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Wednesday 29 August 2012

Mercredi 29 août 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 August 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 août 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let us pray.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, in the opinion of this House, full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment the government can make in the social and economic future of our children and, on this basis, the House supports the government's commitment to ensure that 250,000 Ontario four- and five-year-olds will be enrolled in North America's first full-day kindergarten program by September 2014.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Milloy has moved government motion 45. Mr. Milloy.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm only going to speak just for a minute or two, and I'd like to share my time with the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

I think all of us recognize the important link between education and the economy, and the fact that we need to start an education as early as possible. I've told the story that when I was Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and meeting with some of the financial experts and experts on the economy in talking about where we should invest in terms of post-secondary education, I said, "If you had that proverbial extra dollar, where should it be invested?" The consensus around the table with some of these lead thinkers was not post-secondary education; it was four- and five-year-olds. We have to start at the beginning, Mr. Speaker. That's what full-day kindergarten is about.

I have visited many, many schools within my riding where full-day kindergarten is offered and have been impressed with the huge progress that has been made in those students who have gone through it, compared to those who didn't have that benefit. So as I say, I think this motion speaks for itself.

As I said, with that, I will turn it over to my colleague the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Once upon a time, there was a Great Depression, followed by a great world war. After the war was over, millions of soldiers returned to marry millions of women, build millions of families, spawn the

baby boom generation and begin an era of prosperity. Most of these baby boomers—people like me, people like many of you, if you are aged 45 or older—did not attend full-day kindergarten, and the reason is not hard to figure out: It wasn't available.

Not knowing that full-day kindergarten would benefit us, none of our generation really missed it. In fact, today it is easy for many our age, for whom full-day kindergarten was never an option, to airily dismiss it as fluff or free babysitting, and that would be a tragedy. It would be a tragedy for the generation of kids who would not gain the benefits of socializing with other kids at an early age or learning before their formal schooling begins. It would be a tragedy for employers who will need the kind of skilled people that research says benefit from an early start that full-day kindergarten brings.

Ontarians know that a strong education system has the power to open doors, to change lives and to empower people to achieve their goals; our government knows that as well. For many of us, bringing that hope to educators, to families and to kids represents a big part of the reason that many of us got into government in the first place.

More significantly, other nations know that too. That's why in China, in India, throughout Asia, in Europe and in Latin America, they grasp the benefit that full-day learning brings to their children.

If you're a nation that competes with Ontario on the world stage, you only hope that the retrograde, regressive, anti-education attitude that permeates the entire North American Conservative movement takes hold so that your children can outperform Ontario children. Only among North American Conservatives is education seen as an expense to be minimized rather than an investment whose value should be maximized. So if Conservatives in Ontario don't like full-day kindergarten, you know that there must be something good about it.

In China, they start their youngsters off by teaching them something that the Chinese feel will give them an advantage over us in North America: They teach their best kids how to speak English. Mandarin is the world's leading first language; Spanish is second; English is third; French is 18th. In China, at any given time, there are more kids learning English than there are people in England. In India, the official language is not Hindi—which, by the way, is fourth; it is English. Arabic is fifth; Portuguese is sixth.

The rest of the world is teaching their kids as early as possible to be able to relate to us on our terms. It seems only sensible that we should similarly enrich our own kids. Education is what it takes to succeed in the 21st

century, where wealth will be created in the heads of skilled people. Only North American Conservatives don't get that.

Since 2003, Ontario has worked hard to improve our education system and to give every student the opportunity to succeed and to develop the skills necessary for future success. It's our shared responsibility to make sure we're giving our students the skills and the experience that they need to succeed, and that lifelong advantage begins for children in their preschool years. Only the Conservatives steadfastly refuse to see that. How do we know? When the Progressive Conservatives were last in power in Ontario, they closed schools and fired teachers. They lost some 26 million teaching days to strikes—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

0910

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm finding that the constant bombardment of less-than-historical inaccuracies is starting to drain the members of the opposition and our patience for such fiction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm not quite sure that it's a point of order. However, I do recall yesterday that there was a little bit of a bombardment going the other way, so we'll give the member some flexibility. But try to stick to the script, please.

Mr. Michael Prue: That is the script.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. I was up until late last night working on this script, and I'm kind of proud of it.

Let's see. When the Conservatives were last in power, only 54% of students were meeting the provincial standard when they left office. Worse, one in three students didn't finish secondary school. The Conservatives, it seems, are in love with mediocrity and second-place thinking. As Liberals, we are not. We want Ontario kids to be the best, and today they are the best. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rates Ontario students as the best in the English-speaking world and in the top five worldwide. During the last nine years, Ontario Liberals have worked hard to rebuild public trust in Ontario's education system, a system that was left in disarray after years of neglect under Conservative governments.

The results achieved by working with teachers and school boards are something to be proud of. Ontario has supported student achievement by keeping class sizes small so that students can continue to get the attention they need to succeed. Ninety-one per cent of primary classes have 20 or fewer students, compared to 31% in 2003. All primary classes have 23 or fewer students, compared to 64% in 2003. More students are graduating high school than ever before, with 82% of students graduating in 2010-11. That's a jump of 14 percentage points, from 68% who graduated during the last year of the last Conservative government. Today, 93,000 more students have graduated than would have completed secondary school had the rate remained at the 2003-04 level.

That's roughly equivalent to giving the entire population of the city of Brantford a world-class, supercharged, first-rate education—

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, standing order 23 requires that the person speak to the order at hand. The motion does not speak about graduation rates from high school or anything else; it speaks about full-day kindergarten. I would ask, Speaker, that you compel the member to either speak to the motion or spare us and take a seat.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I hear the point of order. I'm not sure it's a point of order. The member is giving a comparative analysis of the school system; I'm not quite sure I can call him out of order for that. But I would suggest that he not continue to go after the opposition when it doesn't relate to the motion we're talking about. I'll be watching very carefully. Please don't stick to the script in that case, okay? Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker.

The steady, year-over-year increase in the high school graduation rate is thanks to the province's student success strategy and the hard work of students, teachers, principals and support staff. Ontario students in all grades are getting the knowledge they need to succeed and the skills to compete in our ever-changing economy. Sixty-nine per cent of students in grades 3 and 6 are meeting or exceeding the provincial standards, and this is up 15 percentage points from 54% nine years ago. Ontario students are recognized as being in the top 10 in the world for reading, according to the results from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessments. Ontario is recognized as one of the few jurisdictions in the world where 92% of students are performing above international standards, regardless of their socio-economic background or their first language. All of this didn't happen by accident, nor did it happen overnight. This province and this government had to make some challenging choices, not just in these tough economic times but also in the past eight years, around our priorities and particularly Ontario's priorities in early learning.

From the beginning, a strong education has been an essential piece of our government's plan to build a stronger Ontario. This government set a goal to make Ontario's education system the best in the world, and we have met that goal. You don't have to look any further than full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation, as evidence of that.

Our government recognized that the historic separation between formal education and early childhood learning needed to be transformed to support a more natural mode of learning. Increased integration means a more seamless transition for children, which helps create the conditions necessary for them to be successful both in school and in life. That's why in 2007 Premier McGuinty

appointed Dr. Charles Pascal to be his special adviser on early learning. In June 2009, Dr. Pascal delivered his report, which is called, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. The report contained 20 recommendations on how to introduce full-day learning to Ontario students and to create seamless, integrated services for children and young families, including a recommendation to bring full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds to Ontario.

Our government agreed with Dr. Pascal's direction and chose to introduce full-day kindergarten as an essential step to help our youngest children get a better education. Full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds is one of the most important investments that Ontario has ever made. We believe it's an important one. It's about setting our kids on the road to success and building a stronger knowledge-based economy in the province of Ontario.

So let's come back to Ontario Conservatives, once led by an education minister. Today, their ever-changing position on full-day kindergarten mirrors their discord and conflict on so many other important issues. If it doesn't square with the US-based, Tea Party brand of retro nostalgia, they don't see its value—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the member is drifting a little bit. A Tea Party comparison is a little bit out of line, so I would suggest you withdraw that one.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Withdrawn.

Ontario Liberals know that full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment that we can make in the social and economic future of our children. We stand by our commitment to ensure that 250,000 Ontario four- and five-year-olds will be enrolled in North America's first full-day kindergarten by September 2014.

The program establishes a strong foundation for learning in the early years in a safe and caring play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of all children. Giving Ontario four- and five-year-olds a full day of learning helps improve their success in school, including their skills in reading, writing and math, and it provides a smoother transition to grade 1. Our province's approach to kindergarten helps children develop the skills they need to set them on track to a good foundation for success in school and in life.

Ontario is phasing full-day kindergarten into our education system gradually, with about 50,000 four- and five-year-olds now benefiting from full-day kindergarten at nearly 800 schools across the province this year. By next fall, nearly half of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds will be in full-day kindergarten at approximately 1,700 schools, and by 2014, full-day kindergarten will be available for all Ontario's kindergarten-eligible students. This gradual implementation has allowed municipalities, child care operators and communities to adjust to the changes this initiative brings.

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In addition to the funding received through the grants for student needs, the Ministry of Education will provide up to \$675 million in funding to school boards to support year three, reaching about 122,000 students. In total, this commitment is an allocation of just under \$1.4 billion in capital funding to support the implementation of full-day kindergarten. As of this September, approximately 120,000 children in nearly 1,700 schools across the province will benefit from this new enriched, integrated full day of learning.

Depending on demand, some schools with full-day kindergarten programs have offered before- and after-school programs, run by the school boards, for on-site third-party child care providers. This flexibility allows boards to continue building on their strong relationships with local child care providers while offering integrated programs in one physical location that best serves the needs of students, families and communities. Having access to before- and after-school programming with teachers, as well as early childhood educators, has provided our children with opportunities to better prepare them for the more advanced learning that takes place in grade 1 and beyond.

These programs have given children a seamless day in one location, with continuous staffing, familiar faces and friends, and it's a place where they feel safe and encouraged to learn and to play and to explore. Full-day kindergarten has also made life easier for Ontario's families. Too many parents have to juggle their children's schedules between school and child care while worrying about work and other responsibilities.

In addition to being more convenient for families, the long-term economic advantage of full-day learning will give Ontario a competitive edge in this global society. Parents are saving up to \$6,500 per child in child care costs while their kids benefit from all-day learning. This initiative has also helped create more jobs for Ontarians and helped more Ontarians be able to accept jobs. At full implementation, there will be approximately 3,800 additional teaching positions and as many as 20,000 early childhood educator positions staffed to support full-day kindergarten.

Studies have shown that the return on public investment for young children is at least 7 to 1. A recent study conducted by Janette Pelletier, director of the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, highlighted the benefits of full-day kindergarten for children, for their parents and for full-day kindergarten staff. The study, based on preliminary year one findings in Peel region, where our local school boards are innovative and world-class, compared the experiences of almost 200 students enrolled in the full-day kindergarten program with those enrolled in regular half-day kindergarten classes.

Key findings found that full-day kindergarten students had greater early numeracy, language and reading and writing skills than those in regular kindergarten classes.

The study also looked into the experiences of full-day kindergarten parents and how they felt the program benefited their children. Full-day kindergarten parents found that their children seemed more ready for social, academic and physical activities. They also reported a reduction in stress by having their children's school and child care programs integrated at one physical location. The study also reported that both teachers and early childhood educators felt that full-day kindergarten greatly benefited Ontario's students, and they felt that their school community strongly supported them.

We have clearly seen the benefits of full-day kindergarten, and we will continue to monitor the program so that we can ensure that it continues to benefit Ontario's students and their families.

Ontario is viewed across the globe as the leader in education excellence, and we must uphold that reputation. That's why the implementation of full-day kindergarten in Ontario has been so important. Through initiatives such as full-day kindergarten, we will continue to build the best-educated workforce in the world.

Ontarians are proud of the choices our province has made: to protect the gains that we've made in education and to protect the classroom experience for our students. We have chosen smaller class sizes and protecting 20,000 teaching and support staff jobs, and we have chosen to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten. In challenging economic times, this government has proven its commitment to putting students first.

This week, the Minister of Education introduced the Putting Students First Act. In July, the government signed an agreement with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. The agreement represents a road map that balances the need for Ontario to reach its fiscal targets while protecting our investments in full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and in a superior classroom experience. It took an investment of more than 300 hours of discussions, and it's reflected in the proposed Putting Students First Act. It's a fair and balanced approach that will benefit Ontario's youngest teachers and will help preserve 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

The proposed legislation would take effect on September 1 but provide, until December 31, 2012, for school boards, teachers and support staff to engage in local bargaining. This would allow boards and unions to reach local agreements while also including the parameters set out in the legislation.

As the start of the school year approaches, we have an obligation to assure Ontario parents that schools will start in September and continue uninterrupted by labour disputes. I ask my colleagues from all parties to keep Ontario students in mind and to support this government motion and also support the Putting Students First Act.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I look forward to addressing the assembly for the next hour on this motion.

You have to question the motive, first and foremost, of the government bringing this motion forward today, after we've been brought back early, to put kids in their classrooms. For example, we could actually be debating that bill today, the Putting Students First Act, Bill 115. The government chose not to do that.

I might say, to borrow a line from the leader of the third party, that Bill 115 and this motion is more about seats in the Legislature than it is about putting kids in the classroom.

I think, for anybody that watches this Legislature—and I don't know why, after nine years of watching this Liberal government, anybody still would—but watching this assembly, one would suggest that this really is about trying to wedge a political party, namely our party, in a by-election that's happening in Kitchener–Waterloo which they're going to lose. The question is really: Why are we entertaining a motion on a bill that has been passed, on a program that has been implemented and on an issue that has been closed in this assembly? Why else would we be dealing with this motion if it weren't for more nefarious reasons?

If the Liberals want to continue to talk about issues that we have felt were long past resolved, then I think it's really important that we set the stage by talking a little about the fiscal situation in Ontario. We have to talk about how we fund our publicly funded education system. We have to talk about whether or not it is going to be sustainable in the long run.

Speaker, you and I have been in this chamber together for many years now—well, maybe not that many, but long enough—

Interjection: Two.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Two terms. We may not always agree on philosophy or ideology or even issues or matters of the day. However, from time to time, you must agree with me, Speaker, that their motives are not always pure. They like to cover the fact that they have run the strongest economy in Confederation into the ground. The repercussions of that action and that continued action over nine long years are whether or not we're going to be able to continue to afford the public institutions we all cherish.

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We know, for example, that under the Liberal government's watch they lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Those manufacturing jobs would pay income taxes to the province of Ontario. They would buy from local stores in Ontario, and those tax dollars go directly into funding our cherished institutions. It's quite simple, actually. It would be, as one of their heroines, Belinda Stronach, the great Liberal, would have said, baking a bigger economic pie. The reality, as you know full well, is that when we have more tax dollars contributing to our economy, not by raising taxes but by making sure more people are paying into the system, we're able to sustain those core values.

Let me tell you something, Speaker: This is a government that is running record deficits, larger than every other single province combined, and they have the largest

debt in the nation outside of the federal government, larger than every other province combined. The reality, as I would like to point out to the minister of Ornge—you remember that Ornge helicopter scandal? She should probably be focused on that right now. But the point I am trying to make, and it's one that has been made by their own finance minister but I think they like to cover their ears, is that this debt and deficit require us to not only pay it back, but at high interest rates.

Now, you will be interested to know, Speaker, that the first, largest priority of spending in our province is in the Ministry of Health, with the minister of Ornge over there. The second is in the Ministry of Education. The third-largest spending priority of this Liberal government, according to Dwight Duncan, the finance minister, is servicing the debt and the deficits. That is larger than our training, colleges and universities ministry; it is larger than municipal affairs—all of those put together, every other ministry, outside of health care and education. Now, I contend, and I've said it many times in this chamber, that every single dollar we spend on servicing the debt and the deficit that they continue to grow is one less dollar for kids in classrooms.

That takes me to a very important report that the Liberals had commissioned last year, due out right after the election, because these guys—oh, my goodness, Speaker, they are some crafty. They time everything. For example, they like to—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I'm just suggesting perhaps that the same standard be applied here, pursuant to section 23(b) of the standing orders: that the nature of the discussion be focused on the debate at hand, which is full-day kindergarten, if I recall, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member for her point of order, but it will be up to me to determine whether she is drifting or not. If I think she is, I'll let her know. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. This directly relates to full-day kindergarten. Let me explain to the new member. I know she has been here less than a year, but this is how it works in this chamber. They spend the money and then there's less for it in priorities. You know, when you're spending \$190 million on a power plant, when you shred \$100 million at Ornge, or a billion bucks there, they don't care, but it has implications. So before this member was elected, her genius government decided they were going to commission a hand-picked economic adviser, the guy who brought in the HST, that \$3-billion greedy HST tax grab. They asked Don Drummond to come back and write a report on the state of Ontario's finances.

I'm going to read a couple of quotes just so the member understands, because something actually does pay for public services like public education; it's called tax dollars, and we have a budget in Ontario. This is completely

in line because it explains how we pay for one of the largest big-ticket items in this government.

This is what—and maybe she didn't get a chance to read Don Drummond's report, but on the executive summary, page 3, I'll read this to her: "Government debt"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the member has dialogue through the Chair and not directly at the member.

And about her length of stay here, I don't really think that applies to what we're talking about in this motion, so I would suggest you negate that from your discussion.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker.

I just would like to point out, however—before I finish my quote on a report that was commissioned before the last election when certain members weren't already elected—that in relation to the decision on full-day kindergarten, that also occurred before many members arrived here after the 2011 election. Some members may need to be educated on the impact of the debt and deficit on public sector spending, so I will explain.

"Government debt can rise quickly if not headed off early.... The recent decision by Moody's Investors Service to revise its outlook on government "bonds from stable to negative is a danger sign." Those aren't my words; those are their hand-picked economic adviser's words. Don Drummond said this about his own party.

He also said, "With the global recession hitting Ontario particularly hard, Ontario's recent deficit ... is poor; relative to GDP, it ran the biggest provincial deficits in the country for three consecutive years beginning in 2008-09; the current 2011-12 fiscal year is likely to add a fourth." Again, those aren't my words; those are their hand-picked economic adviser's words—Don Drummond.

Don Drummond, of course, Speaker, as you know, wrote an entire report with recommendations, some of which I believe have been wholly and fully embraced by this Liberal regime that has been in power for nine years and that has put us into this poor fiscal state.

I've told you the economic background of the province. I've now told you the situation we are in relative to how we are paying off our debt and our deficit. I'm now bringing you to the point, Mr. Speaker, of what their own hand-picked economic adviser, Don Drummond, said to them. Of course, Don Drummond is the individual who convinced the Premier of Ontario and the Liberal finance minister, Dwight Duncan, to implement the HST after they promised no new taxes.

This is what he says in his report—and I'm going to read the entire thing into the record, because I think that some Liberals may have forgotten what Don Drummond's direct advice to their Premier was. This is chapter 6, "Elementary and Secondary Education," page 213. Now, it is important that I stress and I emphasize one more time that these are not the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus's words, not Tim Hudak's words—this is the Liberal Party of Ontario's own hand-picked economic adviser's words. That would be Don Drummond.

He says, “In recent years, the government has devoted significant attention and resources to early learning. In 2009, the government committed to implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds with an investment of \$200 million in 2010-11 and \$300 million in 2011-12. Dr. Charles Pascal was appointed as the Premier’s special adviser on early learning, and was asked to provide recommendations for implementing a full-day early learning program.

“Dr. Pascal’s 2009 report, ‘With Our Best Future in Mind,’ recommended the development and implementation of a coherent approach to early childhood development and education, including FDK for four- and five-year-olds. Dr. Pascal also recommended before- and after-school programming for kindergarten students, funded through parent fees.” That’s an important distinction.

“In September 2010, FDK was launched in nearly 600 schools across Ontario. The rollout has continued in 2011 with an additional 200 schools, and about 900 new school sites have been announced for the 2012-13 school year. A framework for the extended-day component of the program has also been set; school boards offer the program either independently or through on-site third-party partners, in areas where there is enough demand.

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“The commission”—this would be the commission hand-picked by the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty—“appreciates the research and analysis that was performed by Dr. Pascal. There is substantial evidence that investments in early childhood education produce significant socio-economic benefits in the long term. The Pascal report offers a plan that reduces gaps in child development policy, supports student achievement, and promotes better long-term economic, health and social outcomes.

“However, consideration must also be given to the demands placed on the education system by the program, and the resources required to meet these demands. Costs associated with new staff, classroom supplies, transportation, other school operations, capital and stabilization for the child care sector will result in a mature program expense of over \$1.5 billion....”

Now, I will just stop for a moment to editorialize. I ask my colleagues in the third party and in the opposition and even in the government—\$1.5 billion is a lot of money—can you imagine if there was no such thing as the cancelled Mississauga power plant, \$190 million; if there was no such thing as the big scandal at eHealth, where we could have saved a billion dollars; and can you imagine if there was no scandal and they actually got it right at Ornge, our air ambulance service here in Ontario, and we didn’t waste a billion dollars? Do you know what that \$3 billion could have brought Ontario students? I ask the government that question.

I will move forward on this, going back to the Drummond report, on the affordability of full-day kindergarten. “Given the current fiscal climate,” he says, “the commission”—and I remind them, it is their own hand-

picked government commission—“is concerned that the timing is not appropriate for a new program with a cost of this magnitude. The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget and the 2011 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review in November.” That’s why I think some members who may not have been elected before the 2011 election may need to review the Drummond report in its entirety to understand the fiscal mess the Liberal government got us into before that period.

I’ll go back: “The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget....” He goes on, “But as we have discussed elsewhere, not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall deficit” reduction.

I’m going to read that one more time. You know, when I’m finished here, I think I may send this over to my honourable colleague, who is a little confused over the ability to fund certain programs here in Ontario.

Let me read this again: “But as we have discussed elsewhere, not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall deficit objective.”

The commission—the hand-picked Liberal government Don Drummond commission—considered recommending the suspension of further implementation of the FDK program. What this is saying is that the Liberals’ own hand-picked economic adviser who brought us the \$3-billion greedy HST cash grab is now telling his own government from his own party, his own pals, his own buddies, that they should suspend further implementation of the FDK program.

I know that this government brought this motion in today to divert attention from the \$190-million cancellation of the Mississauga gas plant. I know they don’t want to talk about the Ornge fiasco—those hearings; the fact that they haven’t been able to move forward on bringing any accountability to light there. So they brought this motion here in order to try to wedge us and get us off our game. But I’m just going to continue to read from Don Drummond’s report, because Don Drummond was a member of the Liberal Party and is their hand-picked economic adviser. He says:

“The commission considered recommending the suspension of further implementation of the FDK program, with a progressive redistribution over time of the funded sites to communities with the lowest socio-economic status within each board. However, such an approach would create inequalities, and would pose additional challenges for families, schools, boards and government.”

If that’s not a big acknowledgement by their own hand-picked economic adviser that they bungled this file, I don’t know what is. But again, don’t take my word for it; take the commission’s word for it. Each member was presented with a copy of the commission. This is a product of the government of Ontario; it is from the Queen’s Printer for Ontario. This is a document prepared for members of the assembly. Each member of the assembly,

including the Liberal government, should have the opportunity to do some free thinking on their own and should be allowed to read all of this document, not just the executive summary, and not be told what to think.

Let's go to the recommendations on page 214. I remind you: This is from the government's own economic adviser. This is not from the PC Party's policy adviser. These are not words from an elected official on the PC side. This is from the government. Recommendation 6-11:

"Given the difficulties with such an approach, and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the commission recommends the cancellation of the full-day kindergarten (FDK) program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this government strategy.

"The Ministry of Education should carefully develop phase-out provisions so that a child who had a full day in junior kindergarten would not move to a half day in senior kindergarten, and so that purpose-built spaces are appropriately utilized for child care."

I'm not sure that this government quite understands the gravity of the recommendation their own adviser is making to them. They either are not aware that he made this recommendation or they're ignoring his recommendation, or there's another option: Perhaps they're going to do it and they have a hidden agenda over there.

This is a road map by their own handpicked economic adviser. He recommends:

"Given the difficulties with such an approach and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the commission recommends the cancellation of the full-day kindergarten ... program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this government strategy."

That is what their own government has to say. Their government produced a report recommending the cancellation of full-day kindergarten.

That's not the only recommendation. There is another recommendation by Don Drummond on full-day kindergarten, given the fiscal restraints the province has faced since this government has taken office. I need not remind you that over 300,000 good, well-paying manufacturing jobs have gone the way of the dodo bird because this government has not been able to manage the economy, manage energy prices or keep its government spending under control. So what has happened? Our debt and our deficit have dramatically increased. In addition, we're starting to see our interest rate go beyond our ability to pay here in Ontario. At the same time, they continue to spend without any regard for the consequences of what this will mean for public education.

Let's get back to Don Drummond's next recommendation. "If the government decides to continue the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program, then the commission recommends delaying full implementation from 2014-15 to 2017-18 and reducing program costs by adopting a more affordable staffing model, involving one teacher for about 20 students, rather than a teacher and an

early childhood educator for 26 students, to help moderate salary expenditures for the program by about \$200 million." Of course, that is right here in the Don Drummond report. "The government should not confirm full implementation of the program without assurances from school boards, teacher federations and support staff unions that negotiated annual wage increases by 2017-18 will not be higher than the current trends in the broader public sector, and that the class size increases and reductions in non-teaching staff contemplated by the commission by 2017-18 will be achieved."

0950

He then gives them a second way, if you will, Speaker, another option in order to balance the books so that public education and programs like full-day kindergarten could be sustainable in the long term, but only once—in Don Drummond's opinion—they get their fiscal house in order. I must admit I'm quite surprised that their own hand-picked economic adviser would turn on them this way. But, again, he says that if they continue to implement the full-day kindergarten program, then the commission recommends delaying full implementation.

I would just like to finish on page 214: "This approach would also help ease the oversupply of teachers in the labour market and reduce costs associated with correcting the current undersupply of ECEs."

So, Speaker, there you have it. There has been criticism of their program. They like to say that it only comes from one side of the assembly. I'd like to point out that it comes from within their own ranks. I'd like to point out that there are people out there who are concerned by the size, the scope, that this government has created in our public service, and that there are people in Ontario who are concerned about our ability to pay.

In fact, Don Drummond, in what I find is a prophetic statement, talks about expenditures, and he talks about negotiated annual wage increases. This report was released, I believe, in January, or February, perhaps; it's on the front page here. It was early 2012, in any event, Speaker. And here we are at an emergency recalling of the Legislative Assembly, given another teachers' bill that I referenced earlier on, the Putting Students First Act, Bill 115. We're here to debate that because this government, for the first time in nine years, understood what Tim Hudak and what the PC caucus have been saying for a long time: You can't keep spending without problems on the other end. Like Old Mother Hubbard, she has nothing left in her cupboard, and the reality is, we are in a really rough and difficult time here in Ontario.

So we're here debating Bill 115. The Liberals decide to put this in as a distraction, because I'm sure that their plan hasn't gone exactly the way they wanted it to. We recognized that they needed some help, that we needed to bail them out, we needed to make sure that they could get the kids in the classrooms come September, because here's the thing: We can't afford 5.5% increases in the government of Ontario anymore. We're facing a \$30-billion deficit. Don't take my word for it; take Don Drummond's. Their own economic adviser, their own

numbers, say we're facing a \$30-billion deficit. We cannot continue to spend like that without seeing absolutely terrible repercussions on front-line education.

So we're here to deal with this legislated wage freeze. We believe, like Don Drummond says, that we have to deal with something throughout the entire broader public sector, and we have to ensure that we have a legislated wage freeze for the next two years. In the words of Tim Hudak, we believe that Bill 115 is half a loaf, but we've got to get that spending under control or we're not going to be able to afford core, basic public services. I'm talking about walking into a hospital and I'm talking about enrolling your child in school, because this government is on a course that will dramatically alter the course of our future in Ontario if they are not more responsible with how they pay our bills, how they pay our staff and how they invest in the future of the next generation.

I look at the young pages here, and I think to myself that they are going to get out of university with at least an \$11,000 debt that they are going to be responsible for paying, as a result of taxes, to this government so we can continue to keep the lights on in Ontario. That is absolutely the case. Don Drummond acknowledges it. Their own hand-picked adviser had a meeting with them. I would say that this Don Drummond report is an intervention—it could probably be on A&E's Intervention—and they chose not to listen. They're spendaholics.

Then, when they can't spend the money fast enough, they contract it out through their government boards, agencies and commissions and they tell their buddies, "Come on over. We'll get you an appointment. We'll ask you to spend a little bit of money." I'm thinking of Chris Mazza here, Speaker. I'm thinking of Courtyard, over at the eHealth scandal. I'm thinking about all these names that have cropped up over the last few years.

There are a lot of stories to tell, but a lot more public money has been wasted. I envisage that Dwight Duncan must have this massive shredder right beside his desk, and when he gets bored, he takes \$100 bills—no, wait \$1,000 bills—and he just shreds them. I imagine that's what he does, because how else can you explain the cancellation of a power plant by a campaign worker, not the minister, costing taxpayers \$190 million? That money could have gone into full-day kindergarten—

Interjections.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order: The member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, this has gone really over the top; not only is the member violating standing order 23 by imputing motive, but the member has also been significantly off the topic for some time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Your point of order is taken into consideration. The member was getting very close to being reprimanded, so I would suggest that she stick to the motion. All these other sidelines can be overlooked for a certain amount of time, but I think you're going back to the trough a few times.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker.

Let me just say this—and I appreciate the intervention, because it reminds me that I do have an amendment to the government notice of motion number 45. This is really important, because it speaks to the concerns that we have in the official opposition of our ability to pay for government programs, including full-day kindergarten, while they're wasting money at scandals like that \$190-million power plant in Mississauga, close to his riding, like the Ornge scandal and like at eHealth and other places.

Speaker, I move that all the words following "on this basis" be deleted and the following be added: "to ensure the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, the House requires the government to ask the Auditor General to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure that the Liberal government's nine years of overspending do not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health care and classroom education."

Speaker, you'll recognize that this is very consistent with my speech, my concerns and the issues that our—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. MacLeod has moved an amendment to government motion number 45. I'll re-read the amendment.

"I move that all the words following 'on this basis' be deleted and the following be added: 'to ensure the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, the House requires the government to ask the Auditor General to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure that the Liberal government's nine years of overspending do not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health care and classroom education.'"

Debate on the amendment to the motion, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I do appreciate you and the member from Mississauga–Streetsville reminding me of that critical amendment that I needed to put forward, because it is really important, now that I'm able to debate my amendment, to talk about the fiscal situation in Ontario, the devastating consequences as a result of their nine years of mismanagement and overspending, and their tax and increasing waste, because, as you know, the Don Drummond report wasn't even—he was told, "You're not allowed to bring in a tax increase." That's why he was talking about some of these interesting cuts, but Dalton McGuinty then—I must ask, and the NDP would know this: What was he paid a day? You were asking questions about this—

Mr. Michael Prue: Fifteen hundred dollars a day.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, \$1,500 a day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would remind the member that she's not going to talk to people directly. You go through the Chair, and you do turn around quite a bit. I would suggest you look this way. Thank you.

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I know they wanted to watch me.

My colleagues in the third party reminded me that the Liberal government paid Don Drummond \$1,500 a day to make his recommendations on full-day kindergarten. They must value it, or they don't value money.

Again, just so we're all very clear, I would like to draw the attention of my colleagues opposite the motion that we put forward: "That, in the opinion of this House, full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment the government can make in the social and economic future of our children and, on this basis, to ensure the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, the House requires the government to ask the Auditor General to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure that the Liberal government's nine years of overspending does not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health and classroom care."

Now, let's go back to page 213 of Don Drummond's report, where he talks about offsets. He talks about offsets as it pertains to full-day kindergarten.

All we're doing today, Speaker, is asking them to follow the report they paid \$1,500 a day to table. It was an expensive report with information from their own hand-picked economic adviser on the implementation of full-day kindergarten, which they have a motion on before the House today. Let's go back to page 213, where Don Drummond—and I quote him one more time: "Given the current fiscal climate, the commission is concerned that the timing is not appropriate for a new program with a cost of this magnitude. The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget and the 2011 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review in November. But as we have discussed elsewhere"—and Speaker, again, these are not the words of the Ontario PC Party; these are the words of the Liberals' own economic adviser, Don Drummond—"not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall deficit objective."

Speaker, if they won't take their own advice, we will put it to them in the form of this amendment and talk about the offsets and talk about the fiscal accountability and talk about the reality of life in Ontario. They have for nine years spent us into debt and deficit and have tripled Ontario's debt in a short decade. There are consequences to that type of spending. There are consequences to our public education system as a result of their mismanagement. That is why this masterpiece of a report that their own economic adviser gave to this assembly should be considered in this debate that the members opposite refuse to acknowledge.

They refuse to acknowledge the reality that we are facing in Ontario. If we are not at a crisis at this point, we sure will be soon. The tipping point will continue. We will continue to arrive at that tipping point if this government does not get its fiscal house in order. When they

talk about putting students first, I ask them: Don't you think giving them a solid financial house in Ontario is going to be just as important to ensure that they are not working for the rest of their lives paying off their debt and their deficit?

I ask them this question because I have a high-growth community, Nepean–Carleton. In fact, yesterday the riding was split in two by the federal boundaries commission. Growth is so high, we need new schools all the time, because there are basically people moving in—our former mayor is here. He understands the growth constraints that we have. We need to open new schools because there are so many kids coming into the community, being born in the community; my daughter is one of them. There are just so many—we call Barrhaven "Babyhaven" because we're all mothers and fathers and we all have two cars, or a car and a dog and a cat. The reality is, we've got kids in portables in brand new schools taking up the entire backyard playground of the school—a brand new school—because we can't keep up with the growth and this government can't keep up with funding requirements to the school boards.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So they play politics; they play politics.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's so much easier for them to play politics. You know what we call it? I'm from Ottawa, as you know, Speaker. My husband works on Parliament Hill; I used to work on Parliament Hill, too. We used to have a term for what these guys are playing. It's "smallitics." Instead of dealing with the big issues of the day, instead of actually affirming that they're on the wrong path and they can't continue to afford programs, the reality is, they're playing smallitics, little games.

They have already passed full-day kindergarten; it's already in their budget. I'm going to be honest with you, Speaker. It's not too hard to find, if they want to find it. Don Drummond even said they paid for it here—in 2014–15 it's going to be paid for—and they put it in their 2011 budget and their 2011 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review. So what they want to do is play politics.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Smallitics.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They want to play smallitics. They want to have their cake and eat it too, because they're in a by-election. They think they're going to win a majority next week. Well, I can tell you something: If you want to talk about education and putting students first, there were 5,000 teachers out front yesterday who told them, "No way, José. We're not supporting you anymore." They may not be supportive of our wage restraint message either, but I can tell you something: The teachers did not give me three back-to-back-to-back victories; the people of Nepean–Carleton gave me three back-to-back-to-back majority victories, the largest vote total in the province of Ontario. And the only person who had a higher percentage was my buddy John Yakabuski from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would remind the member that we all appreciate self-promotion, but I'm not quite sure that has anything to do with what

we're talking about. Thank you for those stats, and I congratulate you on your consecutive victories, but please stick to the issue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. But it is important, because it points to the fact that I wasn't beholden to special interest groups or unions to win an election, so I have clarity when it comes to the issues before us, particularly when they pertain to financial issues and making sure new schools are built.

My staff have sent over to me here that Mr. McGuinty is touring schools today to try to force them to agree to his—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Empty schools. He tours empty schools.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Empty schools. If Mr. McGuinty goes to a school next week and there are actually children and teachers in a classroom, I will be shocked. He has done the summer tour of empty schools and classrooms. In fact, I went to one with him last week in his own riding of Ottawa South.

Speaker, I just want to go back, as we have amended this motion, to talk about what Don Drummond told them, to point out that we have some serious problems here in Ontario. If we're going to triple Ontario's debt and deficit as they have done in their short decade in office—a dark decade indeed—there are consequences.

Let me say what a direct consequence is. Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School, a school I was proud to be part of getting built, a school that I'm proud to continue to fight for, is a brand new school.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Who built that school?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: The taxpayers.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The taxpayers built the school. I fought in this House for the school to be built. That school now has close to 20 portables in it. The kids are taking gym class in the halls, because the gym is now classrooms. That is how full that school is. This will be the first year in its five years in existence when there will actually be a grade 12 class. They were operating from 7 to 9, then 7 to 10, then 7 to 11. This will be the first year they'll have 7 to 12. That school will be expanding, busting out of its seams, and do you want to know what we hear from this government when those taxpaying parents are sending their kids to school? "There's no money." And then they bring a non-binding motion, a political smallitics motion to this assembly to influence the people of Kitchener-Waterloo—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, the school board in Ottawa's capital plan is not before the House. What is before the House is this particular motion, and I would remind the member of standing order 23(b), which instructs her to direct her speech to the matter at hand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Once again, I thank the member for his point of order, but it will be my decision to the member whether I feel she has drifted

from the situation. Thank you for your point of order. It has been taken under consideration.

Continue.

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to actually have a page take over our amendment to show that this is in order, if you wouldn't mind, to Mississauga-Streetsville's finest over there. Maybe he can send back a note on why they spent \$190 million cancelling a power plant at the expense of the students in his community and mine.

But, Speaker, I tell you this, and I say it emphatically: There are choices one must make when one is in government. They have not done that. The easiest choices have always been to add a new tax to Ontario students' parents' pockets. Now they bring forward this motion, which is offensive. They've passed this resolution. This is about smallitics. It has nothing to do with whether or not they're going to proceed with full-day learning. It has nothing to do with whether or not they're going to curb the cost of government. It has nothing to do with students in Ontario. It has everything to do with wedge politics.

I will tell you something, Speaker: If they want to start talking about students, let's talk about the students in Longfields-Davidson Heights. Let's talk about the students in Riverside South. Let's talk about the students in Bells Corners. Let's talk about the students in Lisa Thompson's riding who are worried that they're not going to have a community school in a rural riding because this government did not have the courage to make the tough decisions when they should have made the tough decisions. Instead, they decided to saddle the students of the next generation so that they could pay the debt and the deficit, so that those students won't have schools in rural communities like Huron-Bruce.

That is what they have done. They have tripled the size of the debt in this province. That debt alone is the third-largest spending priority of this government. Every single dollar spent to service that debt and deficit is one dollar taken away from the kids in Huron-Bruce, who do not have a rural school right now in one of their communities. That is what this government has done and that is why we emphatically, emphatically oppose the direction of this government. That is why we will continue to bail them out on their wage-freeze agenda, although it is not strong enough. But we are going to stick to our principles, we are going to stick to our guns and we are going to read to them their own advice from their own hand-picked economic adviser, Don Drummond, who told them that they needed to make choices; they needed to make offsets.

That's why we amended this silly little motion that is designed to do nothing more than waste the opposition's time because they want to play politics, smallitics, and try to win a seat—a seat that they have to buy. It's the second one this year they've tried to buy. This is shameful. If this were anywhere else in any other House in the entire country, I'm sure the RCMP or the OPP would be investigating it, because those are taxpayer dollars.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member is suggesting that there may have been some wrongdoing, that the police would have to be called in. The member will withdraw that statement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You withdraw the statement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I wouldn't have.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: One can certainly think it, however.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need comments like that, that you "wouldn't have," because if you hadn't, you would have been gone. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker.

I have about 14 minutes left in this debate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You've got three minutes left.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —three minutes left in this debate, Speaker, before we go into the calmer waters called question period. I'm looking forward to today's questions, because it's an opportunity to continue on the accountability exercise that we have just displayed here in this House today on behalf of the official opposition. We'll be able to ask a lot of questions about why they're blowing money at a Mississauga power plant. We'll be able to ask questions about why Deb Matthews still has a job, for example, because the money that she's blowing and wasting and not overseeing could be used for patients in hospitals. It could also be used, let's be honest, for students in classrooms.

With the three minutes that I do have left, I'm just going to once again read Don Drummond's recommendations.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I just remind my colleagues that Don Drummond has serious concerns with this government. He's one of their own, so it should be very difficult for them. But this is what he says: "Given the difficulties with such an approach, and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the commission"—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Don Drummond, Bob Chiarelli's buddy—"recommends cancellation of the full-day kindergarten ... program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this ... strategy."

We paid \$1,500 a day for that recommendation. They're ignoring it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member.

Debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It is my pleasure—I'm not sure it's their pleasure, but it is my pleasure—to introduce my two children, Dawson and Jamie Gillies.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my pleasure to introduce the mayor of Englehart, Nina Wallace, as well as Brian Kelly and Shawn O'Donnell from the general chairpersons' association.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to welcome Jenny Peng, a former legislative page for the assembly, as well as a constituent of mine from Scarborough–Agincourt. Welcome back, Jenny.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, one of my summer students, Terryn Peplinskie, who will be leaving at the end of August. This is an opportunity for a summer student to actually be in the Legislature when it's in session, which is unusual. Welcome, Terryn.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a special guest here this morning. Moriah Harrington-Gibbs is my summer intern, and she has come all the way from the great town of Cobourg to be with us this morning. Welcome, Moriah.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'd like to introduce a real survivor friend of mine. He's a retired CAW worker. He has survived multiple heart attacks, bypass surgery, is fighting his second bout of cancer and had two open brain surgeries. Join me in welcoming Mr. Bob Holdon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Introduction of guests?

Mr. Mario Sergio: Mr. Speaker, if you insist, I'll introduce my new seatmate here, the fantastic member from Scarborough East–Pickering.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. The current legislation before the House is going to pass. We want to make sure our kids are back in school on the very first day of school. They shouldn't pay the price, nor should their parents, for your mishandling of this issue. The test is whether this was a conversion of convenience for you or if you're actually going to get serious about reducing spending, reining in the size and cost of government.

Premier, on June 21 of this year, the Toronto Star revealed how much the Toronto District School Board was paying for things, like \$143 to install a pencil sharpener while placing four screws. The union billed for 76 hours for four hours' work to install an electrical outlet in a library, to the cost of \$3,000 to the taxpayer. Premier, since this news came out in June, could you please tell us what you've done to fix this mess?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. Again, on behalf of Ontario students and parents and

families generally, I thank my colleague for the support that he's going to lend to us with respect to our bill, Putting Students First.

I do want to take the opportunity as well to celebrate yet another achievement inside publicly funded schools in Ontario. Today we're proud to announce that our EQAO test scores have gone up yet again. In fact, since 2003 they've gone up 16 points. I want to give credit once again where credit is due, and that's to students, parents, but especially teachers, and all those partners on the education team who work so hard day in and day out to put Ontario students first.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't think I got an answer from the Premier on this question, so let me try again. Premier, Bill 115 is going to pass. The question is, what comes next?

I had hoped that we had seen a crack in the door and that we could pry it open to get you back on the path of fiscal sanity, the kind of path that the PC caucus has laid out. So let me ask you again: We saw a week-plus of exposé about this odious practice of closed tendering, where one union gets all the contracts—guaranteed. Jimmy Hazel, head of the union, became a bit of a character around this place with a \$143 pencil sharpener and \$19,000 for a front-lawn school sign that should have cost one tenth of that.

Premier, I hope that the light switch did go on over there. Surely, you must have acted back in June and given direction to end this odious practice. Please tell me what you did in the last couple of months to fix this mess.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague would know that the Minister of Education has spoken to this issue. He will also know that the Toronto District School Board has taken specific steps to address the issues that were raised.

But I think it is noteworthy, Speaker, that you don't have to scratch the surface too much before my honourable colleague pursues his anti-union rant. That's not an approach that we're prepared to pursue. We think we've got a responsibility to find ways to bring people together to continue to make progress in our schools and in health care and in growing the economy.

So we will not be firing teachers and we will not be abandoning full-day kindergarten.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, this isn't anti-union; it's anti-corruption. It's \$3,000 to fix a light socket, \$143 for a pencil sharpener and stories of kickbacks to the union bosses, who, by the way, helped out your Liberal candidates in the last campaign. Surely, you'll rise above this. You will see the light of day that we need to actually get these costs under control and get the best deal for the taxpayer at the end of the day.

Premier, as you may know, the Greater Essex County District School Board is now forced to go to the courts to

fight this mess. They've spent about \$400,000 to date that could have gone to kids in the classrooms.

Surely, Premier, you will stand up and do the right thing and end this odious practice of closed tendering and special backroom deals, and allow the best contractor at the best price at the best quality to get the job for savings in the classroom—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sit down, please.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, we are not going to be taking over all Ontario school boards, which is the logical conclusion one would draw from the line of questioning—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): You've asked the question. Once again I ask you to listen to the answer. You've been pretty good all week, but you're starting very early today.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will do my very best to keep the temperature down, Speaker.

I'm not prepared to take over all Ontario school boards. We have continuing confidence and faith—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No, no; there's a difference.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: By way of information, Speaker, there's a difference between one school board and all school boards. So I say again: We're not prepared to take over all Ontario school boards. We continue to have faith and confidence in the people who work in our school boards. I think they're becoming ever more mindful of our fiscal reality and of their responsibility to ensure that they're mindful of taxpayer dollars. What we're doing is our part in this Legislature by moving ahead with our bill putting students first.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): New question.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. The Premier said he's not about to take over every school board in the province. Premier, you just did, in your failed negotiating process with the unions. I've never seen the like, Speaker, of somebody answering a question and then heckling themselves during the questioning. I didn't think that was possible.

Premier, I know that you're stumbling on this issue because I believe in your heart you know it's wrong that the Jimmy Hazels of the world are controlling the purse strings. I think you believe in your heart that contracts should be awarded to the best quality and the best price to the taxpayer. I think, Premier, you know in your heart

that it's wrong for the Essex county district school board to have to pay \$400,000—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Excuse me. I said, "New question." You're leading into a similar question.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I tend to be consistent in my questions, Speaker. This is a question to the Premier. It is a question about spending in our public services.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Question.

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, \$400,000 that could have gone to kids in our classrooms, special-needs kids, has now gone into court cases because you've failed to act. Surely, back in June you would have said this was wrong; you would have directed action to take place. A PC government would close the odious practice of closed tendering and the secret backroom deals. It's the right thing to do.

Premier, can you demonstrate you're actually serious about reining in costs? Stop the inaction, get out of your paralysis, do the right thing, and end this odious practice.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to repeat some of the information provided by the Minister of Education earlier on the subject of the Toronto District School Board and the particular issue being raised by my colleague. It's our expectation that boards make the best use of our public education dollars. The TDSB and all Ontario school boards are obligated to ensure that they're getting the best value for the dollars they spend, in all circumstances.

As part of their budget deliberations, the TDSB has asked the province to assist the board in a review of their operation, and we agreed to provide this support. The scope of these reviews are based on a school board's specific needs and are determined by the board. PWC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, will be conducting this review, and we understand that they will request that the review focus on facilities maintenance. We're taking specific action in that particular matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Some of the students in the classes who will be \$400,000 short because of your inaction would describe that answer as rather lame, Premier. Get to the core of the issue: End this odious practice of closed tendering. It just seems wrong. I know taxpayers in their guts say you shouldn't hand over the same contract to the same public sector union year after year, no matter what the quality of service, no matter what the price, especially when you see this kind of abuse and arrogance in the system.

Premier, we had hoped that you had seen the light of day. At least bring in a partial wage freeze. You're adopting part of the PC plan, but surely you need to go farther to make sure we get every dollar we can in savings to invest in the classroom, to balance the books. Please tell me why you're backing the Jimmy Hazels of the world, why you refuse to act, why the Essex county board has to spend this money. Will you do the right

thing? Open the tendering so you get the best quality for the students in the classrooms and pass on savings to the taxpayers who pay the bills.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague says he stands for students in the classroom. He would pull the rug out from under 250,000 four- and five-year-olds by abandoning full-day kindergarten, so he can't stand there and tell us he's for students. He would fire 10,000 Ontario teachers in order to increase class sizes, so he can't stand there and tell us he's in favour of Ontario students.

We're very much aware of their record. Strikes were commonplace in this province. Academic performance suffered in this province. We have dramatically turned things around by working with our teachers, working with students, working with parents. We'll put our schools up against any schools on this planet.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sit down, please. Order.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Pembroke–Nipissing–Renfrew, could you just keep your voice down a little?

Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's a shame the Premier continues to look the other way when there are questions of abject corruption in the handing out of contracts, kickbacks and the hundreds of dollars that went to individual union members who helped out on campaigns.

This is a question of doing the right thing, making changes. If the Premier were actually serious about reining in the size and cost of government, he would end this odious practice, he'd close the loophole where 98% of bureaucrats got bonuses last year when their wages were supposed to be frozen, and he would bring in an across-the-board public sector wage freeze.

Premier, can you please demonstrate that you're serious? Will you at least agree to an across-the-board freeze on spending and bring in an economic statement soon that will actually reduce the size and cost of government and fix this kind of corruption that you're turning a blind eye to?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have a decidedly different approach when it comes to managing our fiscal challenge. We believe we should be protecting education, we should be protecting health care, we should be protecting children and our social services, and our budget reflects that. At the same time, Speaker, we said that we were committed to achieving our fiscal objectives, and we will do so.

We reject the approach that they promote, Speaker. They would fire thousands of teachers; we reject that. They would abandon full-day kindergarten. They would fire thousands of educational support workers, who are powerful contributors to the success of our students in our schools. That's a decidedly different approach, Speaker. It lacks balance. It lacks coherence. It lacks a synchronicity with Ontario values shared by Ontario fam-

ilies. They want us to protect our schools; we're going to do that. They want us to protect our health care; we're going to do that. They want us to eliminate the deficit, and we'll do that, too.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Just a few weeks ago, Liberal MPPs voted to defeat a Conservative bill that would impose solutions and violate Canada's Constitution. Can the Premier tell us today, Speaker, what advice he has received from his own caucus regarding his new plan to do exactly the same thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm delighted to receive the question from my honourable colleague, the leader of the NDP. I know that she's going to want to acknowledge as well the progress that we've made in Ontario schools yet again. EQAO test scores are up 1% more, up 16 points since 2003. That is surely something worthy of celebration. McKinsey & Company, the world's largest consulting institute, has said that we've got the best schools in the English-speaking world. The Economist just last year said that we have one of the world's best-performing school systems.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member for Northumberland-Quinte West come to order, please.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Over 5,000 people have been to Ontario from around the world to come and see how we do education so well. So I'd begin by asking my honourable colleague to acknowledge the success that we've made in our schools and how much of that, Speaker, is attributable to hard-working Ontario teachers.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, at least one Liberal MPP made a point of distancing himself from the government's plan and indicated that he wasn't sure whether or not he could support it. It's not surprising, Speaker. The Premier himself has noted that this sort of simplistic, reckless plan is likely to be thrown out by the courts and cost us hundreds of millions of dollars.

Is the Premier willing to give his MPPs a free vote, or does he plan to force them to support his simplistic, unconstitutional legislation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, my honourable colleague is nothing if not proficient in raising issues related to process. Process is important. I'm very confident we're doing everything that we need to do to ensure that our legislation is, in fact, constitutional.

But here's where we really part company. My honourable colleague believes that we can afford to give teachers a pay raise at this point in time. I don't believe that we can do that. I think we've got to make a difficult choice, and that choice is to protect the progress that we've made in our classrooms and to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten. That's an important distinction between that party and this government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everybody in Ontario, including the Premier, knows that pay freezes have already been agreed to by the teachers. Everybody knows that the Premier's plan has everything to do with winning by-elections and nothing to do with helping kids in the classroom. Even the Premier's own MPPs are tired of seeing him play politics with our kids. When is he going to stop focusing on by-election politics and start focusing on real solutions for this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, in terms of reality, I think we should acknowledge the real progress that we have made in our schools. We've built 570 new schools. I think it's important to remember that the PCs closed 500. We've invested in 27,000 school renewal projects. We've hired more than 13,000 more teachers and more than 10,000 educational support workers. We're investing in full-day kindergarten. We've invested in smaller classes. It's paying off for families and for students in particular. Test scores are way up. Graduation rates are way up. We've got more young people going on to college, university and apprenticeships than ever before.

I take issue with my honourable colleague. The fact of the matter is, Ontario schools are working, and they're working for Ontario students.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. There are real challenges that are facing Ontario families, and the government has made it pretty clear that they're more concerned about themselves.

1050

First, they recalled the Legislature in a desperate attempt to create a crisis in our schools. Then this morning they forced a debate on full-day kindergarten, a program that isn't even at risk, a program that's not even at risk of being at risk.

When is the Premier going to stop focusing on his own desperate attempts to win majority power and start focusing on the real challenges that we have been sent here to deal with?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague may be uninterested in full-day kindergarten, but I would encourage her to talk to Ontario parents, especially parents of—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would urge everybody to be a little softer because I'm having difficulty hearing the person asking the question and also the person giving the answer.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, the single most popular initiative that has been introduced into publicly funded education in the last 25 years is full-day kindergarten. It's very important to young families; it's very important to parents of younger children. Leaving aside the fact it saves a family \$6,500 in child care costs on an annual basis per child, it lays a powerful foundation for

learning throughout school. It means a child is more likely to do well at school, to finish high school, to go on to college, university or apprenticeship, get a good job, earn a good living and pass on that standard to their own family. That all starts in the early years. That's why we're so committed to full-day kindergarten.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats are glad that the Liberals finally took our advice on all-day learning in the province of Ontario. But if the Premier needs an update on the other challenges that are facing families—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. I am not getting through to all of you, so from here on in, I'm going to give you the last warning if I single you out, because I'm having real difficulty hearing the question and I also have people on the side of me complaining about the language being used.

Carry on.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier needs an update on the challenges that are facing families, we can provide one. A new report today indicates that nearly half of Ontario families are seeing their family household incomes stagnating or in fact declining. Households in Ontario are paying more for health care user fees, for classroom fees and tuition fees than any households in the rest of Canada.

When will the Premier start looking at these kinds of challenges and stop trying to create a crisis to win by-elections?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Returning to the original subject of full-day kindergarten, I will say to my honourable colleague that when we first introduced that by way of a budget, they voted against that budget. When we introduced a measure in our most recent budget to expand full-day kindergarten, they wouldn't vote for or against it.

When it comes to household costs, we are sensitive to that issue; it is real and it is pressing. Again, full-day kindergarten saves a family \$6,500 per child on an annual basis. We've also introduced the Ontario child benefit, the only program of its kind in Canada, which is providing a family with \$1,100 per child. Then there's our tuition grant. This year, it will save a university student \$1,600 and a college student \$800.

So the truth is, we are mindful of cost concerns in our families and we are reaching out to them with our initiatives.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yes, Speaker, it's true: New Democrats don't support Liberal budgets that leave families falling behind in this province. New Democrats are ready to get to work on the challenges that are actually facing the people of this province. We want to see the Legislature focus on creating good jobs, for example; improving our health care system; and helping families recover from very tough times. Instead, we have a gov-

ernment that's happy to watch families fall behind while they focus on themselves and their drive for a majority government.

The Premier has brought us here two weeks early. When is he going to stop playing politics himself and start working on the challenges that families in this province are facing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think if there's one dream shared by all our families, it is that the children will do well, that they will find success, that they will find opportunity, that they will become the very best that they can be, and that we build that opportunity, we build the foundation for those dreams, inside Ontario's publicly funded schools.

So if my honourable colleague had the genuine concern—and I believe she does—about families and their hopes and aspirations, then I'm sure she will want to continue to support our measures that will continue to expand full-day kindergarten until finally it's available in all of our elementary schools to ensure that we reach out to all 250,000 four- and five-year-olds in Ontario, so we're building that foundation for success and we can do it in keeping with the hopes and dreams shared by all parents.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. This morning at 9 a.m., the public accounts committee investigating the Ornge scandal convened. Last week, that same committee issued a formal request to the Premier to appear as a witness. At 9 a.m. this morning, the Premier, who had refused to appear at the committee, hosted a photo op with the press gallery at an empty school.

On the eve of the appearance of Chris Mazza, here's what the Premier said: "I know our committee members have a lot of questions. They are interested in putting questions to Dr. Mazza, and I think it's an opportunity for us to get to the bottom of a lot of things, which, but for his testimony, would be very difficult for us to ascertain."

Speaker, the Premier was right. We had a lot of questions for Chris Mazza, but we also have a lot of questions for the Premier. The committee wants to hear from the Premier. The public wants to hear from the Premier. Why is he refusing to appear at the committee? What is he hiding and who is he protecting?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. Sit down, please.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What my honourable colleague dismisses in terms of my appearance this morning with the media was in fact an opportunity for the media to put questions to me on Ornge and any other matter, as they in fact did.

I appear in this House on a regular basis. If my honourable colleague has a question related to Ornge, I

would encourage him to ask yet another question on the subject matter of Ornge to me in this House.

Having said that, my colleague the Minister of Health has appeared before the committee on three separate occasions. She has specific responsibility for the portfolio and this issue, but again I say to my honourable colleague: If he has questions related to Ornge, I'm here today and he should put the questions to me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: My question to the Premier is very simple: Why do you refuse to appear at the committee? We're asking for one hour of your time where you can ask and answer the questions that we have for you.

The Premier has refused to answer questions about Ornge in this House on numerous occasions. He now joins the company of Dr. Chris Mazza. Only two people in this province have refused to appear at the committee: Chris Mazza and the Premier. The difference is that we could compel Chris Mazza with a Speaker's warrant. The Premier knows that he is immune because he's the Premier.

I'm going to ask him a very simple question. What are you hiding? Who are you protecting? Why do you not want to appear at our committee?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Sit down. Can I have everyone seated?

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that there is a difference between myself and Dr. Mazza in terms of our appearance, in terms of our availability for questions. He doesn't appear in this Legislature on a regular basis for question period; I do.

There are just under 34 minutes left in this question period, Speaker. I encourage my honourable colleague, if he's got a question, to put the question to me.

I think what is more important here is, it's time for the committee to come forward with some positive, substantive recommendations so that we can act on those, and, together with Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, we can move forward and do what is required under the public interest.

1100

COMMITTEE WITNESSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. A recent witness at the public accounts committee on Ornge was suspended almost immediately following his testimony. The details of his suspension are shaky at best. The protection of witnesses is vital to uncovering what went wrong at Ornge so we can learn and move forward.

Given all of this, did the Minister of Health ask Ornge to provide details or justification for this suspension?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have been assured that this human resources issue had nothing to do with the

appearance before the committee. In fact, we have had several staff members of Ornge appearing before the committee. I believe that this morning we will have yet another Ornge pilot appearing before the committee.

I think it's important that people at Ornge have that opportunity to speak, but what I also think is important is that we move forward. The committee has met for 81 hours; there have been 56 witnesses. I think it's time for the committee to stop playing politics and start being part of the solution when it comes to Ornge. We must get Bill 50 passed. We must get the recommendations of the committee, and I really do hope that if the members opposite are sincere in their determination to do what's right for Ontarians, they will do exactly that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wish I could take the minister at her word when she says she has been assured, but we have been assured of many things about Ornge and none of them turned out to be true. If it's true that things have changed at Ornge, but we hear witnesses saying that they've been intimidated, it brings all of it into question that maybe the changes are not really changes. When my colleagues and I heard about the suspension, automatically the alarm bells went on.

My question is simple. Did this suspension also raise alarm bells for this government and for this minister and, if so, what have they done to ensure that the committee can carry on its work unhindered?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I say, I think it's important that if there are any people at Ornge who want to be part of this process, we welcome that. In fact, we've had letters from dozens of Ornge pilots who support the actions this government has taken. The voice of that front-line staff at Ornge is vitally important to me.

What we need to do now is, we need the committee to come forward with their recommendations. We need the Legislature to pass Bill 50. We've seen significant progress at Ornge, but we haven't finished the job yet. We need the support of all members of this Legislature to do what needs to be done at Ornge. Pass Bill 50. Get the recommendations from the committee.

WATER SUPPLY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. In my riding of Guelph and across southern Ontario this summer there has been a lot of hot weather, very little rain. In fact, when the Premier visited Guelph in July, there was considerable media coverage of the dry weather's impact on agriculture in southwestern Ontario and the impacts on yields of corn and soybean crops especially, as well as a concern about the availability of livestock forage.

Minister, can you, through the Speaker, inform this House of the steps you've taken to assist farmers in this very difficult dry growing season?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the member for the question. I've seen the

effects of weather throughout the summer, and I want to thank all of the farmers who took time to show me the difficulties they were experiencing.

We've asked the federal government to work with us to assess if relief is appropriate under the AgriRecovery program, which is a federal-provincial program.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: Come to order, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: While the AgriRecovery assessment is ongoing, interim payments—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, this is my last warning to you because you're totally ignoring me.

Minister.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Interim payments under our existing programs, agri-stability and production insurance, are available for producers who are experiencing financial distress.

We also asked the federal government to accelerate their review of prescribed drought regions, and I'm thankful they have done that. That came out yesterday. That will help farmers, through some tax credits, if they have to cull some of their livestock. That tax is spread out over a number of years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We've also insured farmers in these—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Minister. My supplemental is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, water is always a hot topic in Guelph, because we are dependent on groundwater. The hot, dry conditions that we've seen this summer have caused significant concerns for my constituents about their water supply.

Minister McMeekin has already shared with this House the many things his ministry has done for farmers. I know that your ministry, in partnership with conservation authorities, plays a significant role in monitoring our province's water levels and the water supply within local communities.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please tell the members of this House what your ministry is doing to monitor the current low-water situation in Guelph and across much of the province?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks again to the member from Guelph for asking this very important question. Certainly, our government understands that the hot, dry weather across the province has had a profound impact on our farmers and the economy. My colleague the Minister of Agriculture and I have had a number of conversations over the summer, and frankly I think we should—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West, this is your last warning.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: —applaud Minister McMeekin for his persistence and for his advocacy on behalf of Ontario farmers.

Certainly, our Ministry of Natural Resources does play an important role in providing up-to-date and immediate information to conservation authorities, to municipalities and to our local partners regarding ever-changing water levels in our area watersheds. We share the concerns expressed by a number of conservation authorities about prolonged lower-than-normal water levels in some of our lakes and rivers. That's why, through our low-water response teams, we're working very closely with them to encourage voluntary reduction in water use. We are continuing to monitor water levels on a daily basis in order to support those community efforts, and we'll be working closely with all of our partners, obviously including the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. It's good to have hung around for it, too.

For months now, the public accounts committee has been trying to get to the bottom of exactly how your government allowed the mess at Ornge to happen. The committee has heard how former Liberal Party president Alf Apps lobbied on behalf of Ornge and arranged for Chris Mazza to brief you on what he was up to. But you have refused to appear before the committee to explain what you knew about the developing scandal at Ornge. You claimed in this House that you've met Chris Mazza maybe once. In committee, Mazza said that he had multiple meetings with you. Someone's not telling the truth.

Why won't you agree to testify to the committee and put on the record exactly what you knew and when you knew it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm pleased to receive the question, and I'm pleased to answer it yet again. To the very best of my recollection, I met Dr. Mazza on one occasion only. That was in Sudbury in the context of an emergency response plan. It may have been that I met Dr. Mazza in the course of a—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —as I have previously said in this House, as I have previously said in this Legislature, at a fundraiser. Speaker, I meet thousands and thousands of people during the course of a year, some at fundraisers and some at political events of another nature. That is, to the very best of my understanding and recollection, my connection with Dr. Mazza.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

1110

Mr. John Yakabuski: I don't know, Premier. Perhaps you bumped into Chris Mazza at your photo op at the empty school this morning. I don't know. But if you have nothing to hide, then why won't you testify?

That committee compels you to testify under oath. The citizens of Ontario have the right to know what you knew, when you knew it, and the details of any discussions you had with Chris Mazza. You have a duty to testify so that the public can be assured that the failures of your government that allowed this scandal to happen will not be repeated. Or are you afraid of reminding them of your government's dismal record on this issue? Is your refusal to testify yet another cynical attempt to try to influence the by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan, or is it, Premier, that your testimony under oath to that committee would leave you with no option but to call for the resignation of your Minister of Health?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Sit down.

I would ask the member to withdraw his statement where he's imputing motive to the Premier, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is a real issue associated with Ornge, and we acknowledge that in government. Speaker, we have accepted that there was a failure on our part to bring the necessary oversight to bear. We want to put in place the necessary measures to correct that going forward. We have a bill, Bill 50. It's called An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. That's been delayed by my honourable colleagues in the opposition for five months now.

We would ask that the committee, sooner rather than later, complete its work. It has heard from 54 witnesses. It has sat for 16 days. It has worked for 75 hours. We would be most grateful—and I say this sincerely, Speaker—to receive substantive recommendations from the committee members so that we can take any additional steps that are necessary to protect the public interest.

I say to my honourable colleagues once again: Get that work completed; help us move ahead with Bill 50, and let's do what we need to do to protect the public interest.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. As we all know, the Northlander passenger train will be cancelled on September 28 through a decision of your government. Northern mayors continue to call on you to honour your pledge to keep Ontario Northland in public hands. Today, Alice Murphy, mayor of the township of Muskoka Lakes, has joined her northern colleagues in urging your government to enhance northern passenger train service instead of cancelling it. Her reason: The

Northlander could be a vital link in the provincial strategy to lessen gridlock on the 400 to cottage country and beyond.

Premier, will you listen to the people across Ontario and announce that you are changing your plan to cancel the Northlander and give us time to use it as a tool to help the province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We will continue to listen to the people of Ontario, as we have in the past. The people of Ontario told us that we have to get our fiscal house in order in order to invest in health care and in education. The people of Ontario told us that a \$400 subsidy per ride on the Northlander is not sustainable or acceptable. The people from northern Ontario and the people from Ontario have told us that we have to make changes to ensure that we're able to fund the priorities that they sent us to govern for, and we will be doing that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is again to the Premier. That is exactly the point that Mayor Murphy was making. No one's asking for the status quo here, but you've got a rail line running along the 400; on the weekends, the 400 is a parking lot. All she's asking, all we're all asking—one change would make a huge difference: We change it from a day train to a night train; then people could go on the Northlander to their cottage and back, and get off the highway. That's not rocket science, but no one's looking. We are all looking for ways to save money.

Once again, are we really going to—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Regarding consultation, northerners want to talk before decisions are made, not after.

Once again, Premier, will you reconsider, look at the whole picture and see if we can use that to lessen the financial burden on all Ontarians?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member should know that the night train was tried a long time ago. It was cancelled by a previous government because it didn't have the ridership to have it continue. Clearly we have had, over the course of the last nine years, \$430 million invested in trying to make the ONTC a viable operation. The reality is, we're looking at decreasing revenues, increasing costs, a \$100-million subsidy this year. That's no longer affordable. The people of Ontario have told us quite clearly, "We want you to invest in the priorities," those priorities—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Answer.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: —that they sent us here to govern: health care and education.

We're divesting. We're allowing the private sector to come and put their footprint in northern Ontario to help provide a sustainable, an efficient and an effective transportation system not only for now, but also in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Next question. The member for Peterborough.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The total disrespect being shown today to finish question period is really not appreciated. Some of you are carrying on no matter what I say to you. Please.

The member for Peterborough.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I think my mother-in-law's watching this morning.

My question is to the Minister of Energy. Minister, since the launch of the Green Energy Act in 2009, Ontario has become a global leader in green energy initiatives. We all know that through the introduction of the act, our government has cleaned up the air we breathe and is on track to eliminate the use of dirty coal in our energy supply mix by 2014.

I understand that the Minister of Energy conducted the scheduled two-year review of the FIT program. Since the introduction of the program, I've seen the implementation of clean, renewable energy across Ontario and the jobs and investment that have come along with it.

Minister, could you please share with this House some of the successes of the Green Energy Act and the FIT/microFIT program thus far?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member from Peterborough, I know, is very interested in the workings of the Green Energy Act. We were actually up in his community touring a solar farm and speaking with the head of the Ontario Waterpower Association, Paul Norris, about some possibilities.

We did bring in the Green Energy Act to accelerate getting out of coal. That's best for the health of Ontarians, because burning coal creates dirty air. That makes people sick. It was costing us \$4 billion a year on the tax base to pay for those illnesses. So we're getting out of coal by the end of 2014.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings, if you're going to heckle, you have to sit in your seat.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Green Energy Act has allowed us to create already over 20,000 jobs in the province of Ontario, over \$27 billion worth of investments, and it is a vibrant industry that's already exporting around the world, working with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade.

Interjection.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What the review—and I'll speak to that in a moment—has enabled us to do is to strengthen the approach, solidify the jobs here in Ontario, and provide further opportunities to accelerate getting out of coal, bring on new jobs, attract new investment and protect the health of Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know that my constituents would be pleased to hear about our government's continued commitment to a strong green economy. Many businesses and families awaited the results of the FIT review and subsequent rules to see what the future of the program will entail for all Ontarians.

I'm aware that some of these goals and new program changes are to increase what I consider very important community participation and make the application process move forward more efficiently so that the success of the program can continue well into the future. Minister, can you please highlight some of the new rules and changes to the program and how they will affect Ontario families and indeed businesses?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's an important point, because when we conducted the review, we heard from over 3,100 Ontarians: families, businesses, associations, including from my colleague the member from Peterborough, who is interested in the solar and the water power issues. He'll be pleased to know that there are still strong opportunities for water power in the new review.

1120

What's the result? Prices are down. The rules are posted. The small microFIT program is accepting applications. We've increased community participation priority and increased municipal participation priority, meaning that where a community participates and municipalities approve, they're more likely to get the project. We've placed it on a sustainable footing so we can continue to clean the air, attract investment and provide jobs here in the province of Ontario.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: The public accounts committee has now spent months investigating the Ornge air ambulance scandal, a scandal that has seen hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars misappropriated, has seen the safety of patients put at risk, all on your watch, Premier. Public accounts has received and assembled thousands of pages of evidence and background materials. We've sat for 16 days. We've heard from over 50 witnesses. We've tabled thousands of questions.

The lack of proper administration, accountability and oversight by your government is appalling. But one piece of the puzzle remains missing: Premier, when will you be able to free up your schedule to come before public accounts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Here I am yet again. I'm prepared to take questions, but there was not a question in that supposed question.

My honourable colleague is in fact making the argument for us. The committee has collected thousands of pages of evidence. To date, they've heard from 54 witnesses. They've expended 16 days, 75 hours. The work has been nothing if not thorough and exhaustive. I think

we are fast approaching a point in time where it serves the public interest—not the partisan interests of my colleagues opposite—that we receive recommendations, substantive in nature, that we could then act on.

I am genuinely interested in learning what it is that we might do and learn from this experience by receiving recommendations that we can adopt not only insofar as the Ornge matter is concerned, Speaker, but more broadly in terms of how we deal with our agencies, boards and commissions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Public accounts has heard testimony from Mr. Alfred Apps, a former Liberal Party president, and has the following email from Alf Apps written in 2007: “Last nite worked perfectly. Chris was able to make a real connection with the Premier, and to lay out the success story of Ornge at a high level in a way that provides”—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Energy, I called upon you twice and you totally ignored me. Would you please come to order? This is my last warning.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I’ll just finish the quote: “... the success story ... at a high level in a way that provides the groundwork for our entire initiative.”

Premier, did your night with Chris Mazza, CEO of Ornge, work perfectly? Is it true Chris Mazza was able to make a real connection with you? Did he lay out the success story of Ornge for your perusal? Did this night provide the groundwork for the entire initiative?

Premier, you couldn’t attend previously because of a cabinet meeting. Will you now attend public accounts—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Premier, answer?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In addition to our genuine interest in any substantive recommendations that might come forward from the committee’s important work, we ask ourselves: Why is it the opposition has delayed passage of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. Why have they delayed its passage for five months thus far? That’s a long time.

They say that they are interested in moving ahead with the Ornge matter. They’re interested in learning whatever lessons that we might. They’re interested in ensuring that we put in place new measures to ensure that that kind of thing is not repeated. Insofar as all that is concerned, I am onside. But I think, at this point in time, it’s time for us to receive recommendations from the committee’s work, and it’s time for us to move forward with Bill 50 together.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. There are 20,000 families in Kitchener-Waterloo who can’t find a family doctor. But it goes far beyond

family doctors, Speaker. Kitchener-Waterloo is facing a shortage of psychiatrists. In fact, the Waterloo Record just featured the story this week.

New Democrats have a plan to get more doctors into underserved communities. Will this government actually work with New Democrats on our ideas to bring more doctors to underserved areas like Kitchener-Waterloo?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Peterborough, come to order, please.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much for the question. Of course, all of us are interested in improving access to health care, and we have made some tremendous success.

I’m sure the member opposite, the leader of the third party, would like to actually celebrate and acknowledge the fact that we now have 134 more physicians working in Waterloo region. That’s a 22.3% increase in doctors since we were elected in 2003. We’re also very proud of the fact that 96% of residents in Waterloo region do have access to a family doctor. We have made tremendous progress.

Speaker, that’s not the only thing that’s happening in Kitchener-Waterloo when it comes to improving health care. We’ve made dramatic improvements in bringing down wait times. Hip replacement wait times have been cut in half, knee replacement wait times are 62% lower, and waits for CT scans are down by 44%.

Things are so much better in Kitchener-Waterloo now, when it comes to health care, than when we took office in 2003.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, there is a shortage of doctors in Kitchener-Waterloo, and that’s having an impact on economic development in that region. The Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce has in fact focused on this issue, but it’s an uphill battle. The Liberal government is great at coming up with statistics that sound great, but families in Kitchener-Waterloo are telling us on the doorstep that they can’t find a doctor.

Is the government prepared to work with New Democrats to bring more doctors to areas like Kitchener-Waterloo, or are they going to continue to play the same old cynical politics and deny that there’s a problem?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can tell you that there are communities in this province where we need to get family doctors. In other communities we’ve made significant progress, and Kitchener-Waterloo is one of those areas where I’m very proud to say that we’ve got more family health teams. The Centre for Family Medicine family health team, which I’ve visited, has 16 doctors and 14 health care professionals. It’s serving 7,000 patients who were previously unattached.

I would welcome the plan from the NDP. I would love to know what their advice is to us. We’ve made great

progress. If they've got ideas, of course I'd love to hear them.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. With the construction of condo buildings throughout Ontario's big cities, we have seen several incidents in recent years where glass balcony panels on some high-rise buildings have shattered. This has understandably created a great deal of concern amongst the public, who deserve to know that their homes and neighbourhoods are safe.

Can the minister please tell us what steps the government has taken in response to these incidents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for Richmond Hill for his question. Public safety is the reason that the Ontario building code is as stringent as it is, the reason that the standards are as strong as they are. Following these very serious incidents, we knew that we needed to act quickly, and my ministry convened an expert advisory panel to explore what changes we needed to make to the building code to ensure public safety in the immediate term. That panel included experts from all key sectors—building inspectors, engineers, developers and designers—and the panel presented me with a report that included seven recommendations, all of which we accepted.

Based on that set of recommendations, we have now amended Ontario's building code to address how glass is used in balcony guards, and these new measures actually came into effect on July 1 of this year, so we moved very quickly. The new standards clearly state what type of glass must be used and how it must be installed, depending on how close it is to the edge of the balcony. This will put Ontario at the leading edge of the standards for this kind of balcony glass.

1130

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Minister. I'm very pleased to hear what our government has done to ensure the safety of Ontarians. However, it's important that the public has full confidence in the safety of its buildings, and I would like some more information on how these new amendments to the building code will be applied.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please tell the House how these changes are being administered and what the public can do if they live in a building with glass balconies?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said in my previous response, the amendments to the building code came into effect on July 1, and they apply to any construction for which the building permit is issued on or after that date.

Having said that, we're considering these amendments as interim measures, because we're going to be supporting the Canadian Standards Association in their development of a national standard for the use of glass in balcony guards. Then once that national standard has

been put in place, we'll review the standards we've put in place and determine if further building code amendments will be needed.

Municipalities also have the ability under the Building Code Act to address unsafe conditions in buildings, including the ability to conduct inspections in order to make repairs. The city of Toronto has used these powers to address the issue of balcony glass failures in several buildings, and I understand that the city of Toronto has also been proactively contacting owners of existing buildings to make them aware of changes to the building code and to advise them on steps that they can take to ensure safety for their balcony glass guards.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. So far, the legislative hearings into the Ornge scandal have heard from former Ornge CEO Dr. Chris Mazza, who claims he is a scapegoat, and your health minister, Deb Matthews, who claims she did not know. And you, Premier, are simply refusing to appear before the committee. None of you is taking responsibility for what's happened at Ornge.

Premier, one simple question: Who does the buck stop with in the Dalton McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I am pleased to entertain yet another question on the subject of Ornge. I want to make it clear: We've indicated, I think—at least I have—on at least half a dozen occasions that we take responsibility for failing to bring the necessary oversight in the matter of Ornge. We've said that many times.

The auditor, an independent third party, has taken a close look at this. He's provided us with recommendations and conclusions. We accept all of those wholeheartedly, Speaker.

We have a committee that's doing good work. I think it's time to wind up the committee, Speaker. I ask my honourable colleagues to complete their work and provide us with substantive recommendations.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Bring in the bill.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I hear from my honourable colleague from the Ottawa area, who brings considerable volume to her responsibilities—it's always well appreciated—"Bring in the bill." We brought in the bill a long time ago; it's Bill 50, Speaker. We'd like to move ahead with Bill 50.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: Mr. Speaker, if the buck doesn't stop with the Premier, then who? We know: Don Guy.

The Premier refuses to let his incompetent health minister step down. He refuses to testify amid the disclosure that he and Dr. Mazza had meetings. The Premier's lack of accountability, in my opinion, is in itself a scandal. Premier, there is only one explanation for why you yourself won't testify: You don't want the committee to get to the bottom of the truth about Ornge.

Premier, one simple question again: Just what are you trying to hide?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I haven't been keeping count, but this is maybe the 10th question I have received on the matter of Ornge, and I'd be pleased to take as many as they'd like to put, Speaker. But again, I think it's important for us, and I think Ontarians understand this, to draw a distinction between the game—the game is fun; I understand that. But we have a responsibility in government.

We begin by taking responsibility for the lack of oversight that we should have brought to bear on the matter of Ornge. We accept that. That's not a game, Speaker; that's serious business.

We also have a bill that we have put together based on the auditor's recommendations. We'd like to move forward with that. That's not a game, Speaker; that's serious business.

The Ornge committee can, in fact, complete its serious work, providing us with substantive recommendations at the earliest possible opportunity so we can get on with that. That's not a game, Speaker; that's serious business.

Here on this side of the House, we're focused on the people's serious business.

Mr. Frank Klees: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, the Premier makes reference to Bill 50. Let the record show that the government has not even bothered to call that bill for debate. If the Premier is serious about it, why didn't he call it this morning, rather than a motion that was irrelevant?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would say to the member that that's not a point of order.

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

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GRAND BEND AND AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AWARDS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Each year, the Grand Bend and Area Chamber of Commerce selects Business of the Year and Entrepreneur of the Year recipients from those nominated by the members and residents of the Grand Bend area. The Entrepreneur of the Year Award is for an individual in the business community who best personifies hard work, dedication, initiative, innovation and creativity in operating their business. The recipient is recognized for displaying good business ethics, providing superior customer service and demonstrating commitment to the local community.

This year, the award was given to LeeAnn Powers of Aunt Gussie's Country Dining and Delectables for her ongoing community involvement. When the tornado struck Goderich last year, LeeAnn's highly successful

fundraising efforts for the tornado relief raised \$75,000—again, an outstanding sum of money for an individual. LeeAnn truly embodies all the characteristics of this award.

I'm also pleased to say the Business of the Year Award was given to a company or organization for accomplishments in one or more areas that include environmental consciousness, product research and development, marketing innovation, increased sales, business development, employee relations and product service and quality.

This year, the Huron county playhouse—and I should repeat that—the Huron Country Playhouse in Huron county was this year's award recipient. The Huron Country Playhouse has provided area residents and visitors with 40 years of live entertainment and received this award for their continued investment in live entertainment in our community with the recent \$4-million renovation and refurbishment. Indeed, good news for our area.

TEMISKAMING SHORES SKATE PARK

Mr. John Vanthof: Carter Antila was an avid skateboarder, and he had a dream that a permanent skate park be built in his hometown, Temiskaming Shores. Carter was the kind of guy who had the determination to carry out his dreams but, tragically, he was not given the time. Carter Antila was killed in an accident last year at the age of 19.

To honour his memory, his friends and family focused on an effort to see his dream become a reality, and so the Harder 4 Carter committee was born. Their goal: to raise \$400,000 to build a state-of-the-art skate park venue. They have now raised over \$200,000, \$25,000 of which was donated to the committee by Kraft Canada. This donation was a result of a 24-hour vote-off between two northern Ontario communities.

Temiskaming Shores has 12,000 residents yet, thanks to their friends and surrounding communities, they were able to accumulate 372,000 votes in 24 hours, blowing the competition out of the park. The cheque was presented to the community on Saturday, August 25, as part of the TSN Kraft Celebration Tour. Local residents enjoyed a community barbecue and were part of a live TSN broadcast which showcased our beautiful area to the rest of the country.

On behalf of the community, I would like to recognize TSN and Kraft for this great opportunity. Carter's dream will soon become a reality. A site has been chosen along the lake and construction is slated to start in the spring.

On behalf of all the constituents of my riding, I would like to thank the Harder 4 Carter committee for their hard work to see this dream become a reality. Although he will not be here to enjoy it, it will be a venue that Carter would have loved.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This summer, I had the opportunity to attend several family-oriented community

events, and I met many parents who understand the incredible value of strong child care. Only strong child care during their formative years can ensure a strong foundation for a happy, healthy and bright future for Ontario children.

Our government understands this mantra, and this is why it has continuously taken steps to realize a more seamless and integrated system to support families and their young children.

I'm proud to share with this House that our government is investing \$90 million in 2012 and 2013, which will help during the transition to the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

On June 27, 2012, our government released a discussion paper on the modernization of child care in Ontario. These discussions are geared towards achieving increased affordability, quality and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the families in my riding of Mississauga–Brampton South and across Ontario will benefit from these discussions.

LAKE NIPISSING WALLEYE FISHERY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm deeply troubled by the contents of a letter I received from the Minister of Natural Resources regarding the state of the Lake Nipissing walleye fishery. In that letter, the minister did not rule out imposing restrictions on the sport fishing, nor did he rule out closure of the North Bay Fish Culture Station. The letter does affirm that Lake Nipissing's walleye population "is in a stressed state and requires management action."

It seems that this government is about to take the easy way out, though. They're poised to propose a shorter season, changes to the slot size, or other restrictions to sport fishing. They've made up their minds before looking at all the solutions for a situation that was foreseeable and preventable.

It's worth noting that the lake's cormorant population has been allowed to grow over the last decade. The birds now take 100,000 kilograms of fish, more than four times what the sport fishermen draw from Lake Nipissing. Please, let's not make any rash decisions until the cause of the stress on the fishery is fully determined.

We're also concerned that the minister's letter appears to all but rule out the restocking of the spawning-size walleye in the lake. Stakeholders I've met with and talked to say that restocking is the way to go, and it has scientifically been shown to be effective elsewhere. The ministry needs to revisit its stance on this.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Ontarians are absolutely outraged at the maltreatment of sea mammals at Marineland. And here's the situation, folks: We don't have any legislation; we don't have any licensing requirements; we don't have any government oversight, and this despite the fact that 83% of Ontarians have called for these for years and the

Ontario Environmental Commissioner has been urging the McGuinty government to do this for years.

It's not just about aquariums; it's also about roadside zoos. Did you know that zoos and aquariums need licences to keep chipmunks or raccoons but not for whales, dolphins, lions or elephants? This is absolutely outrageous, and Marineland is just the tip of the iceberg. Keeping an orca in a pool in Marineland is like keeping you or me in a bathtub. That's the reality. They're used to swimming 100 miles a day. They're not used to chlorine, and there are lots of examples of whales dying young and dolphins dying young. In fact, that's the reason BC has banned the importation of sea mammals. But Ontario does nothing.

The Canadian Council on Animal Care has come out very solidly and said that large, complicated creatures—cetaceans: whales, dolphins—cannot possibly have their needs properly met in an aquarium. So here's what we're calling for: Stop the abuse. Legislate and regulate now.

RÉCIPENDAIRES DE LA MÉDAILLE DU JUBILÉ DE DIAMANT

M. Phil McNeely: Monsieur le Président, comme vous le savez, cette année marque les 60 ans de règne de Sa Majesté la reine Elizabeth II.

Une nouvelle médaille commémorative a été créée pour symboliser et honorer l'engagement dont elle a fait preuve toute sa vie envers ses responsabilités. Cette distinction rend hommage à ceux et celles qui ont fait des contributions importantes à l'Ontario et au Canada. Leurs actions représentent vraiment le legs de Sa Majesté.

Deux mille Ontariens et Ontariennes ont reçu ou recevront cette reconnaissance exceptionnelle au cours de l'année 2012. Je suis donc très heureux de souligner aujourd'hui, devant cette Chambre, le travail acharné, la passion et le dévouement qu'ont déployés 14 citoyens et citoyennes d'Ottawa–Orléans.

Je leur ai remis d'ailleurs la Médaille du jubilé de diamant le 25 juillet dernier, lors d'une cérémonie au Centre des arts Shenkman à Orléans. Alors, toutes mes félicitations à Élizabeth Allard, David Bertschi, Dan Biocchi, Frank Cauley, Syd Davie, Kimberley Fawcett, Nicole Fortier, Janise Johnson, Carl et Mary Lou Maisonneuve, Phyllis Mayers, Gilles Morin, Denis Perrault et Eric Smith.

1510

CARBON TAX

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm concerned about the recent comments made by the member for Ottawa–Orléans about imposing a needless carbon tax on hard-working Ontarians. To me, they further prove the Liberal government hasn't fully abandoned its reckless economic plan to increase the cost of everyday essentials like gas, groceries and hydro.

Ontarians want a serious plan to get our economy working again, not failed economic theories touted by Stéphane Dion, who led the federal Liberals to defeat in

2008 with the same carbon tax scheme now supported by a number of provincial Liberals.

The member for Ottawa–Orléans would like the Liberal government to forge ahead with a carbon tax—

Mr. Phil McNeely: Lies!

Mr. Michael Harris:—sooner rather than later, but he did acknowledge it can't because minority government status has put the Liberals in a "difficult position" to talk about the issue. That seems to be an admission that if the Liberals had a majority government, they would move quickly to impose a carbon tax. And now the Premier is trying to add another carbon tax supporter to the Liberal caucus.

It's no secret that one of the biggest proponents of a carbon tax happens to be running for the Liberal Party in the Kitchener–Waterloo by-election. In fact, Eric Davis is on record stating he believes a carbon tax would "greatly benefit Canada."

It's time for the Premier to be clear with Ontarians and disclose where he stands on the carbon tax issue today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member for Ottawa–Orléans to stand and withdraw his comment.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I withdraw, Speaker.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Reza Moridi: On August 11, 2012, the Azerbaijan province of Iran was hit with two earthquakes measured at 6.4 and 6.3 magnitude of scale. The cities of Ahar and Varzaqan were devastated by the earthquakes that lasted 11 long minutes. The epicentre of the quakes was almost 60 kilometres from the major city of Tabriz.

Official reports coming from Iran have reported 306 casualties and more than 3,000 injured victims. The unofficial figures indicated over 15,000 dead and injured.

This tragic event was worsened as many countries around the world, including Canada, did not come to the forefront as they have in similar situations to provide aid to the victims.

Furthermore, the Iranian regime refused the aid offered by other countries for over four days and kept the public at large in the dark with regard to the real impact of the quake by controlling the media, which placed the disaster at the lowest priority.

A more humanitarian path must be carved to support the victims of this earthquake, the same people that can be allies in bringing everlasting democracy and change to Iran.

I stand by all Ontarians in sending our condolences to the family of victims of this tragic earthquake and urge the governments of Canada and Ontario, and all Ontarians, to provide assistance to the survivors of this natural disaster.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to congratulate four farm families in Perth–Wellington who were recently

recognized for their innovation and contribution to Ontario's agri-food sector.

In 2009, Ralph and Paulette Coneybeare of Conlee Farms lost their barn and cows to a fire. From this tragedy, the Coneybeares started over. They came up with a simple but effective invention that helps cows be less stressed, give more milk and have fewer foot problems. Farmers worldwide use that system today.

Kim and Ben Dietrich, owners of Full of Beans in Bornholm, had a son who became sick after eating wheat products. This led them to make gluten-free baking mixes using Ontario bean flour. Their products are distributed in more than 50 stores and bakeries.

Hilton Soy Foods in Staffa have created a product called Wowbutter, a soy-based alternative to peanut butter. Owner Scott Mahon developed the product to protect children from nut allergies.

Debbie and Ron Riddell of Delhome Farms in Milverton have used technology to develop an extremely efficient automated dairy facility. They recycle water to clean their cows and barn floors. They used natural ventilation when they built their barn. And no matter where they go, their video surveillance system will monitor their barn 24 hours a day.

Again, I congratulate these talented leaders in agriculture on receiving well-deserved recognition. They show yet again that Perth–Wellington is at the forefront of innovation in agriculture.

VISITOR

Ms. Dipika Damerla: On a point of order, Speaker, in order not to be a bad mother: I forgot to introduce my daughter, who's in the gallery: Sharmeila Cherla. Some of you may remember her. She was a page here back in February, but I think she looks a little bit different outside of her uniform.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): As the member knows, it's not a point of order, but welcome.

Introduction of bills? Is the member for Northumberland–Quinte West standing to introduce a bill?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes, I am, Speaker. I'm going to do the honourable thing and introduce a bill to the Legislature.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

INTER-PROVINCIAL IMPORTATION OF WINE AND BEER ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR L'IMPORTATION INTERPROVINCIALE DE VIN ET DE BIÈRE

Mr. Milligan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act respecting the importation of wine and beer from other provinces / Projet de loi 117, Loi concernant l'importation de vin et de bière provenant d'autres provinces.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Shall the motion be carried? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Does the member have a short statement?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Earlier this year, the federal government amended the legislation governing the inter-provincial sale of wine products between provinces. Now that there are no longer any federal prohibitions, each province will be required to amend its own legislation to make interprovincial trade legal.

This bill amends the Liquor Control Act to add a provision that permits individuals who are 19 years of age or older to import, or cause to be imported, wine into Ontario from another province if the wine is for their personal consumption and not for resale or other commercial use.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario's powers do not apply to wine imported by an individual in accordance with that provision. Wineries all across Ontario, including those next to my own riding in Prince Edward county, have indicated how the elimination of inter-provincial trade barriers will have a very positive impact on their sales.

Furthermore, it requires the government of Ontario to encourage the other provinces to implement or amend measures to allow for the free movement of wine within Canada.

A progress report must be tabled in the Legislative Assembly within three months after the bill comes into force and every six months thereafter.

The bill has similar provisions with respect to the importation of beer from other provinces, but those provisions will only apply if and when the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (Canada) authorizes the interprovincial importation of beer.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), the requirement for notice be waived for ballot items number 50 and 52.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45

p.m. to 12 a.m. midnight tonight, on Wednesday, August 29, 2012.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Shall the motion carry? I heard a no.

All in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, please say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1521 to 1526.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion number 42. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Miller, Norm
Arnott, Ted	Gravelle, Michael	Milligan, Rob E.
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Milloy, John
Barrett, Toby	Harris, Michael	Moridi, Reza
Bartolucci, Rick	Horwath, Andrea	Murray, Glen R.
Bentley, Christopher	Hoskins, Eric	Naqvi, Yasir
Bisson, Gilles	Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick
Brotten, Laurel C.	Jaczek, Helena	Pettapiece, Randy
Cansfield, Donna H.	Jeffrey, Linda	Piruzza, Teresa
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Chiarelli, Bob	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Leone, Rob	Sousa, Charles
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crack, Grant	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Wilson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	McKenna, Jane	Yakubuski, John
DiNovo, Cheri	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	McNeely, Phil	
Fedeli, Victor	Meilleur, Madeleine	

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker. I heard you call "opposed."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I did not, but I will call it.

All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Prue, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Gélinas, France	Schein, Jonah	Vanthof, John
Marchese, Rosario	Singh, Jagmeet	

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 61; the nays are eight.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

“Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

“Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

“Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to ‘operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being’; and

“Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

“Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

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

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): There are a lot of side discussions going on in the chamber, and I can’t really hear what’s going on. Can I ask those who are speaking in the chamber to take their discussions outside?

Petitions.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I fully agree, sign my signature and give it to Sydney.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I have petitions 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 these petitions. I sign them and pass them on to page Georgia.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

“Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas Street, at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

“Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

“Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

“Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

“Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

“Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

“Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

“We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

“We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder.”

I support this petition and send it forward with Dia.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

I’m signing this on behalf of the 1,000 or more dogs that have been euthanized because of breed-specific legislation, and I’m giving it to Sydney to be delivered.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here. It reads:

“Whereas the Liberal government has demonstrated that it simply does not understand the needs of rural Ontario and has unilaterally decided to prematurely cancel the extremely successful slots-at-racetracks program;

“Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates more revenue than all Ontario casinos combined and is the largest contributor to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.;

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry employs 60,000 Ontarians, including more than 31,000 full-time jobs and is the second-largest employer within the agricultural sector of the Ontario economy;

“Whereas the horse racing and breeding industry contributes \$2 billion into Ontario’s economy, with 80% of that spent in rural communities;

“Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates over \$1.1 billion in profits annually to the government of Ontario and another \$345 million that is shared between racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry;

“Whereas local racetracks spend a considerable portion of their revenue on charitable causes in their community;

“Whereas the loss of the slots-at-racetracks program revenue will force host communities to raise local property taxes by as much as 2% to offset the lost funds;

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

“The government of Ontario must immediately recognize the damage that will be done to businesses, individuals and communities caused by its decision to end the slots and racetrack partnership. It must commit to reverse the decision immediately and commit to negotiating a fair, long-term income-sharing agreement between the OLG, racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry, to take effect at the end of the current partnership agreement.”

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

1540

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 28, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l’éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Speaker, it’s my pleasure to resume where I left off yesterday. As I said yesterday, I will be splitting my time with my colleague the leader of the NDP, Andrea Horwath.

When I wrapped up my remarks yesterday, I was talking about the legal risks that this bill poses to the people of Ontario: the potential for tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of dollars in damages.

The more people I talk to in the labour sector, the more people I talk to who are familiar with this area of law, the more they see this bill as an extraordinary and risky venture on the part of the government.

Speaker, as you are well aware—and I know you personally, so I know you are quite well aware—this government has brought forward this legislation rather than letting education workers and teachers sit down and work things through with their employers, the school boards. They’ve done that because they’re facing a tough

time in two by-elections, and this government has an extraordinary quest which they are happy to have fuelled by the funds of the people of Ontario, an extraordinary quest to seek, to hold, a majority government.

When this bill was first brought forward as an idea by the Minister of Education, she made the argument consistently that we had to have it in place so that school could start right on the first day of September, right after Labour Day. The reality, Speaker, is that this bill is before us today because on September 6, a few days after school starts, there will be by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan, and those by-elections will determine whether this government resumes what it sees as its entitlement, and that is majority government in Ontario, or if it will face an ongoing period of minority, where it will have to listen far more closely to the people of Ontario.

I have asked the Minister of Education before and I've posed this question to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association: Which school boards were facing closure on the first day of school because of a dispute with their employees? And the answer I got back from the public school boards' association was, "None. Not one." This government is focused on its own interests, on seats in the Legislature, far more than on kids in the classroom.

Let's go back a bit and look at some history here. The government sat down with all of the stakeholders in education in February. Speaker, as you well know, the province of Ontario is not the direct employer of the counsellors, of the custodians, of the office staff, of the teachers who look after our children, who educate them, who provide them with guidance, with knowledge—those employers typically negotiate with their employees starting a little after the beginning of the school year.

So this government sat down at the beginning of the year in February. Frankly, Speaker, when you talk to many people who were there, they found an unyielding, unco-operative, really "take it or leave it" approach on the part of the government that one could barely characterize—could not fairly characterize as negotiation, as discussion. It was an attempt to deal with things by simply saying, "This is what's going to happen. Sign on to it. Get used to it, because this is the way it's going to be." It was a "my way or the highway" kind of approach to talking to people that you work with, the people that the government refers to so often as its partners. Frankly, Speaker, treating your partners that way is one sure way to end a partnership.

A number of organizations walked away from that table knowing that, in the end, the provincial government was not their employer and that they weren't going to get movement on substantial issues—knowing at the same time that the province is in a difficult situation financially and that they would have to compromise, that they would have to move. But what they were looking for was mutual co-operation to actually build an agreement that both sides could live with, even if they weren't particularly happy.

As you're well aware, Speaker, the people who educate our children, who look after them in their hours

in our schools, felt that they were not respected. The Premier would talk to them through YouTube videos. He would not talk to them. They had huge problems getting through. Quite a few people left. A few organizations stayed at the table, operating in extremely difficult conditions. They concluded that they would come to some agreement with the government of Ontario, not because of great enthusiasm that I can detect but because their reading was that even though they weren't getting a good deal, it was a deal that they could live with. However, many others didn't believe that what was coming forward was something they could live with.

It's interesting that the government of Ontario, the Liberal government, decided that the whole idea of people talking and trying to find an agreement was something that stood in their way. And so, on July 25, the *Globe and Mail* reported that in a memo sent out the previous day by the Ministry of Education, school boards were told they had a month to settle with their employees—a month, after six months of negotiation with the province that had been largely fruitless. They had a month, and if they were not able to settle within a month, there was great potential that the government of Ontario was going to take them over.

That's not a way to treat your partner. That's not a way to treat an autonomous organization. It's not a way to treat a board of trustees that are elected by the people, given authority by the people to run those schools—a bad approach.

Now, one thing that is still unclear is what the government did next, because I have heard from numerous sources—and it would be useful for me and useful for everyone in this Legislature to know if it is true—that early in August, the government contacted boards of education and told them to start the legal process that would allow them, a month later—in fact, right at the beginning of the school year—to either lock out their employees or let their employees go on strike.

1550

Speaker, for government to say that its greatest interest is to look after students, and then, at the same time, talk to those trustees and say, "Do you know what? You have to act, and you have to act fast to be in a position where you can provoke a disruption of the school year. You have to do it now"—I'd like it if this Minister of Education would present in this House the memos that went out to the school boards at the beginning of August because if, in fact, those statements are true, that this government was telling the trustees to be in a position where they could disrupt the school year, then that puts in question everything we've been told about this government's commitment to making sure that education went on, went on continuously, went on for the benefit of students.

This government knew in mid-August that it was not going to get the cooperation that it wanted. It was not going to get people rolling over. It realized that it had set an impossible task to those boards of education, and so, around August 15, a draft of this bill was announced by

the Minister of Education. Again, we were told urgency was the order of the day because if we didn't act urgently, then we wouldn't be able to have the schools open the first day of school. But in fact, instead of calling the Legislature back in mid-August, it wasn't called back until August 27.

The government's whole approach, at every stage, says that putting students first is exactly contradictory to what's being done. If the government felt things were urgent, it could have called the House back sooner. If the government cared about the schools and the students, it would not have been telling school boards to set things in motion legally so that school could be disrupted on the first day.

If things were so urgent, Speaker, we could have debated this bill yesterday morning. We could have debated it this morning. We would not have needed any motion this afternoon for debate this evening. The government has been playing all kinds of games with time, all kinds of games with the public, and there is a price for those games. There's a price in terms of the morale in our schools. There is a price in terms of the stress on the women and men who educate our children. That's a price that we are all going to face in the next few years, should the government be successful in ramming this bill through.

What does this bill do? It imposes a two-year restraint period, commencing the beginning of 2012—September 1, 2012—and contrary to agreements made with two of the associations unions representing teachers for a two-year agreement, it gives the government the ability to go into a third year, turning their backs on the people with whom they have an agreement. What sort of trust can you have in a government that does that?

Teachers, education workers, school psychologists, counsellors have until August 31 to negotiate a memo of understanding with the Ministry of Education. If a deal is not reached by this time, the range of options for shaping agreements becomes dramatically tighter. It gives local boards the power, until December 31, to negotiate agreements, frankly, Speaker, that can only vary a small amount from the government-imposed template. And then the Minister of Education, the cabinet, can simply say, "This is the agreement; live with it," or, "Don't live with it, but that's what it is. That's the agreement."

The legislation gives the province the power to force employees to pay back any money they receive ahead of the passage of this act, ahead of the settlement and the agreement.

It's interesting that the labour relations board and any other arbitrators are prohibited from either inquiring into or making decisions about the constitutionality of the act or whether the act is in conflict with the Human Rights Code. I have to say that this is pretty thorough. It makes sure that all kinds of legal structures and protections are stripped away. It didn't leave anything to chance. If there's a violation of the Human Rights Code, man, that's set aside. If there are problems with the law governing relations between employers and employees, well, those

protections are stripped away. If there's an arbitrator who may—who may—look at this, do an assessment and conclude that there are fundamental problems, that arbitrator can have no impact on the agreement.

The province can use the labour relations board to enforce their agreement, but employees can't use that same mechanism to protect themselves. Speaker, you know as well as I that if you're in a situation where the law can only be used to beat someone down and no one can use the law to protect themselves, you've diminished the law, you have diminished the authority of law, and you've diminished respect for the law because it has become one-sided. That's what is happening here.

Perhaps in the very short term this will be advantageous to the government, but in the long run, people will recognize that the authority and the integrity of the law has been undermined, eaten away, by this legislation.

This bill, in its entire shape, is contrary to the values that the people of this province hold dear to themselves: fairness, the rule of law. Those fundamental principles that have meant huge gains for the people of Ontario, that working people have used over the decades to try to improve their lives, are pushed aside, to our detriment as a society—not just to the detriment of the students, not just to the detriment of their teachers, not just to the detriment of those who work in the schools, but to every last person in this society.

There's no question that in dealing with the financial problems we face in this province and in trying to come to an agreement with those who teach and those who look after our children and those who work in our schools, negotiations would be tough on both sides, for the government knows that it has to look out for the interests of the whole society and that those who work for the public understand the constraints. Everyone needs to come to the table willing to be creative, to find areas where both sides can win and where, if the sides have to lose, they can lose with the least damage to themselves. That's the approach that was needed to make a success out of a very difficult situation. You have to roll up your sleeves and be ready to be creative, tough and willing to compromise. That isn't what we've got. What we've got is essentially a take-it-or-leave-it approach that damages the schools our children depend on.

The government failed to meaningfully consult with unions before introducing this legislation and has not allowed school boards and their employees sufficient time to work through their own collective agreements. Frankly, even if those agreements would have met the government's fiscal needs, even if they had had that opportunity—they may well have met all of the government's needs—but that process is pushed aside.

1600

The government approach has been counterproductive—making ultimatums, refusing to discuss parameters for bargaining, ruling out cost-saving suggestions from unions. It is this uncompromising attitude, this stance that has blocked the ability of all concerned to come to an agreement that all can live with. That's the problem.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask that the sidebars calm down a little bit. I'm having a little trouble hearing the person speaking. If you have a really hot conversation, I suggest you take it outside. Thanks.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the last few months I've had an opportunity to talk to members of teachers' unions, I've had a chance to talk to custodians, and I've had a chance to talk to support staff who have come in to see me in my office, who have phoned me and who have sent me emails. There wasn't a single person I talked to who thought, "Hey, it's party time. We can get whatever we want." No. They understood that they were going to have to move.

In the end, my sense is that the people who work for us, educating our children, looking after them, and the management, who have a responsibility for administering and running our schools, weren't that far apart, that a deal was possible. But again, because of the government's hard-line approach, common ground was left out, pushed aside, not explored. That will be of consequence to all of us.

As an example, one that shows up with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, they offered a two-year wage freeze, retirement incentives, cuts to administration costs, an employee-run benefit plan to bring about millions of dollars in savings—in other words, the flexibility and creativity that we all say we want to see. Their ideas were dismissed out of hand. That is no way to run an education system. That is no way to school our children, no way at all.

The bill, however, is successful in diverting attention from real education issues. The bill, first off, is driven by the need to win by-elections and, secondarily, is driven by cost-cutting considerations, not driven by the need to put students first and make sure that our children have the best education.

Speaker, as you are well aware, we are looking at recommendations to close 125 schools in Ontario, even though, according to People for Education, a number of schools could be saved if there was stronger government support for community use of schools.

Speaker, my guess is you found it in your riding, but I've certainly found it in my riding: There are demographic waves. In my riding—those who may be familiar with Greentown—right at the centre of it, at Danforth and Logan, there's a parkette there, and there's a school there called Frankland. When I moved into Riverdale in the early 1970s, the population was predominantly past the age when there were small children at home. We had people in their 50s, 60s and 70s, and that school, Frankland, was looking at being shut down. You go forward another 10 years, another 15 years, and that school was packed. Why? Seniors moved on, young families moved in, they had kids, and they had to send them to school. That happens time after time after time. Stable communities age, children move on, schools see a reduction in numbers, homes turn over, families come in with small children, and once again the schools are full.

We have a problem in that in the periods when the schools are partially empty, that space is expensive to look after. If the government was creative and decided, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to try and take things like child care centres, community health centres, day centres for the elderly, and section off the building and make sure that it's full but meeting community needs," then you would save buildings that could be used for decades to come.

Those school buildings are community centres across this province. In my riding, in Brampton, in Parkdale, there's no question that people see these as congregation points. Even more importantly, in small-town Ontario, rural Ontario, it's the place with the biggest meeting room that there is.

Blyth, Ontario, is losing its school. People who have been to that part of the world know that in winter, to get 100 or 50 kilometres down the road in a blizzard isn't going to happen. So the people of that community know that having the school in town means that children can walk. They don't have to risk being in a bus on a blizzardy day.

Shutting down those schools means eating away at the core of communities, in rural Ontario, in urban Ontario. Those are the big issues that this government is leaving unaddressed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Point of order? It's my own guy. Don't you like my speech?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I believe we have unanimous consent to move the following motion:

I seek unanimous consent that the votes of Mrs. DiNovo, Mrs. Horwath and myself, Mr. Bisson, on government notice of motion number 42 be recorded in the votes and proceedings as nays.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Do we agree? Carried.

Continue. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to quote Annie Kidder, executive director of People for Education. She says, "If we supported real community schools, it would save some schools from closing, ensure that the one in five kids who need mental health support get that support in a timely fashion, and, in the end, it would save money." And you know what, Speaker? She's right. This government needs to be addressing that problem.

With this bill, it's catching our attention in the upper right-hand corner, while down on the left, they're taking away the supports that our communities need.

Talking about special needs: This government has failed to ensure access to support for students with special needs. In May, again, People for Education reported that 80% of elementary schools in eastern Ontario have caps on the number of students that can be assessed for special needs.

Let's face it: If you have a child who's having emotional difficulties, who's acting out, who needs

attention and support—a child who a teacher is trying to work things through with—if you can't get them even assessed, how are you going to get them support?

If there's a cap, you're a teacher and you go to the principal and say, "This child, this student, is in great difficulty." "That may be true," you're told, as a teacher. "That may be true, but you know what? There's a cap on assessments. You're going to have to wait." And in the meantime, that child isn't getting the support that it needs, and the children in that class are going to find that their teacher is distracted, that their teacher is having to deal with that problem, even in a partial way, for things to function. That's a substantial problem with the school system not being addressed.

1610

In fact, student-teacher ratios for special education have increased 50% since 2001. We hear all kinds of announcements about education, but for those children who need extra support, that support has been in decline—assessments capped so that even if you have a problem, you can't be put on the list to be taken care of. Then, when you are put in a situation for getting extra care, frankly, Speaker, the classes become larger and larger; the care is diluted.

There's inequality of opportunity. Schools in high-income areas fundraise five times as much as low-income schools and have more after-school programs. They have more enriched programming opportunities. One of the things that has made this society stand out from others is the equality of opportunity. I grew up in the east end of Hamilton. It was a fairly rough place when I was a kid, and I have to tell you the fact that there were publicly funded schools, that you could get into McMaster at a price that was relatively affordable, meant that many of the kids who I grew up with, sons and daughters of steelworkers, of people who worked in broom factories, who worked at General Electric, had an opportunity to get an education and go further in life than their parents had. If we don't deal with the inequality in our schools, if we make them two-track, if we ensure that people are locked in to a particular socio-economic situation, are locked out of opportunity, then this society will change in fundamental ways. The failure to address that problem on the part of this government undermines the stability of this society.

Schools with higher proportions of aboriginal students, even though they have more special-needs students, are less likely to have music teachers, teacher librarians or phys. ed. teachers. Almost every Toronto school has a library, but only about 10% of northern Ontario schools have libraries. Is it that people in northern Ontario shouldn't be allowed to read, that their needs are not as important as those of people who live in the south? Clearly not, although that's the way this government has structured things.

I want to just make one last note before I turn this opportunity over to Andrea Horwath, and that's talking about the state of equipment in schools, because I have a friend who's an occasional teacher who teaches music in

downtown Toronto. She would like to teach music. Her experience, though, is that every time an instrument breaks, that's it, it's over. No violins? No violins. No horns? No horns. We're getting down to the sticks. Her experience is that students want to learn, that they want to express themselves musically, but she doesn't have the budget to teach them because she can't replace equipment that wears out.

Speaker, others from my caucus, from the NDP, will be speaking about this issue today—it looks like until fairly late today—and we will talk about it in what I expect will be committee hearings, and then we will talk about it again in third reading. But I have to say to you, Speaker, that there's a fundamental failing on the part of this government. It's being covered up by its approach. It is using this act to try and win elections. It is using this act as a way of obscuring all the weaknesses in its approach to education.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I first want to commend my education critic from the riding of Toronto–Danforth for having done such a great job in describing the legislation and the impact that it's going to have on Ontarians.

I think that the biggest impact is going to come in the form of a huge bill that's going to be delivered to this province in a couple of years that's going to cost us upwards of probably \$800 million or more. I think that's the crux of the matter. This government is prepared to spend who knows how much? The sky is the limit when it comes to what they're prepared to spend to win some seats in by-elections, to gain their majority rule back in this province, notwithstanding the fact that the people of Ontario told them very clearly just a couple of months ago—well, maybe a year, almost, now—that they don't deserve a majority government.

I can tell you that, in talking to people in those ridings, they don't think the government deserves a majority. They know the government doesn't deserve a majority. Look what they did with a majority. They did the eHealth scandal with a majority. They did the Ornge scandal with a majority. They're in a situation where just last week they gave managers all kinds of bonuses—up to 98% of managers in the public service got bonuses, all the while the government is complaining that their fiscal house is not in order.

So, Speaker, it's very, very transparent and very, very obvious that this initiative, this legislation that is before us today, is not about kids in the classroom, it's not about making sure that parents and children are understanding what's going to be happening next week when school comes back, and it's not about education. It's not about any of those things. What it is about, unfortunately, is Liberals and their own self-interest, Liberals and their own desire to gain back power in this province. It's a very sad day, because we saw that they'll pay any amount; they'll pay any price. They have no regard whatsoever for the interests of the taxpayer, if that's how

we want to describe the citizens, the people of this province—no regard whatsoever.

We've seen it in the litany of scandals, and we saw it when it came to their own electoral interests in the general election, Speaker, when of course \$190 million was spent to try to save a couple of seats in the Mississauga area with the cancelling of that private power plant. It's very cynical. In fact, the Premier of the province actually said, "Oh, people understand that we have to spend tax dollars to do these things." In other words, he was justifying spending the tax dollars to get more Liberal seats. I think that is something that shows what level this government is prepared to stoop to—again, not for any reason other than their own political self-interest.

So it's more about the seats in this Legislature than it is about anything else, Speaker, and it's a sad situation, because once again we're going to have a situation, really, in this province where, maybe not today but a couple of years down the road, we're going to see a massive hit to the finances of this province simply because the Liberals thought they could buy themselves some by-elections. You know, it's not the way to properly govern a province. It's not the way to properly deal with the challenges we're facing.

I've got to say that I think the parties in this issue were willing to compromise. I mean, let's face it: They have been saying for some time that parents and students didn't need to worry; there wasn't going to be any disruption in the classroom come September. So there was no crisis and there is no rush to necessarily get this legislation through because, guess what? There's no problem. There's no uncertainty. There's no risk that there's going to be a disruption in classes in September, a short week away.

Not only that, Speaker, but the organizations that represent some of these folks are saying, "We're prepared to compromise. We know times are tough. We're prepared to take zeros. We've got no problem with that." Well, it looks to me like if you've got all of those things already in the bank, then there's a deal to be had. There's a solution to be worked out here. But this government was never interested in a solution because a solution simply wouldn't serve their political needs. That is the saddest commentary we could possibly have, a government that is so self-interested that they don't care what kind of damage they do to the books of this province or anything else in order to get their coveted majority.

I think that sometimes what politicians need to do more of is to actually stop talking and listen to people. Unfortunately, we haven't seen much of that from this government at all. In fact, what we've seen is the exact opposite. It started the day after the election took place. Instead of rolling up our sleeves and working to build an effective minority government, the McGuinty Liberals almost immediately set out to try to get their majority back—almost immediately. We saw what they did, right? They went to Mrs. Witmer and suggested that perhaps she would like a plum position as the head of the WSIB.

We've seen the lengths that they're willing to go to. It is very, very cynical.

As I said, they spent \$190 million cancelling that gas plant, and then of course they hid the information. They wouldn't let anybody know how much that cost until it was dragged out of them at committee, far, far after the election.

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They handed that responsibility of the WSIB over to Liz Witmer even though they actually disagreed with most of what her positions were when it came to the WSIB, when it came to the workers' compensation system.

So again, they're prepared to sell their principles, sell their values—I don't really know if they have principles or values actually, so I should probably retract that statement, but nonetheless—because, for them, forcing the by-election was the more important thing to do, because they thought that they could get that seat and win a de facto majority. Time and time again, when the people of this province need leadership that makes a difference for them, a difference that helps everyday families through the struggles that they've been facing after tough times, they face instead a Liberal government that is more focused on helping themselves, more focused on their own self-interest.

Now these two by-elections are being faced and the government is desperate to win them, desperate to win these by-elections. Voters really don't want to see that. They don't want to see another arrogant, out-of-touch majority government in Ontario. So what has happened is that they've decided they have to create a crisis. They have to make it look like there's some crisis happening to try to create fear, to try to create the fear of doing something radical for the people in those ridings, and they're doing it because they actually think that voters can be fooled.

Well, Speaker, I don't think voters can be fooled. I think the government is wrong. I think voters know very well what this cynical government is doing.

Just a couple of weeks ago—not a couple of weeks ago; actually, probably closer to two months now—New Democrat members worked with the Liberals to defeat a Conservative scheme that was pretty much like the one that we're debating today. At the time, the Liberals denounced the Conservative scheme; they denounced it as a simplistic scheme that was unconstitutional and would end up costing the public billions of dollars when it was eventually overruled by the courts.

Well, Speaker, fast forward a couple of months and here we are again. But I guess because the scheme, the reckless scheme, the unconstitutional scheme now has a Liberal brand on it, somehow the people are not supposed to be worried about what it's going to cost us? They're prepared, for their own political well-being, to kick this issue down the road for a couple of years until we find out that the Supreme Court overturns everything that they're doing today? And then what happens? Taxpayers are left on the hook. And so all the money that

they're pretending this is going to save—it's actually going to cost double, if not more, by the time this thing works itself out. It's a shameful, shameful grab for power, it's a disgraceful way of governing a province, and really, they should hang their heads in shame because they're trying to dupe the public or dupe the people in those ridings into thinking that there's a reason for it when there isn't. There's no reason whatsoever for it.

So, again, I don't think people are going to be fooled. I think that they know that they often pay the price for a government that is reckless and self-interested. They've paid the price time and again in Ontario. They're watching this train wreck come down the track, and they know they're going to have to pay the price one way or another with this particular reckless scheme. They also know, Speaker, that they can't afford it anymore. The people of this province cannot afford this government anymore. I think that they know that. I think the people in those two ridings know that.

I think everybody realized that, with the deficit, it was going to be tough times when it came to having the conversation about how we wrestle that deficit down. In fact, I talked to lots of different people during the election and before about how we were going to have to have some serious conversations about how we all work together to make that happen. But I also always said that the best way to make it happen is to have the conversation, is to actually work it out.

It looks to me very much like the parties are willing to compromise. It looks very much like there's a complete willingness to make sure not only that the school year is safe but that there is a way to help the government save money. In fact, I saw a number of proposals brought forward by a particular organization that set out quite a list of very interesting opportunities for that money-saving to happen. But instead of actually being willing to compromise, instead of actually being willing to have the conversation, the Liberals decided that they were more interested in picking a fight, picking a fight that nobody wanted, for their own political self-interests.

Speaker, I believe very much that the Liberal government has taken us down a very bad path here. It's a path that is going to cost us enormously—enormously—and I'm not talking in the long term; I'm talking within a couple of years. It's a path that is destructive and one that's financially and fiscally inappropriate. It's reckless and it's simply wrong.

I want to actually end off with a couple of quotes from some of our famous Liberal cabinet ministers and the Premier across the way. I'm going to start with one from the Premier himself because I think it's quite interesting. It's one from Mr. McGuinty. He was talking about the conversation that should happen in order to settle some of these impasses, the importance that working people should have a level playing field, the importance that working people should have the ability to organize and bargain freely, fairly and effectively: "There have been only a couple of occasions in the history of this province

when that has been taken away, and it has resulted in long-term problems." In fact, he goes on to say that relationships were poisoned and people ended up having a very, very difficult time re-establishing decent relationships.

He then said that he applauded those who stood up and said that the discussion route, the talking route, must be at the heart of whatever the solution is, that actually bargaining has to be at the heart of whatever the solution is. He went on to say that his leader led the way on that. I guess, now that he has become the leader, he doesn't need to lead the way anymore. It seems pretty backwards to me.

I also want to mention something that the Minister of Education said not too long ago, just several weeks ago: "We are at the table and we're having conversations with our partners, and for those who respect collective bargaining, that's the appropriate place to have those conversations." What the heck happened to that, Speaker? What the heck happened to that?

I've got to tell you: This government doesn't know anything other than what saves their own bacon. Every possible opportunity to try to make this impasse go away, to try to actually come to a positive conclusion through a respectful conversation and a hopeful and helpful dialogue, was thrown out the window, was set aside. It was set aside for a particular political reason, and that is so that the government could gain a couple of seats in the by-elections. Again, it's a cynical ploy and it's one that we do not support whatsoever.

The last quote is one from the finance minister, who said, "This party"—meaning the Liberals—"believes in free and collective bargaining." That's what the Premier used to believe, but he flipped and he flopped. Why? Because they're desperate. That's what Mr. Duncan said about the former Conservative government.

I have to say, really, who's talking out of both sides of their mouth? It's always the Liberals, and people have seen it time and time and time again. One day, they're in support of something; the next day, they're not in support of it. It's very, very clear that the only thing that matters in their figuring out whether they support something or they don't is if it helps them and if it's good for them. It's not about Ontario families and it's not about Ontario students and it's not about all of the other priorities that they should be focusing on right now—like the fact that there are 600,000 people still out of work in this province; like the fact that there is no investment happening in this province; like the fact that people can't make ends meet and there's a crisis in household budgets in this province; like the fact that people in Kitchener–Waterloo and many, many other parts of the province cannot get a family doctor to look after them; that people can't get home care for their loved ones; that people can't get long-term care, and they're expected to leave work to take care of ailing relatives.

The province is in a mess, and all this government cares about is its own political bacon. Shame on them.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: While I may be an MPP, I do have a lot of very close friends who used to teach, who still teach or who are studying to teach. These negotiations are about as tough to bear in government as they are if you're an educator.

1630

This bill aims to keep teachers working, and to do so with fairness, in a contract that's sustainable, that's affordable and that's sensible. Four years ago, Ontario was running its third consecutive budget surplus. Times were better. The contract was a lot easier to negotiate. Just as all good times come to an end, so too do all bad times, and this challenge will end. I hope it ends, as the OECTA negotiations did, with a negotiated settlement.

This issue does not affect our government's commitment to education, and it certainly doesn't affect our respect for educators. Indeed, most of us who have served in government since 2003 have a direct connection with education, as teachers, as principals, as trustees or as board personnel.

The alternative to this bill is either an unaffordable status quo or it means stripping something else or borrowing or taxing in order to turn the proceeds over to these bargaining units. We cannot answer the sacrifices that the men and women in the private sector made during the past four years by neglecting our obligations in Ontario's education budget.

We'll still be there for our teachers. We look forward to the end of this collective bargaining process to restore the warmth in a relationship that I know, on this side of the House, we have all cherished and hope to see again. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues here have made some good points. The member from Mississauga–Streetsville says he has many friends in the teaching profession. Well, I am a teacher, or was, in my former profession, and I have many, many friends in the teaching profession.

One of the things I've heard from my colleagues in the profession about what the PC Party has presented, which was an across-the-board public sector wage freeze for two years: It was fair, it was equitable; they actually thought that was a fair and just approach in dealing with this.

But here we are in this mess now that this government has made. They've had two years to negotiate with the federation, but now, at the eleventh hour, we're bailing them out again. This Liberal ship is sinking.

To the member from Toronto–Danforth and the leader of the NDP, I'll point out that this government and the mismanagement of their finances is the real issue here. We wouldn't even be here if the Liberals and the NDP had supported my esteemed colleague Mr. Yurek's private member's bill back in May that would have solved all of this problem.

So here we are. We're in this mess because this government didn't listen. This government doesn't listen. All this government tends to do is bully its way through. It's forcing federations, teachers who really just want to be back in the classroom with their students—they don't want the politics, and that's what we're getting here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker. To our education critic, Mr. Tabuns, and our leader, Andrea Horwath, I appreciate the comments. I think they're bang on.

It's clear that what has been going on is that the government has been trying to figure out a way to create a ballot question that will assist them in the by-elections. That's what this thing has been all about. What better thing to do than try to create a crisis where none exists, to vilify teachers, to make it look as if the teachers are trying to do something they're not?

I heard the president of the OSSTF on television yesterday or the day before, saying, "We're not having a strike vote." I heard the head of ETFO and the head of OSSTF and others say, "We're prepared to have a wage freeze for two years." I've heard all of them, including the school boards, say, "We want to sit down and negotiate." Listen, I've negotiated on both sides of the table. It's hard work. You have to sit down and have the conversation, as Andrea Horwath has said. In this particular case, it seems there is a fair ability to find an agreement, because in fact there's already an indication on the part of the parties that they are willing to deal with the wage freeze for two years and some of the things the government was interested in.

So why are we doing all of this? I think it's a page out of John Snobelen's handbook for being Minister of Education: Create a crisis, and then once you get the crisis, you can get the objective you want. I think that my friend the Minister of Education across the way essentially, along with the Premier's office, has been creating this crisis. Why? Because they're trying to gain this to win seats in the by-elections, and I don't think the public's going to buy it. I think the public, at the end of the day, understands what's going on. I think they don't look well at a government who says, "I'm constantly trying to play this for my own political gain."

I would say to the government across the way: Hard work; that's what this is all about. People need to sit down and do the work that needs to be done to come to an agreement. I'm confident that we can get there, and I wish the government would come to that conclusion as well.

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

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I just want to go back to a few points that have been raised, and I want to make it entirely clear that this party has been totally consistent that the preference is always a bargaining solution. No one has ever said that's not the case. Although we're getting into the 11th hour, that's still the preference. It

has always been the preference, and a bargaining solution, hands down, is the best solution. So any suggestion that our government does not prefer that is an incorrect suggestion.

I also want to go back to the budget. Not that long ago, after some deliberations and co-operation, we did pass a budget, and I want to remind people that a big part of that budget is focused on eliminating this deficit by 2017-18. It's ambitious. These are tough economic times. We are committed to eliminating the deficit. We inherited a terrible mess from the prior government. What is most important to remember in these discussions is that this deficit is, indeed, the biggest threat to education and health care.

Across-the-board increases don't work. Read Drummond. He says that; we know that. Salary and wages make up the biggest component of health care and education. Our commitment is to protecting the gains we've made in education and health care. That's absolutely the commitment.

We have to recognize that the biggest threat to those things is indeed the deficit. We need to continue to move forward with the gains we've made. We want to continue to build on the successes. We do not want to undo the quality things that have happened for our students in Ontario, the wonderful contributions of our teachers, the gains we've made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A two-minute response from the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Mississauga–Streetsville, Northumberland–Quinte West, Timmins–James Bay and Pickering–Scarborough East.

Speaker, you cannot figure this out, you cannot get through this maze, unless you understand that, in the end, this is all about the by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan. Once you know that, everything else falls into place. That's what's happening.

Why has the House been brought back right at the end of summer with very little time to do what the government says it wants to do? Because there's a by-election going on. Why did the government not act earlier in the summer? Because the by-election wasn't in motion. They couldn't showcase their toughness to the people of Kitchener–Waterloo. Why is this government acting in a way so different from the way it's acted over a number of years? Because they think what they're doing sells at the ballot box. They're making this calculation that, in order to get a majority government, they can behave in this way and get those votes. That is the core of what we're dealing with. Everything else is understood, once you understand that.

Talk to reporters. I had an opportunity to talk to a number of them this morning. They look at this. They raise those questions all the time.

Speaker, in their quest for a majority, this government is risking sticking the people of Ontario with a bill for hundreds of millions of dollars, because this bill has a very good chance of being judged unconstitutional. This

bill could cost us money, will demoralize teachers and will undermine the education our students need, all because this Premier wants a majority—all because of that.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: I rise today to speak in support of the Putting Students First Act. In doing so, I and this government are speaking up and standing up for Ontario's students, for Ontario's families, for Ontario's educators and for Ontario's taxpayers.

This proposed legislation is necessary to secure peace and stability in our schools. It's necessary to achieve the financial sustainability of our publicly funded education system. It's necessary to demonstrate that we, as elected MPPs, can work together in the best interests of Ontarians and get results when and where they are most needed.

Our government's recent outreach should give all Ontarians confidence that the majority of members here today understand our province's fiscal circumstances and have considered the personal circumstances of families across the province.

If passed, this legislation would ensure that collective agreements between unions and school boards reflect the province's fiscal reality while protecting Ontario's investments in our publicly funded education system, a system that ranks among the best in the world.

The Minister of Education has already spoken in great detail about the specifics of the proposed legislation, so it's my intention to use this time to shed light on other important results that have come from our difficult but determined discussions with our education partners during the past six months. In doing so, I will also speak about some of the compromises our government has made, in the spirit of making minority government work, to ensure that the proposed legislation has the necessary support of the House.

There are two things our government has heard repeatedly from teachers across the province: first, that hiring practices, specifically young teachers seeking long-term or permanent positions, are fraught with inconsistencies across school boards and rely too little on experience and too much on who you know; second, that teachers, people who are highly trained in assessing student needs, should be given a greater role in determining the selection and use of diagnostic assessment tools for their students based on informed, professional judgment. To do so, teachers tell us, is not to diminish the necessary oversight and expertise of principals and school boards, but rather to recognize that teachers dealing with students on a daily basis are well positioned and well trained to determine how best to assess student learning.

I'll speak to both fair hiring practices and diagnostic assessments in turn, but first I think it's important to speak on how these issues arose in labour discussions and were refined during more than 300 hours of negotiations with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.

As the Minister of Education outlined in her remarks to this House, we began discussions at the provincial discussion table six months ago with our education partners. These discussions, for those unions who showed leadership and stayed at the table, were difficult but constructive. They resulted in significant improvements to the government's initial position. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association should be commended for their hard work and their skill at the table. Through their perseverance and problem-solving, and the government's openness to their input and ideas, we reached a memorandum of understanding on July 5. That memorandum is a win for families, a win for taxpayers and a win for educators.

A key part of the memorandum, a document that was painstakingly negotiated in good faith, was the inclusion of language around fair hiring practices and diagnostic assessments. Current hiring practices vary from school board to school board. In some cases, this can result in significant challenges for qualified teachers who are looking to do what they do best: get into a classroom and help Ontario's students succeed. The fair hiring provisions in the OECTA memorandum provide for a standardized, consistent and transparent approach to hiring occasional teachers for long-term occasional and permanent positions.

With regard to diagnostic assessments, these are used to identify a student's needs, abilities and readiness to learn the knowledge and skills outlined in the curriculum. This information helps teachers determine where individual students are in their learning so that teachers can better personalize their instruction for a particular student's need.

Language in the OECTA memorandum was designed to give teachers greater autonomy in choosing appropriate assessment tools and in deciding how often assessments are needed, while continuing to respect the vital leadership of principals and school boards in making decisions on student supports. Similar language for both fair hiring and diagnostic assessments was included in the memorandum our government would later sign with l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO. It was, and remains, our government's intention to extend fair hiring and flexibility about the decisions regarding diagnostic assessment tools to all instructors in our four publicly funded systems.

But the language in the OECTA memorandum immediately came under attack from school boards and, in turn, from some members of this House. These attacks were fuelled by either misunderstanding or misinformation, or both. For example, self-interested parties claimed that fair hiring would force school boards to assign supply teachers based solely on seniority, regardless of the qualifications of the teacher. Not true. In fact, all boards in Ontario have processes for selecting and placing certified teachers on their occasional teacher rosters. These processes will not change.

The fair hiring provision in the memorandum focuses on the steps after the initial selection by the boards and

on the subsequent placement of teachers in long-term or permanent assignments. It outlines the process by which appropriate candidates for jobs will be interviewed and considered for those jobs.

In a nutshell, boards will have to give first consideration for hiring to teachers who are qualified for the position, taking into account the obligation to provide the best possible program and the safety and well-being of pupils, as well as the teacher's experience on the board's occasional teacher roster. That is in no way a requirement to blindly hire based on seniority. To be clear, many boards in our province do have clear and transparent processes in place, and I commend them for their leadership. But it's important to our young teachers that we have consistency when it comes to the hiring of teachers with public funds.

Regarding diagnostic assessment tools, it's been stated that much of the value of assessment comes from using the same assessment tool over several years to build a portrait that is clear enough to allow for effective, targeted intervention and board improvement planning. We don't disagree with that. However, while these types of assessments need to be maintained, we are looking for a better balance. The OECTA memorandum still requires that teachers conduct those assessments, but with assurance that these assessments inform the instruction of their students. No teacher will be permitted to opt out of using diagnostic assessment tools, but they will be given more flexibility to provide input on the selection and use of assessment tools in a manner that recognizes their in-depth understanding of the needs of their students.

The oversight and expertise of principals and school boards continues to be essential in efforts to support student achievement. Our government is simply ensuring that another qualified voice, the teacher's voice, is allowed to speak up on behalf of a student's best interest.

At their core, both fair hiring and teacher flexibility for diagnostic assessments are about student achievement and doing what's right to ensure that every pupil has an opportunity to reach their full potential. That should be the focus, not territorial rights. School boards and principals are vital partners in our student achievement agenda. These provisions respect their role and their expertise. Clarification about how diagnostic assessment tools are selected and used, and the establishment of fair hiring practices that are consistent across the province, will strengthen our education system. That's why we agreed to them, and that's why these improvements are still a priority for our government, just as they are for the many teachers who, over years of talking with us and in hundreds of hours in recent negotiations, made fair hiring and diagnostic assessment a clear priority for improvement.

1650

Our government announced weeks ago that we would be moving forward with a fair hiring regulation and a policy and program memorandum on diagnostic assessments. That will happen. But to make the ministry work and respond to concerns from some members in this

House, we made a revision to the Putting Students First Act before we introduced it in the House. We changed the original draft of the act to reflect that balanced diagnostic assessment and fair and transparent hiring practices will not be a required element for any other union or board that has not already signed an agreement. That means that our partners, OECTA and AEFO, who have signed memorandums will be required to have those specific terms included in local collective agreements, but other parties would not, unless they have signed a memorandum on or before August 31.

To be clear, this limitation would not affect the ability to make a regulation under the Education Act with respect to hiring practices, nor would it affect the minister's ability to issue a program and policy memorandum with respect to the use of diagnostic assessments of students. In fact, we still intend to do just that: introduce a fair hiring regulation under the Education Act that will cover all school boards in Ontario, and issue a policy direction regarding the use of diagnostic assessments. We will do so because it is in keeping with what has been our focus all along: finding ways to continue to improve our publicly funded education system while also finding savings that can help us address Ontario's most pressing concern, which is the provincial deficit.

Since 2003, our government has invested heavily in publicly funded education. We have given the sector, including teachers and staff, the resources they need and the recognition they've deserved. Our investments in education, made in the best interests of students and reflecting the strength of Ontario's economy at the time, have resulted in a world-class education system that is well equipped to manage a two-year pause in compensation gains. This pause, which is included in the already signed memorandums and is included in the proposed act, is strong and necessary action toward reining in our deficit in a responsible and a balanced manner.

Now it is on our shoulders, every member of this House, to do what is right and pass into law a bill that would do nothing less than stabilize our education system and our finances, not to mention the lives of everyone expecting school to start on September 4.

Our government did not make the decision to introduce legislation lightly, but times are also tough, and there's a need to take action when, after six full months of negotiations, we still have so far to go.

Some unions are content to let their contracts roll over, ensuring a significant number of teachers get a 5.5% wage increase and two million more bankable sick days. Some school boards are content with the status quo when it comes to things like fair and transparent hiring and balanced diagnostic assessments. But in 2012, the status quo is not a good enough reason to do nothing.

Our government does not accept the status quo. Some 300 hours of negotiations with OECTA produced an agreement that is fair, balanced and responsible for families, for teachers and for all taxpayers. It challenged the status quo and it delivered a superior, affordable,

sustainable result. We don't need the status quo. We have something better: the proposed Putting Students First Act.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much for that fine introduction, Speaker. It's so perfect.

I must say, for the member who just spoke—I'm sure he's feeling pretty dizzy right at the moment. It's probably a good thing that he sat down from all that spinning that he was doing during his discussion. There are far, far too many statements in that member's speech to address each and every one of them in two minutes, but I think we have to—first off, let's put some of the obvious out in front.

This is sheer political posturing on the part of this Liberal government. We saw it first-hand and clearly this morning, when there was an opportunity to debate this bill this morning at 9 a.m. What did the Liberal government do? They brought in a motion to speak about full-day kindergarten, a policy that has been adopted by this House, in legislation, and is being implemented now. This Liberal government has the gall to bring forward a motion to support it after it has been implemented. It's absolutely preposterous that the Liberals could actually think that they're being truthful and honest on this bill.

The member speaks of securing peace. Well, I guess he wasn't out in the yard, out on the front lawn yesterday with 4,000 or 5,000 teachers down here at Queen's Park. I guess his idea of securing peace is somewhat different than the teachers in Ontario.

The member was speaking about getting rid of the inconsistencies in hiring. I think, first and foremost, the Liberal Party and all its members should be looking to get rid of the inconsistencies in their own platform and in their own bill and start sticking to some principles and start doing honest, rightful things instead of this posturing and this facade that they've been foisting on the people of Ontario.

I will agree with the members from the third party: This bill has everything to do with September 6 and nothing to do with September 1 and the start of the school year. That was never in jeopardy. The only thing that's in jeopardy is this Liberal government.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd like to add my voice to this debate as well. What I find very concerning and what I find very troubling is that the government is creating their own crisis. This is something that we read about in novels. In 1984, by George Orwell, it talks about governments creating a crisis and then solving the crisis and trying to take credit for solving it as a manner or as a fashion to gain popular support. That was fiction, and it's funny that sometimes fiction comes true in reality.

If we look at what's happening now, we're seeing—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Truth is stranger than fiction.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: There you go.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's the one you're looking for.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I lost it in my train of thought.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much to the member from Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And you don't get much of it from over there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the tri-party dialogue goes through the Chair and not to each other. I feel left out, okay?

Continue.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We never want that, Mr. Speaker.

What's more troubling is that this is simply an attempt to distract from real issues that are going on in our education system and some real scandals and real crises that are going on in the government, namely Ornge, namely the fact that power plants have been cancelled in Oakville and Mississauga, and the cost to taxpayers. These are issues that we need to hear some accountability about. These are true crises, not the teaching issue, because, first and foremost, teachers have made it clear and support workers have made it clear that schools were never in jeopardy and the school year was never in jeopardy, so that there is absolutely no necessity for this legislation. It was not required, and it's simply an attempt to distract from real issues and a ploy to gain popular support, which will not be accepted by the people of Ontario.

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

1700

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair there and keeping order in the House, as usual.

I have two minutes to make some comments on the very eloquent rendition of Bill 115 by the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

In a few days, the kids are going back to school. We weren't so sure that the kids would be going to school in the next few days unless we introduced this bill. I think the members of this House know that two of the unions—one has already taken a vote to go on strike and the other one is holding votes until September 7.

Now, I think it's not only appropriate, the title of the bill, but it's more appropriate to know that the parents of all the children will be given the peace of mind that the kids will be going to school, that the schools will be open, that the teachers will be in the classrooms—and the teachers, Speaker, are the ones that we, together with the kids, want to do the job: the kids to be in school and the teachers to teach.

We love our teachers. There's no question about it, Speaker. This is not about the teachers. This is about putting kids first, and the rendition by the member from Mississauga–Streetsville has addressed so eloquently the benefits of this particular bill. So I think the House should be considering it very seriously, and say that it's

not the time to put this threat out there to our families, our parents, our students. They deserve that our teachers are given every opportunity to do what they do best, and that is to teach. So I congratulate the member, and I hope that the House will support the bill.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I've only been a member of this House since October, and it's incredible how things get spun around, turned around, and everything else. It's just incredible how this is done. We've had a government that has been in trouble financially for a number of years. We also have a government that was given a minority government by the voters of this province, and here they are trying to win an election in K-W by trying to get people's minds off of what the real problem in this province is. The problem is: We don't have enough money to go around to pay for things—and that goes back to the last election, when a gas plant was cancelled in Mississauga, after a gas plant was cancelled in Oakville. We find out it's going to be \$190 million of taxpayers' money, this gas plant in Mississauga.

It's incredible how this government can pat themselves on the back and say they're doing a good job. The voters in my riding certainly didn't see that. They've also given a 98% raise to managers and executives in the public service. It's just incredible how this government works. This is all about political posturing. We know that. The public knows that. It's time for this government to get down to business and find some real ways to help with our deficit in this province. We are not going to make their targets in a couple of years because of the bungling that has been going on with this government. We are headed for a \$30-billion deficit, and unfortunately this government has a real issue seeing that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Mississauga–Streetsville has a two-minute reply.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Bramalea–Gore–Malton, York West and Perth–Wellington.

To my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, it was two minutes of Conservative, rhetorical blah blah blah—enough said.

To my colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, this is an issue that can be resolved by people of goodwill. Join us, I ask you—join us and let's get everyone back at the table, talking with one another, where we can actually do something. If I understood the intonations of the member's comments correctly, he thinks balancing the budget is a distraction. I hope that's not what he meant to say, but that is indeed what Hansard put on the record.

My colleague from York West—a great member—does grasp the gravity of this issue, and he shows how his background and years of experience in the House and in his community favour dialogue and negotiation over confrontation and sloganeering.

My colleague from Perth–Wellington said not a single word about the bill or about education at all. Enough said on that, too.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Boy, just in the nick of time, I finished with that text.

Today we're debating Bill 115, which I know the member from Mississauga—Streetsville erroneously referred to as something about students. There's nothing about students in the name of the bill. I forget the name of it, actually, because I don't have it in front of me, but it has nothing to do with students; it's about sending people back to work. It's about legislating people to work.

From the start, Tim Hudak and the PC caucus have said that we're not going to derail a school year or the start of a school year; we're going to do whatever is necessary—and I have our education critic here with me today, Lisa MacLeod, who has done a tremendous job representing our views on this issue—and we're going to ensure that students are in school for the start of the year next week. We made that commitment to the government.

Of course, they then, sillily—is “sillily” a word? I'm not sure, but it doesn't matter, because it was just silly. The Premier comes back and he says, “I'd like that in writing.” Can you imagine that? That's game number one. We'll get to the point here shortly, Speaker.

Then they tabled the legislation, and then they changed the name of the legislation. Then today, we get a silly motion in the morning when we could have been debating this legislation.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: No, we couldn't. We can't debate the same day.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Absolutely. The Minister of Education is chirping in there, but she knows that this House works on the basis of unanimous consent. We could have unanimously consented to speak to the bill in the morning and the afternoon. By unanimous consent, we could have done that. But, no, they would rather try to play the game of “smallitics,” as my friend from Nepean—Carleton called it today, which came from her roots down east. They call it smallitics when you're just playing games.

I've been here for a little while now, but every day I get another lesson about Liberal principles. I'm going to give you a little explanation about Liberal principles. One thing about Tim Hudak: Last November, he said, “An across-the-board public sector wage freeze affecting everyone. Whether you are a provincial public servant or municipal public servant, legislate a wage freeze”—principled, equitable, responsible.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Illegal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, my. The Minister of Health is telling me what's illegal now. She should go study some of those files over at Ornge. You want to find something that's illegal—illegal, immoral, disgusting, degrading, awful. I tell you, go take a look at those files over at Ornge; we'll talk about illegal.

Everything that we've done can be defended on the basis of principle. We have stuck to them, they've been rock-solid, and we've been consistent on them.

I'm going to tell you a little story about Liberal principles. Have you ever looked into the refrigerator, and oh, you've got some of this, and you've got some of that? Oh, there are some carrots there. There are some turnips. There are some cucumber—whatever—some squash. You decide, “I don't want to throw this stuff out; I'm going to make a little soup out of it.” So you take all that stuff that's stuck in the refrigerator that you don't want to throw away—it's still good food; shouldn't be wasted—and you make a soup out of it.

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There's no consistency of what's in the soup; it's whatever is in the fridge. A couple of weeks later, you go through the fridge again, and, “You know what? I'm going to have to make another pot of soup.” It's completely different from the one you made two weeks ago, but that soup could be called Liberal principle soup, because depending upon the situation, it could have anything in it, and depending upon the situation, it may in no way, shape or form resemble what was in the Liberal principle soup of the week before. So that's what we're dealing with here, because it is every little political game that they can play. Thank goodness our critic stood hard and our leader stood tough and they said, “You know, we need to see some changes.” So we got some changes with regard to the seniority and how that would affect the hiring of supply teachers within the school boards. The minister and the Premier made an agreement. They said, “Okay, we're going to do that. But we're only going to do that to the people that signed on after August 31.” So the people that have signed on already, which was really the partners of the government, OECTA and then the French school board, are saying, “Oh, no. We're still going to have the union deciding who gets to supply teach.”

You talk about a principal: principle, “le”, and principal, “al.” We're saying that the right thing is to let the principal, “al”, decide who is going to be supply teaching, and on the basis of who should supply teach in my school if I was the principal. Let the principal make the decisions on who is best suited to teach, to supply those grades, whatever the requirements would be at that particular time. That's a great principle, “le”.

But the Liberals now, they say, “Well, no. That's only going to apply to the ones afterwards.” Again, they just blow like the wind. It's up and down like, you know—I was going to say something, but I didn't know if I could so I didn't say it, Speaker, because I know who's in the chair and I'm rather careful when there are certain deputies in the chair. So they're just all over the map on this.

And then today—this is just too rich. And there's a lot of anger out there, as you saw yesterday on the lawn, thousands of teachers. You saw the front page of the Toronto Sun this morning. Right on the front page, the headline on the front page just said, “Liar, liar.” That's what the headline on the front page of the Toronto Star said. And so obviously there's some anger out there.

So what does the Premier do to further confuse the situation? He added a little something else to the Liberal

principle soup. He makes a statement today that he's musing about—you see, because part of this agreement is that the teachers are going to lose some of the banking of the school days.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Sick days.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sick days; thank you very much. So the Premier now says he's musing about ending the bankable sick days for police and firefighters. However, he only says, "But that's for the municipalities to deal with." Because we want the municipalities to deal with the police and the fire, yet the biggest police force in the province happens to be the OPP, and he won't be dealing with that. I mean, this guy is unbelievable—or, to be more accurate, not believable. Anything he says has to be taken with a grain of salt.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Put some salt in that soup.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Health says, "Add some salt to the soup." Well, this week it may be salted; next week it may be not. It depends where the Liberal principles land that day.

So this is what we're trying to grapple with on this side of the House. And let me be clear: We have said from the start we're going to support the legislation. Why? Because it is the first time since last November, when Tim Hudak sat in the corner office—the corner office on the second floor that I hope and pray to God he will occupy after the next provincial election, for the sake of this province, for the sake of the people in this province. But he left the meeting in that corner office, currently occupied by Premier McGuinty, and for the first time since that meeting, we actually saw the possibility that that Premier—that Premier over there—may actually be starting to come around and accept that the condition, the fiscal mess that he put this province in, along with his friends, that there is the possibility that he might actually recognize that we're in a fiscal mess and that restraint at the wage level in the greater public service might be something that he wants to talk about.

So what did he do? Instead of doing the principled thing and saying to everybody out there, "Look, we're going to treat you equally"—in this House, we're equals; we have different roles and different responsibilities, and there are some things, for example, ministers of the crown cannot put forth a private member's bill and backbench MPPs can. We understand that. There are delineated responsibilities depending upon the office that we hold, but in this House, we are all equal. We have one vote, and that vote counts equally. But he says to the public service in the province of Ontario, "You are not equal. Today, I'm going to single out the teachers. I'm going to attack them, and I'm going to rip up the agreements that we have with them and we're going to impose a deal."

I understand, and we understand, that in times when you are on the edge of the fiscal abyss you have to take tough measures, but why does he do it in only the one instance? Because he wants to be in the news every day talking about how tough he's become. That's why he muses today that he's considering ending the practice of

bankable sick days for police and firefighters, because, you see, he's getting the news back from Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan that he's not selling as well as he'd like to. Premier McGuinty's lustre is growing a little bit dull. So he figures, "Okay, I've got to send out a new confusing story today. The Toronto Star is not even printing what I'm saying anymore, so let's throw something new out there today." Again, that is sort of the confusing environment surrounding the principles of the Liberal Party and the Premier.

Our position has been consistent all along. Don Drummond, the hand-picked economic guru of Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party—paid for by your tax dollars, by the way—

Mr. Robert Bailey: How much did he make a day, John?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Was it \$1,500 a day or \$1,800?

Interjection: Fifteen hundred.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Fifteen hundred a day.

Mr. Robert Bailey: That's good work, if you can get it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, it's good work, if you can get it, and, you know, some of the stuff he did was worth \$1,500 a day; he did some good work. I'll tell you one thing, he'd be able to figure out why there's a \$300-million hole in the numbers that the Liberals put out there, saying that this is a move to balance the budget. But the deal that they signed with OECTA, if it's spread across the entire teaching sector, will actually add \$300 million to the debt in this province—the debt that Premier McGuinty keeps going on and on and on and saying, as he said at AMO last week up in Ottawa, "The number one priority for this government must be to eliminate the deficit in the province of Ontario." He's going about it quite the way.

So, after the budget, as soon as we left this place here, the first thing we find out is they just signed a deal, \$190 million—let me say that again: \$190 million—to cancel the gas plant in Mississauga, to save Liberal seats. I don't know how many seats they saved, I think there was—somebody said it was something like \$43 million a seat.

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Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's 47.5.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What was it, there?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's 47.5.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's \$47.5 million a seat. I'd like to know what it was per vote. We need to do the math to see what it was per vote. You see, we have election financing laws in the province of Ontario. In my riding, the maximum amount I could have spent on the campaign would have been somewhere around about \$82,000 or something. I might be not exactly 100% accurate, Speaker, but it's in and around that amount. I don't have the most populous riding in the province. I have the best, but I don't have—what we lack in quantity, we make up for in quality up in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I think that in election financing, a dollar and a few cents per voter is what you're allowed to spend—what is

it, \$1.07 or \$1.09, or something like that, per voter that you can spend. I wonder how much they spent per voter in all of those ridings in Mississauga to cancel that gas-powered plant.

But they didn't just cancel it; they waited till the darned thing was half-built and then they cancelled it. It's just unbelievable.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): My apologies, member. There's a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure we should be making accusations about Elections Ontario. I think—

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Let me finish, Mr. Speaker. The integrity of Elections Ontario, of course, is to make sure that they look after the operation of democracy in the province of Ontario, and I think we should be very cautious in impugning the integrity and talking about Elections Ontario. That has very little to do with Bill 115 here, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much. That's not a point of order.

Please continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm a little disappointed in the member from Peterborough, that he would rise on something like that, knowing that the gentleman sitting in the chair temporarily as the Speaker would not have the depth of knowledge of the standing orders to be able to rule him out of order immediately. But I'll rule him out of order myself. Shame on him.

Anyway, we've got this money that was spent, your taxpayers' money, and here's the best part of it, Speaker: They admitted that it was a completely political decision. There was no logical reason. If you decided to start building the thing a few months before, on what basis would, all of a sudden—the skies changed and everything else, the world completely reversed itself, and now we don't need to build the plant? No.

The Minister of Energy, at estimates—the committee is holding him in contempt, by the way; they're holding him in contempt. They're changing his name from Minister Bentley to Minister Contemptly. They held him in contempt for refusing to release the details on the deal. You would think that a government that—Speaker, you weren't here in 2003, but I remember that first throne speech.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Peterborough has a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to hear you rule on standing order 23, section (b), where it clearly says: "Directs his or her speech to matters other than ... the question under discussion..." Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector: I

would say it's a bit of a stretch to be talking about the Minister of Energy and gas and power plants. I'm not sure how that relates to Bill 115.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member for his point of order, and I will certainly take it under consideration. But I think the final decision will be up to me if I think he's stepped over the line.

Continue, but I am watching.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, I'll get some added time, because I've got some very important points to make here, and the member from Peterborough has been robbing my clock.

Anyway, what it comes down to is, it is a matter of principle. Again, we've decided, for the sake of the children—they wanted to whimsically call the bill Putting Students First, but I think some of their own advisers changed their minds on that, because it was just a bit of a stretch. But we've decided to do the right thing—put students first—and support the government on this bill, not because the bill is right—it's like a piece of Swiss cheese; there are holes in it all over the place—and we're not doing it to support their principles, because they don't have any. But we are doing it to try to ensure that the students will be in school next week when the school year starts.

But I want to ask them this question: If you believe, rightfully so, that you can freeze the wages of teachers across this province, then why in the name of all that is holy can you not freeze the wages of every public sector worker in this province? That's the question I put to you. That's the question you have not answered. You can do it legally. It is constitutionally proper. It has been shown. It's time for you guys to stand up and start to adopt Conservative principles.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Gosh, I've been here for about 10 months, and every bill that has been presented in this House I've listened to very closely. I've listened to both parties' points of view. This bill, it's kind of hard to—it's like a sales job. That's the impression I'm getting: that this government really wants to sell this bill as if they did their best to have talks with the teachers, the talks came to a stone wall and they have had no choice but to impose legislation. I'm not buying that sales job this time around.

Some of the bills that I've seen come through—I have seen some of the good points that have been discussed. Then we've put our input and also the party opposite, the opposition, put their input, and a lot of the time it comes back to the House and it's actually a better bill than it started as because everybody has a voice in that bill and they've come to an agreement.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke talked about principles. All of us here have principles, but sometimes you do have to compromise on some of those principles to come to a resolution that is fair for everyone and so we can all come to an agreement.

I think that what has happened here—from what I’ve picked up on and listened to, you’re really trying to sell us and the public a bill of goods. During this by-election in Kitchener–Waterloo, I don’t think the voters are going to buy what you’re selling.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I truly enjoyed the concoction—presentation—by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke there. I know he went into the fridge, but I hope all the vegetables that he put in that soup were all Ontario produce. I would call it perhaps a wonderful cocktail, with some whisky and maybe some grappa, because listening to the member is always wonderful and entertaining. I have to say, Speaker, with all due respect, that, right or wrong, and of course we don’t always agree on everything, he puts his heart into what he says, even when he’s wrong. But given the fact—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That’s the nicest insult I’ve ever heard.

Mr. Mario Sergio: No, no, I truly mean it, Speaker, with all due respect. The fact is, we welcome his comments. We welcome the PC caucus support. I know they have some concerns, but at the end I can see that they understand the importance of seeing this particular piece of legislation going forward.

I have to say to the member and to the House that the minister has been very, very busy since early this year, since February—over six months of negotiations. Some of the boards have seen reason and accepted the memorandum of agreement as of July this year; others are still pending. But it is important that we get our teachers, for whom we have so much respect, and we get the kids back into the classroom come September. I think the reason that the bill is here today is because of that, and I hope we can have the support of the House. I thank you, Speaker.

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

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. It’s a pleasure to once again be part of this debate. I want to thank my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his 20 minutes of this debate, talking about our concerns.

Let’s be quite frank, Speaker. We did indicate last week, through our leader, Tim Hudak, that we would bail the Liberals out on this particular piece of legislation, not because we agree with its entirety, but because we believe it starts to get us on that road to what we have been saying for over a year now: a public sector wage freeze throughout the broader public service.

My colleague mentioned that this is really a labour bill and not really about students. I can say that it is consistent with our view that the basis and the parameters of this legislation really have more to do with a fiscal hole in the government’s financial plans than they do with anything else.

It goes without saying that we appreciate Ontario’s teachers, our principals and our school boards, which

brings me to our two very big concerns with this legislation. One is, we believe it produces a \$300-million hole in their fiscal plan. It’s going to cost about \$450 million because teachers will still be able to move up the grid, with offsets of only about \$150 million. That’s why we want the Auditor General to review their numbers, because we still have 4,000 collective agreements outstanding in the province of Ontario throughout the broader public service.

The second thing we have a problem with is sub-clauses 19(1)(e)(i) and (ii). We are concerned that they strip and usurp the ability of school boards and principals to make locally based decisions in their own school communities on hiring supply teachers and also diagnostics testing. That’s unacceptable to us, and that’s why we’re going to be pushing for a committee meeting in order to amend this legislation at clause-by-clause.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I partly have to agree with the member from Nipissing—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Renfrew? Thank you. I’ve got to partially agree, and the part I will agree on is, where I think we are in sync is that it’s pretty clear what the Liberals are up to here. The government wants to create a crisis in order to show that they’re responding to some kind of a crisis so that they’ll be seen as being tough and responding to the crisis so that they can manipulate the voters in order to try to win some by-elections. I think simply this is what this is about.

What’s clear, and as we know from the public record, is that teachers have offered a two-year wage freeze as they went to the bargaining table. How often have you seen a union, prior to negotiations—I remember this only happening once, where CUPE inside workers or outside workers for the city of Toronto essentially said, “We’ll take a pay freeze,” going into bargaining. You don’t see that very often. The reason they did that is, I think, the teachers understand, “There’s a tough time out there. There’s the need to balance the books.” They’re prepared to do their part. That was the first part.

The second thing is that none of the teachers have ever gotten up and said that they want to have a strike, and neither have any of the school boards said that they want to lock the teachers out. So where’s the crisis? We have two parties who want to negotiate, and you have two parties who want to have hard discussions that have to happen to get to an agreement. What you’ve got in the middle is the government saying, “No; we’re going to contrive a crisis in order to drive an issue that, hopefully, will help us win some by-elections in Waterloo and in Vaughan.” I think that’s a pretty cynical play.

I think we need to respect that, when it comes to these kinds of decisions, the local employer, being the school boards, and the teachers, through their unions and associations, have to have the opportunity to sit down and have the discussions and do the hard work that has to be done in order to get to an agreement, and I think there’s an agreement to be had.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members from London–Fanshawe, York West, my colleague from Nepean–Carleton and also from Timmins–James Bay.

I want to thank the member from York West for his kind personal comments. We don't hear that that often in this House, and I do appreciate that.

To my colleague from Timmins–James Bay, I share a lot of his concerns about the motivation and the reasons why we're here. A few weeks ago, the Premier was saying that we had to come back and pass this legislation by September 1. It had to be passed by September 1. It is highly unlikely that we're passing this legislation before September 1. So we know that wasn't the fact. We know that was an invented situation.

We now know that, regardless of what we do here in this House, we could have made it retroactive. Whatever decision is made at the end of the day, if the bill is passed, we could make the terms of that bill and the actions denoted by that bill retroactive. So you do have to ask yourself, was this somewhat of a manufactured situation in order to draw some attention to, you know, Dalton McGuinty, dragon slayer, riding into Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan as a white knight of some kind?

Because all summer long I've said, "There's only one thing that the Liberals are thinking about right now. It's clear they don't care about the deficit. It's clear they don't care about the debt. It's clear they don't care about jobs and the economy. They care only about power." And right now, the only thing they're worried about is the by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan. Once they get by those—we'll have to see what the composition of the House is—we may find out a little bit more about what the next Liberal plan is for the people of Ontario. I hope it's a better one than we're hearing today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I want to do is paint a picture for the public. I want to paint a picture of what's really going on here, and I want to clarify a phrase that I used earlier.

What's going on in Ontario, and particularly what's going on with this legislation, is nothing more than an overt attempt to distract the public and to use and manipulate an opportunity to create the perception that the government is taking decisive action.

The problem is this: My honourable colleague drew attention to the fact that this was about making sure that the school year starts on time, and that there was some indication that unions had presented the appearance of looking to strike come the start of the school year. Let's clarify that. First and foremost, there are a number of steps that need to be taken to have a legal strike. Those steps have not been taken by any union in Ontario. There has been an indication of perhaps a protest, there's been an indication of perhaps the willingness of some of the members that they would in some circumstances strike, but very, very clearly, no union in the entire province of Ontario has said that they would stop the school year

from commencing. No union, or school board, for that matter, has indicated that there would be any disruption of classes whatsoever. That's a statement I make without any hesitation, and anyone in this chamber can confirm that there is absolutely no risk to the disruption of the school year.

Our classrooms will commence, our school year will commence as usual, so why the necessity of this bill? Well, let's look at some of the circumstances surrounding the bill.

We were called back early from the summer break, but this bill was not debated until today during evening session. There were three full days that we could have started the debate on this bill; it did not begin.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: You can't do it on the first day.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Fair enough. Perhaps we couldn't have done it on the first day, but—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There appears to be about six sidebars going on, and I'm having trouble hearing. So could we cut it back a little bit so the Speaker can at least have some—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Turn up the volume.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need any 10-cent comments, thank you.

Continue, and hopefully it will get a little quieter.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: So that's one thing when you look at the strategy about when the House is called back, the timing of it, coincidentally right in the middle of the by-election. It could have been called back earlier. There was a strategic decision not to call back the House earlier. Why not? We need to think about these questions. Why? Why was it specifically called during the by-election?

Why was this legislation presented when there was absolutely no risk of the classrooms being disrupted? There was absolutely no risk. No member on this side of the House can tell me with any confidence that the classroom would have been disrupted come the start of the school day. Absolutely no one can say that.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough–Pickering East.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Now, some members like to draw attention to—and one of my honourable colleagues discussed the fact that this is about the budget, that this is about balancing the budget and this is an issue regarding the fact that there is a cost associated. Fair enough. We are in certain economic difficulties, fiscal difficulties, and we need to approach those with some measure, some thoughtfulness and some seriousness. However, it is very clear in case law in Ontario—and in Canada, more importantly—that the type of legislation that's being presented has been found to be unconstitutional.

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This very government has indicated very clearly that a similar program or similar type of approach was taken in BC with public sector workers. The public sector workers were legislated to have a wage freeze, and there were some serious repercussions. I can't fathom how anyone

on the government side can with a straight face think that this legislated wage freeze—and it's not just a wage freeze, in fact; this is a much deeper bill than just a wage freeze—won't be challenged in court. There will be significant costs associated with that challenge, and there is certainly the chance that this bill will be defeated and determined to be unconstitutional. There's absolutely no guarantee that this bill will be deemed, for sure, 100% constitutional.

Now, if this bill has the chance of being unconstitutional, and there is some case law precedent to support that—now, every case is not identical, but there are certainly strong arguments to say that this is very similar to the case in BC; it doesn't have to be identical—how can the government members then say with a straight face that this will be saving money for Ontario? How can they say that? There is the spectre of billions of dollars—not just millions of dollars. There is a spectre of billions of dollars of risk here. It's most certainly a risk.

Again, it speaks to the fact that this bill is a guise. It is a form of distraction. It is not about putting students first whatsoever. It's not about Ontario families. It's not about ensuring our education system is strong. It is politics of distraction, and it is a method and a strategy to gain popular support. But the trouble is that it's not working, and the trouble is that people are seeing through it, and if people don't see through it, we will do our best to ensure people see the true colours of this bill.

What we also have to look at is, again, the timing. Let's look at the timing of this bill, just to understand the circumstances here. There was no surprise. There wasn't an unprecedented or unpredictable event that occurred here. Everybody knew that the contracts were set to end at the end of the month. That was common knowledge. This was known for a great deal of time. Why is it that these steps were taken right at the 11th hour? It begs the question, why? What's the strategy behind that? Obviously it's not the most sensible approach. Obviously it's not the most rational approach. Why wait till the 11th hour, if this was truly the purpose of the bill, to ram it through right at the end? There was considerable time to negotiate with teachers, with support workers, but strategically, the government chose not to do that and chose to present a bill at the 11th hour.

What's remarkable is that we have so many members of the government party who spoke out against a very similar bill that was proposed by the Conservatives, and they spoke out with clarity, with fervour, that this was absolutely unacceptable. They cited case law. They cited how it's an irrational and reckless approach. But they're doing the very same thing. It was so easy for us to research this. It is somewhat troubling and concerning that the government party would bring up a bill when they themselves criticized something quite similar. They criticized—and didn't just say, "Oh, there's a problem with it," but, "We're adamant that the proposed bill of public sector wage freezes was a wrong approach, was an incorrect approach."

They're doing the very same thing. Let's look at some of the comments that were made. Our education minister,

who seems upset with some of the comments that are made, indicated, "The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled the unilateral PC Party wage scheme unconstitutional. If tried here in Ontario, it would be overturned by the courts and cost taxpayers billions of dollars"—the Liberal education minister. This is from the CBC News, July 25, 2012. And just a month later, we're looking at something quite similar.

I'm very careful with my language. I'm not saying that it's exactly the same. For sure, it's not exactly the same, but it's quite similar. It's a wage freeze. It actually goes beyond that and talks about what the unions are able to do in terms of whether they can strike or not strike. It looks at the ways they organize themselves. There is a very deep bill here that goes into quite a number of issues beyond simply freezing wages. If the government party was so concerned with the Conservatives' bill, then why are they presenting something so similar that goes beyond what the Conservatives wanted in terms of its scope, in terms of its impact on teachers?

Again, it's not about education; it's not about teachers. It's about the by-election. We've seen the track record of the Liberal Party on this issue, on the idea of purchasing votes, the idea of spending money to gain seats. It's no surprise, but it's the facts.

There are two examples that we've talked about and need to be addressed very clearly: the power plants at both Mississauga and Oakville. They were cancelled, again at the 11th hour, on the eve of an election. If it was truly an attempt to be democratic, if it was truly an attempt to work with the constituents or the citizens or the residents of that area, then why weren't the citizens of that area consulted previously? Why was it that after protest after protest, when the polling indicated that there were seats at risk, the government then took the step to cancel the power plants, costing hundreds of millions of dollars to the taxpayers of Ontario? We know that at least the publicly disclosed cost of the Mississauga gas plant is \$190 million. We don't know yet the cost of the Oakville power plant.

These are examples of spending taxpayers' money, precious resources, to gain seats, and it looks like we're seeing the very same thing here, where we have the risk of court battles. We have the risk of a courtroom settlement which could cost us not millions, not hundreds of millions, but there is a risk of billions of dollars being wasted here in the long run, simply to have the perception of being decisive.

Even the Minister of Finance, when referencing the Conservative Party's bill to freeze public sector wages, indicated that Tim Hudak needs "to reference the BC Supreme Court decision and a number of others that have constrained governments.... Mr. Drummond, an adviser we brought on, and others have advised and will advise the Leader of the Opposition and others that wage freezes tend not to work, either in the short or long term."

What do we have now? We have a wage freeze, and it's not going to work in the short term or in the long term.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's a lot more than that.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's exactly that. Actually, it's a lot more than just a wage freeze, which makes it that much more troubling.

A member opposite said that I would go on record that my position on this—that the bill is simply a point of distraction. His contention was that I was saying that balancing the budget was a matter of distraction. No. Balancing the budget is very important, but to balance the budget takes a measured and rational approach. It doesn't take 11th-hour legislation that's haphazard and has the potential of being overturned and costing millions, if not billions, of dollars.

I talked about this previously. I want to make it very clear: This is very truly a fabricated and a manufactured crisis. There was no risk to our classrooms. School would continue, and there is absolutely no need for this legislation. In fact, the unions and the school boards have at least come to this agreement: Across the boards, many of the unions have already accepted the idea of a zero wage increase, a freeze on their wages. They were able to voluntarily come to that point. The issue is that this legislation goes beyond that. The negotiations went beyond that.

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What issues is this bill distracting us from? We look at the mismanagement of our precious funds. We are being distracted from the fact that we've seen time and time again that in Ornge there was a number of clear red flags and warning signs that were missed, that were overlooked, that were ignored. Ignoring these warning signs cost millions of dollars to taxpayers again. If we're talking about balancing the budget, if we're talking about being careful with our precious resources, then it's of paramount importance that we as a government, as representatives, ensure that there are proper oversight mechanisms in place, that we don't see wasteful spending.

We also see that there are substantial issues in our classrooms. We see schools being closed, and one of my colleagues talked about this, that there are cycles when it comes to schools. There are cycles in populations. There are cycles in terms of children who attend a school. There are time periods where families grow up and mature, and populations or attendees of schools decrease. It's not the right action to then close that school, only to have to rebuild or reopen that school when the population increases. That's not a thoughtful approach, and that's what we're seeing. We're seeing community hubs, centres of communities, small communities, rural communities, urban, suburban—schools act as a hub for the community. If schools act as a hub to the community, shutting them down is a devastating blow to communities. It's not the appropriate approach.

That's an area where we can look at using our resources more effectively. We can use schools in a creative way. We can use them to balance other concerns, including child care, seniors' centres, community health centres. This is a creative approach, a strategy to consolidate our resources, to not waste what we've already

built, and that would reflect a more rational and thoughtful approach to the fiscal problems we have.

I had mentioned previously today George Orwell and his famous novel 1984, where the author was describing a fictitious scenario where the government created problems. It created conflicts that weren't really there. They created problems, and then they solved those very problems to appease the populace, to make people feel that the government was taking care of them. It turned out that all the conflicts were manufactured and fabricated.

What I had tried to say before is, truth is much stranger than fiction. Truth is stranger than fiction, because what we're seeing is very much of the same. We're seeing a fabricated problem, a fabricated crisis, and then we're trying to solve that. The government's trying to solve that fabricated crisis and gain credit for it: "Look, there was a problem here," which wasn't actually there. "Here's our problem: The school year's at risk; our students are at risk. We're going to save them. We're going to stop that from happening." There's absolutely no evidence, though; there's no proof that there is actually a problem. There's no proof that the schools won't open on time. There's no proof that students and teachers won't show up.

In fact, we know that this week teachers have gone to their classrooms, are setting up as usual, business as usual, that they had been talking about their classroom preparation last week. There was no talk of, "Let's organize for a strike. Let's shut down the schools." There was absolutely no talk of that. So absent any proof, absent any evidence, the government has tried to present this picture that, "We're saving the school year. We're going to make sure that classrooms will open on time; that this legislation will protect our education system." It's not doing that. If this bill doesn't pass, or was never presented, the school year would have started as usual. So I say that truth is much stranger than fiction.

What do we need to do? We need to look at sitting down at the bargaining table and negotiating with our teachers, with our support workers. We need to look at proper government oversight to ensure that our precious dollars are spent wisely. We need to look at a more rational and thoughtful approach, as opposed to cynical politics and posturing, as opposed to creating divisive policies. We need to be looking at ways to create positive change that is meaningful and that doesn't distract the populace but engages them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Being close to 6 o'clock, there is not time to get in the two-minuters.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will be recessing the House until a quarter to seven this evening. Thank you.

The House recessed from 1756 to 1845.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Piruzza, Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
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Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
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Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
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