439
Radiation safety	
Mr. Reza Moridi.....	2439
Correctional facilities	
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson.....	2439
Hydro rates	
Mr. Michael Mantha	2439
Family caregiver leave	
Ms. Soo Wong.....	2440
Wind turbines	
Mr. Rob E. Milligan.....	2440
School facilities	
Mrs. Laura Albanese.....	2440
Air ambulance service	
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	2440
Services diagnostiques	
M. Michael Mantha.....	2441
Radon	
Mr. Reza Moridi.....	2441
Anti-bullying initiatives	
Mr. Monte McNaughton	2441
Dog ownership	
Ms. Cheri DiNovo.....	2441

Markdale hospital	
Mr. Bill Walker	2441
School facilities	
Mrs. Laura Albanese	2442
Wind turbines	
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	2442

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	
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	2442
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	2444
Ms. Cindy Forster.....	2444
Mr. Jeff Leal.....	2444
Mr. Bill Walker	2445
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	2445
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	2445
Ms. Tracy MacCharles	2447
Mr. Jack MacLaren	2447
Mr. John Vanthof	2448
Ms. Soo Wong.....	2448
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	2448
Hon. John Milloy	2449
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	2450

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 16 May 2012 / Mercredi 16 mai 2012

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (Rent Increase Guideline), 2012, Bill 19, Ms. Wynne / Loi de 2012 modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation (taux légal d'augmentation des loyers), projet de loi 19, Mme Wynne

Ms. Laurie Scott	2409
Mr. Rosario Marchese	2410
Mr. Mario Sergio	2411
Mr. John Yakabuski	2411
Mr. Jonah Schein	2411
Ms. Laurie Scott	2412
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	2412
Mr. Michael Mantha	2414
Ms. Tracy MacCharles	2414
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	2414
Mr. Jonah Schein	2414
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	2415
Mr. John Yakabuski	2415
Mr. Michael Mantha	2416
Mrs. Laura Albanese	2417
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	2417
Mr. Jonah Schein	2417
Mr. John Yakabuski	2418
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	2418
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	2419

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Peter Shurman	2419
Mr. Michael Prue	2419
Mr. Jeff Leal	2420
Mr. Victor Fedeli	2420
Mr. Gilles Bisson	2420
Mr. Bill Mauro	2420
Mr. John Yakabuski	2420
Mr. Kim Craitor	2420
Mrs. Jane McKenna	2420
Ms. Helena Jaczek	2420
Mr. Todd Smith	2420
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2420
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	2420
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	2420
Mr. John Yakabuski	2420

Hon. Rick Bartolucci	2420
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	2420

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Ontario public service

Mr. Jeff Yurek	2420
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2420

Energy policies

Mr. Victor Fedeli	2421
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2421

Energy policies

Ms. Andrea Horwath	2422
Hon. Christopher Bentley	2422

Mining industry

Ms. Andrea Horwath	2423
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2423
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2423

Air ambulance service

Mr. Frank Klees	2424
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2424

Air ambulance service

Mme France Gélinas	2424
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2424

GO Transit

Ms. Helena Jaczek	2425
Hon. Bob Chiarelli	2425

Air ambulance service

Mrs. Christine Elliott	2425
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2425

Anti-bullying initiatives

Mr. Peter Tabuns	2426
Hon. Laurel C. Broten	2426

Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One

Mr. Phil McNeely	2426
Hon. Christopher Bentley	2427

Protection of privacy

Ms. Laurie Scott	2427
Hon. Michael Gravelle	2427

Cancer treatment

Ms. Andrea Horwath	2428
Hon. Deborah Matthews	2428

Continued on inside back cover