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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 10 September 2012

Lundi 10 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 10 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 10 septembre 2012

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is the tradition, during the time for introductions, that the Speaker be allowed the privilege of introducing former members.

In the members' west gallery today we have Mr. David Tsubouchi for Markham, who served in the 36th and 37th Parliaments. Welcome.

As an editorial, I used to get under his skin from time to time.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think I opened up a can of worms there.

The member from Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the fact that you introduced David Tsubouchi, but I also wanted to let you know that he's here to see his grandson, Ethan Seaver, who is a page here at Queen's Park.

David currently—I told him I wanted to mention this if I could—is the honorary consul general of the Republic of Mongolia. He was recently been appointed to that. Give him a hand for that.

Applause.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We're also blessed this morning to have in our presence Leonard Preyra, Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage from the great province of Nova Scotia, who is sitting in the gallery over here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to welcome, in the east gallery, Freshta Raoufi, a graduate of U of T with her B.A., who is now doing her Master's at the School of Public Policy and Governance at U of T and who is assisting us in our Ajax-Pickering office.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to welcome to Queen's Park the family of Jenna Rutherford, who is the page captain today. She has brought a big family who are all here from the great riding of Oxford. In the gallery are her parents, Mark andCarolynn Rutherford; her grandparents, Ralph and Irene Baker and John and Sandra Rutherford; and Jenna's brother, a former page, Kyle Rutherford. Also in the gallery are her aunt Julie, her cousin Liam McGregor and family friend Mark Vandenberg. I want to welcome them all to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I would invite members of the Legislative Assembly in joining me in welcoming a volunteer from my riding—an excellent friend, volunteer and intern as well—Dune Rabideau.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I guess I'm the only one who got the memo: It's "Bring your MP to work" day. I'd like to introduce Joe Preston, MP, Elgin–Middlesex–London.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Joe, I can't stand for those, but we're glad you're here with us.

The member from Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce a number of people from my riding of Halton: Christopher Wu, Iris Wu, Bagshe Wu, Alexandra Wu, Nathan Wu, Katarina Wu, Marion Wu, Michelle Clarke, Jaida Riley, Thanh To, Lyndsay Tran, Wyatt Darling and Madeleine Grand. They're all here, and they're the proud family of our lead page, Jacqueline Wu, who is serving from Halton. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, seven months ago you received the Drummond report, and for seven months it has basically sat on the shelf. Mr. Drummond pointed out some major failures of your local health integration networks: becoming increasingly bureaucratic, not coordinating care and failing to hit even on their most basic deliverables.

Premier, Don Drummond recommended action on two paths. Why have you refused to go down either path? Why are you treading water when it comes to improving coordination in our health care system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. First of all, Speaker, I want to welcome their new interest in health care in a substantive way. I can't recall the last time we had a question about a hospital, access to doctors, access to nurses, wait times, childhood obesity or the incidence of smoking from that caucus, so I'm interested in learning a little bit more.

I understand they put out a white paper today. I have not had the opportunity to look at that yet. I have not reviewed that, but I have reviewed their record. They closed hospitals. They fired nurses. When it came to fighting drug companies for lower costs, they chose the wrong side on the fight for lower-cost drugs in the province of Ontario. So I'll begin, Speaker, with an honest assessment of their record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, we have asked 50, 60, 100 questions on health care when it comes to the scandal at Ornge and the fact that taxpayers were ripped off and you looked the other way. Instead of investing money in patients and quality care, money went to well-connected Liberal friends, and the Premier still refuses to go before the committee to answer basic questions.

Premier, back to the issue at hand. Don Drummond actually recommended two paths. He recommended community hubs based around hospitals, or LHINs 2.0. It's time to choose a path. You've been paralyzed in place these last seven months. You refuse to make change while too often families in our health care system have to fight like hell to get things done, to get improvement for the patients. We're on the side of those families. We want to get behind them and coordinate care. We've chosen our path: community hubs.

Premier, will you make a decision or at least back our plan to get something done for patients in our health care system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

1040

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, like our Premier, I welcome a focus on health care, because it is not something we've seen from the opposition for a very long time.

I've had a chance only to review, at a pretty high level, the recommendations that are coming from the white paper. I can assure you that I will look very closely at this to see if there are any good ideas in there—any ideas we can adopt.

What I did notice is a significant similarity with some of the initiatives that are already under way. In fact, I brought a copy—maybe I could have a page come over—of our action plan for healthy change that I released many months ago in January, which does talk about some of the initiatives, including patient-based payments so hospitals get paid when they care for patients.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, it's a shame that whenever we mention the word "Ornge," the Premier seems to want to duck those questions. I will say to him again, I do hope that you show the same backbone that your Minister of Health, your former Minister of Health and other MPPs have shown. Show the backbone; actually show up at committee and answer questions from members of all three parties.

Let me point out to the Premier what has happened with your LHINs, the local health integration networks, these last six years. The Hamilton-area LHIN failed to meet 12 of its 14 basic targets in 2010. In five key categories—your own measurables—the LHIN's performance actually deteriorated from the previous year.

We believe you can't build excellence in the health care system on a foundation of weakness. Isn't a better idea to close down your LHINs, put money into patient care and have local, community-based decisions? Premier,

will you follow our plan in our white paper on patient-centred care and put patients, not bureaucrats, at the top of the pile?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I did have a chance to listen to the press conference for a few minutes, and I was a bit surprised that the member from Whitby—Oshawa wasn't there, but I suppose that's another issue.

What I can tell you, Speaker, is that much of what the Leader of the Opposition talked about could have been taken right out of speeches I have given: putting patients at the centre of care. That is why we are driving real change that is making a real difference for patients.

Thanks to the program called Homes First, people are now leaving hospital and returning home, when previously they would never have been able to go back home, because we're building supports around those people. They can wait at home for long-term care, if that's where they're going, or they can wait at home and get healthier and stronger and stay at home. This is the work that's under way. I'm so proud of our front-line staff—

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

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to get back to the Premier on his drift in the last 10 months. His whole plan seemed to be to try to win a majority. He answers questions by saying—well, sometimes he tacks to the left, sometimes he tacks a little right, sometimes he hits the pause button. That sounds to me like somebody who doesn't have a plan, who doesn't know where he wants to go and is only concerned about his own job.

Premier, if you won't make the necessary changes, will you at least take the bold Conservative ideas to reform the health care system, get every bang for the dollar and create jobs in our economy?

Let me point this out: When you look at the LHINs and the CCACs, there are 2,000 people in bureaucratic positions, pushing paper from the inbox to the outbox every day. We want to close down those jobs and invest in nurses, personal support workers, physiotherapists and doctors. If you don't have a plan, will you take our plan to do exactly that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague. Again, I think it is both remarkable and noteworthy that there is an interest in health care coming from the official opposition, and I think it's important to begin with their record in government. They closed hospitals, they fired nurses, and when it came to our fight on behalf of Ontarians to lower drug costs, they chose the wrong side. They chose the wrong side.

I think it's also interesting, Speaker, if you get the opportunity to take a look at their white paper, that there are no specific commitments to enhancing home care hours, no specific commitments to increasing access to doctors, no reference to reducing the incidence of smoking, no

reference to tackling childhood obesity—nothing that is very, very patient-focused, which speaks in a real and meaningful way to Ontario families.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I have to offer you a little of my confusion. I'm trying to hear the question and the answer, and while the question is being put, I'm hearing noises from all sides, and when the answer is being put, I'm hearing noises from all sides. Bring it down.

Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: In his answer, Speaker, the Premier sadly makes my point for me. He seems to be stuck in time; he seems paralyzed to take action. We've seen 10 months of inaction, since the last election, when it comes to creating jobs. We've seen seven months of paralysis when it comes to implementing the Drummond report.

Do you know what the problem is? Patients are paying the price. We have women and men coming to our office in tears because they can't get their mom a spot in a long-term-care home. We have people coming to our office frustrated and at their wit's end because the home care promised for their mom, their dad, their loved one, gets cut off at the last minute. And where is it going? Thirty cents of every dollar in the CCACs is going to administration; up to 20% of beds in hospitals are for people who should be at home or in long-term care getting care; you have failed on 77% of your targets for LHINs.

Premier, that is a recipe for failure. It's time to take a different path. We have bold ideas for reform to help patients. Will you accept our plan, Premier, because you—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it looks to me like the only lesson the Leader of the Opposition learned from last Thursday's double loss was that they were to move further to the right. I don't think that's what the people of this province want when it comes to health care.

When he was in charge, he closed hospitals—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, their record speaks for itself. They closed hospitals. They fired 6,000 nurses. They had the worst surgical wait times. Hospital deficits were out of control with no plan to fix the problem. They didn't even bother to measure how long people were waiting for procedures because they, frankly, did not want to know the answer.

We've come a long way when it comes to providing better care for patients. We've got farther to go, but we've come a long, long way.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem is the government continues to simply tinker. They want to put a fresh coat of paint on an old system. They seem to think that by

wishful thinking and little tweaks that they can turn a 1970s gas guzzler into a Prius. It's not going to work. It's time for fundamental reform. It's time to actually put patients at the centre of our health care system, not bureaucrats, to put decisions closer to people who depend on that care. It's time to fight for patients and their families because they're tired of fighting for themselves because they waste so much in health care and put the money into LHINs and CCACs. Let's clear it aside. Let's invest in patient care and more services for families.

If you're not going to lead, we will: bold Conservative ideas to create jobs, to grow our economy and put patients at the centre of our health care system. If you won't move, step aside, and put these ideas into place.

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, the words might be bold, but the action certainly isn't. This plan is a pathway to nowhere.

I'll tell you what, Speaker. In our last budget, we took an important, strong and decisive step to actually enhance community care. We had to make some difficult decisions to hold hospitals to a 0% base increase, to hold the line on physician compensation, but we did that so we could invest more in home care. We're seeing the results of that now. ALC rates are dropping in our hospitals. People are getting the care they need at home. This is a good-news story. We welcome your support, but we would have also welcomed your support when you voted against increased home care in the last budget.

1050

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In last fall's election, the people of Ontario chose a minority Legislature, and since then the Premier has done almost everything he possibly can to change that outcome. He has offered appointments. He has made promises. He has even made a desperate attempt to create a crisis in our schools.

I think people have been pretty clear: Knock it off and actually get to work. Did the Premier get the message?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I don't see it that way. As a minority government, we were successful in moving ahead with our budget. We worked with the leader of the third party and her caucus. We made some significant amendments to our budget in order to secure, if not their support, their passive acquiescence.

With respect to putting our Putting Students First legislation forward, we are working with the official opposition. We made some changes there in order to accommodate some of their concerns. The fact of the matter is, we have and we will continue to find a way to move forward on behalf of Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people are worried about finding a job and a doctor, about making ends meet in very tough times, and they're tired of seeing their Premier scrambling to create a self-serving crisis.

Later today, the debate is going to conclude on a reckless and unconstitutional bill that's going to cost Ontario families hundreds of millions of dollars a few years down the road. Is the Premier still going to plow ahead with this reckless plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I welcome the question, Speaker, and the opportunity to engage in this debate, but I really would encourage my honourable colleague, if not to read the actual decisions offered by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Ontario Court of Appeal, at least read some of the summations and some of the interpretations offered by objective, independent third parties in this matter.

We are being very careful in terms of respecting the law. We are being determined in our effort to collectively bargain as much as we can. But as we said in the context of our budget several months ago, if we cannot obtain a result through collective bargaining that achieves our fiscal results, then we will not hesitate to act, because we believe that's in the public interest.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what people want is leadership that delivers for them, and when they look at this government, they see a gang that's more interested in power for themselves. They spent millions and millions of dollars cancelling private power plants after they themselves signed the deal. They're ready to spend countless and countless millions more on a reckless bill that's headed for the courts after they themselves warned that it was simplistic and unconstitutional.

Is the Premier ready to stop the cynical politics and start tackling the challenges that people actually sent him here to deal with?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to draw my honourable colleague's attention to a \$15-billion deficit. On behalf of Ontarians—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. As a reminder to all, I have already started to mention individuals by riding. I will continue that trend.

Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not my turn anymore. It's the Premier's turn.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank you, Speaker.

It's good to know there remains a weak—but there's a pulse there, nonetheless, in the official opposition. I'm glad to hear that they're awake for this.

Again to return to my honourable colleague, the leader of the NDP, there is this matter of a significant deficit, and I think she owes it to Ontarians to specifically tell us what her plan is to eliminate that deficit, and understanding that more than one half of the money we spend in provincial government goes into compensation to our

public sector partners. We can't afford to give our partners a wage hike at this point in time. On this matter, she and I differ, but I would argue she owes many more specifics to Ontarians on this subject.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. One of the main challenges that people sent us here to address is the lack of good jobs in this province. On Friday, we learned that Ontario lost another 25,000 jobs last month. Most of those jobs were full-time, Speaker. And our unemployment rate continues to sit above the national average.

Is the Premier ready to try some different ideas, some new ideas, to get people back to work, or is he going to be doing the same old things using the same old solutions that simply have not been working for Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is indeed a very important issue and I'm glad my honourable colleague has brought this to the fore here today and now. I think it's important to maintain some perspective. In the US, they have recovered 45% of their jobs lost. In the UK, they have recovered 71% of their jobs lost. But here in Ontario, we've recovered 130% of our jobs lost.

In June, our economy created about 20,000 jobs. In July, it created about 10,000 jobs. August was not a good month; I acknowledge that. But the trend line is positive, and since the recession, Ontario has created 325,000 new jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fact is, Speaker, there are still hundreds of thousands of people out of work in this province. The Premier actually made a promise, and he may recall it. He made a promise that corporate tax cuts were going to create all kinds of jobs, but instead, that's not happening. The money is being used by the corporations to do things like pay their CEOs more. They're sitting on hoards and hoards of cash that the Liberals gave them in corporate tax cuts.

The Bank of Canada governor, Mark Carney, has said that Canadian companies are sitting on dead money, and that dead money is worth about \$526 billion. We can complain about this, Speaker, or we can actually do a better job of creating jobs. Does the Premier agree that it's time to look at new ways to work with businesses to create jobs for the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's noteworthy that we hear from the official opposition and how they like to engage in union-bashing. Now we hear from the leader of the NDP and how she likes to engage in business-bashing.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We think we have a responsibility to work with business and to work with labour.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's the foundation of growth and prosperity, this old-fashioned idea of understanding we're all in this together.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: And the best way for us to continue to move forward is by working together. I'll remind my honourable colleague, there's something that she can do—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time for the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —in order to help us create more jobs. We have a specific bill. It's the healthy home renovation tax credit, Speaker. It will support \$800 million in home renovation activity on an annual basis and create 10,500 new jobs every year. That's a bill before this House right now. If she's interested in jobs, she can support our bill.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what I'm bashing is a government that recklessly cuts corporate taxes year after year after year without creating any jobs for people in this province. Now, we put forward one practical idea that actually could make a big difference. Instead of handing out tax giveaways to companies, even when they fire people, let's reward the companies that are actually prepared to create jobs. A job creation tax credit is a very simple and effective way to reward the companies that are ready to put people to work in this province.

Later today, the Premier is going to be meeting with the Jobs and Prosperity Council. Will he ensure that the job creation tax credit is actually on the agenda? Is he ready to move forward with an effective plan to actually create jobs for the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll remind my honourable colleague that the proposal put forward by her party in this matter, the job creator tax credit, is something that remains the subject of active consideration by the Jobs and Prosperity Council, and she's aware of that.

But I also want to remind her of her support for our budget, which provides for an investment in infrastructure of \$35 billion over three years. It creates over 100,000 jobs every year. If you take a look around this province today, we are building and renewing schools and hospitals, roads and bridges and public transit, creating thousands of jobs across the province.

Today, we made an announcement with respect to the Pan Am Games. We're going to be building the Markham Pan Am sports centre and the University of Toronto field hockey centre. We're expanding the Etobicoke Olympium, all with a view to creating thousands and thousands of jobs for Ontario.

1100

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Health. Under the McGuinty Liberals, patients and taxpayers have seen Ontario's health care bureaucracy balloon over a long, dark decade of Liberal mismanagement. Patients and taxpayers are paying the price for a poorly built, ill-conceived system of layers upon layers of office workers that do nothing to improve access for patients.

The OECD says that if Canada's health system was as efficient as some of the best-performing European systems, Canadians could save as much as 2.5% of the GDP on our health care. In Ontario alone that amounts to \$13.4 billion which could be directed to front-line patient care. Don't take my word for it, Minister; that number was confirmed by Don Drummond, your very own hand-picked economist whose report the Liberals have ignored.

Minister, rather than wasting more money on eHealth, Ornge scandals and layers of bureaucracy, why don't you accept our new bold vision, scrap the health care bureaucracy—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. A reminder for all members: When I stand, you sit.

Minister of Health?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, it's great to have a new health critic. I'm not quite sure what happened to the old one, but it's great to have a new one.

What I can tell you is that I have not yet had a chance to look in depth at the PC proposal. If, in fact, there are some nuggets of good ideas in there, we will, of course, take them very seriously. What I can tell you, though, is that when that party was in power—the party that actually created CCACs, lest we forget, Speaker—they also saw runaway hospital deficits. Those deficits are now under control. In fact, all of our hospitals across this province, thanks to the good work of the LHINs, are either in balance or are on a path to get to balance, Speaker. That's extraordinary progress.

We want every possible dollar to go to front-line care. That's why we're taking the steps that we are.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Speaker, my question is back to the health minister. We need a new health minister. You can quote your facts all you like till you're red in the face; the bottom line is that you know, the Premier knows and Ontarians know that LHINs haven't improved health system performance in Ontario at all. You want a statistic? You're proud of the LHINs? You missed 77% of your government's own health care targets. You wouldn't get an F, you'd get a T for "terrible."

Minister, you've failed. You've failed from Ornge to eHealth part 2 to a 77% key-performance-indicator failure. Under your watch, provincial wait times, emergency

hospital care, long-term care and home care remain stagnant or worse under your LHINs.

Do us all a favour: Admit you cannot manage your ministry, admit you need a new direction, take our ideas in our new white paper, implement them, and for once put patients ahead of your bureaucracy and your needs.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. This is my last warning for individuals who are heckling while the question is being asked from the same side—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We're just cheering, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —as well as any comments being made while I'm speaking. I would ask that you bring this down. I continue to mention individuals by riding. I will now move to the warning stage, and after that, you're out.

Minister?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All that noise is not necessary.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I just want to remind the member opposite that an increase in volume does not compensate for a deficit in ideas. However, Speaker, I think what matters to the patients in this province is, are they getting better care now than they were when we took office in 2003? Well, 2.1 million more Ontarians now have a family doctor than when we took office. We've opened up nurse-practitioner-led clinics, a model that health ministers from across the country are watching very, very closely. We've gone from the lowest adoption of electronic medical records to the best in the country. Our wait times were the worst in the country, and now they are the shortest in the country.

We've made tremendous progress and we are accelerating that progress by investing more in home care, more in community care and driving the best value for every dollar that we spend.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, the Erie St. Clair Community Care Access Centre is facing a \$10-million deficit and is considering deep cuts to service. The minister proposed a 4% increase to the community care sector in the last budget, but that line has gone silent since then. More than six months into the fiscal year, this CCAC is trying to provide services without knowing how much money they're working with. It's completely outrageous. Can the minister tell the CCAC whether the promised 4% increase is still coming?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Make no mistake about it: Our priority as a government in our health care system is to invest more in community care, more in home care. While each LHIN is allocating strategically where that funding will go, I can assure you that funding for com-

munity care is up by 60%. More people are getting the home care they need because our system benefits—the more people who are getting home care instead of care in hospital, the happier they are and the better off the system is. We are determined to continue to invest more in home and community care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The Erie St. Clair CCAC is warning that cuts to the community sector will not only impact its clients but will also have a serious effect on local hospitals. The CCAC is doing all that they can to not have an acute impact on the community, but they can only do so much. If the minister's promise to strengthen the community sector is no longer on the table, will she at least have the decency to come clean and admit that her government's priorities have changed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our priority to invest more in community is stronger than it has ever been before because we're seeing demonstrated results from those investments. I'm happy that the third party supports this move, this rebalancing of our health care expenditure. I sure do wish the opposition party did the same. I sure do wish that rather than speak loudly about things that we're not doing right, they would actually have supported our budget that begins a very important transformation of our health care system. When people need to be in hospital that's where they should be. But if they don't need to be in hospital, let's move the resources to give them the care they need where they want to be, in their own home.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As the population continues to age, our health care system is dealing with a demographic challenge as well as a fiscal one. Our hospitals, now more than ever, are dealing with these issues. Specifically, there are many individuals in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt who are staying in hospital beds who ought not to be there. Other health care settings, like home care and long-term care, are exactly what they need.

Focusing on home care and long-term care has many benefits. It reduces ER wait times, frees up hospital beds, and also provides the care to people they need closer to home. Through you, Speaker, to the minister, what are hospitals doing to address this challenge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for that very thoughtful and important question. This is a challenge that I know hospitals are dealing with, but they cannot solve this problem alone. It must be done in partnership with others in the health care sector, particularly the community and home care sectors. Hospitals cannot do it alone.

Our action plan lays out a pathway where we can work in partnership—government, hospitals, the entire health care system—to get people the care they need. Let me give you an example of where it's working. London Health Sciences Centre in my community has been working with the CCAC and community partners to free up hospital beds and make sure that patients get the care they need at home whenever possible. This is where Home First comes in. Home First focuses on discharging elderly patients to their own homes after an acute episode in hospital, rather than assuming long-term care is the only option. We've seen a reduction of 66% in the percentage of ALC patients waiting for long-term care—in the month of August, zero patients in hospital waiting for long-term care—

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

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Ms. Soo Wong: These are very positive steps which are helping us to deal with the demographic challenges we face. We need all the health care partners working together to do what's right for our patients.

We know that in order to provide the type of care that is right for each community, we need to focus on local decision-making power. At the same time, there are significant financial challenges that our health care providers at all levels continue to struggle with. Despite the provincial fiscal reality, we must ensure that Ontarians have access to the health care services they need.

Speaker, these are the questions that need to be asked, and in the absence of questions from the opposition, I would like to ask, through you to the minister, how will the government provide care to Ontarians while recognizing the fiscal reality?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the member is very correct. This is a challenge that can be addressed only through a very ambitious plan, and that is why we released our action plan in January.

Part of our action plan is our seniors' care strategy. Dr. Samir Sinha is our expert lead. He's travelling the province listening to front-line providers, listening to caregivers and listening to seniors and developing a plan which he will have for me this fall to ensure that people, particularly our seniors, get the right care at the right place in the right time.

That is right for them, Speaker, but it's also right for the system. Staying in a hospital can cost up to \$1,000 a day. Long-term care is \$150 a day. Home care is a fraction of that. So by providing people the right care at home, we're not only doing what they want, which is to be in their own home, but it's also the right thing to do for our system.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier. The McGuinty government has a lot of sins to account for, not the least of which are record deficits, staggering debt, out-of-control spending on government salaries and

your abhorrent record on job creation. You've done nothing to get Ontario moving in the right direction. You procrastinated on the budget, then watered it down. Then you held your breath, hoping for the by-elections to hand you a majority.

Now that the dust has settled, are you waiting for another downgrade from Moody's and S&P before you get your act together? And stop playing "Fun with figures" in your answer. How long do people have to wait? Explain yourself, Premier: Tell Ontarians what you're waiting for.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we've implemented a budget plan that is bringing Ontario back to balance. Like jurisdictions across this country and around the western world, we were hit hard by the downturn of 2008-09. Unlike a number of those jurisdictions the Premier cited earlier, more jobs have been created since the downturn than existed before the downturn. That's better than the US, better than the UK. Just this morning, RBC is out saying that Ontario's growth will once again lead Canada this year, which I think is important.

I'll have more to say at public accounts in the very near future about our achievements to date, but we are continuing to bring down the deficit while we protect the important investments we've made in education and health, which are essential to a better economic future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaker, the truth is that this Premier, this finance minister and this government are failing Ontario. You want to stay the course, is what you say. But Minister, you're the first mate aboard the Titanic. You've had nine years to get it together. You've quite frankly flopped.

The latest job numbers show that you're not just preventing the province from moving forward; you're actually dragging it down. Your excuses are all out the window at this point. The by-elections are done. The teachers' legislation is done. It's clear that you still do not have a plan.

Since you haven't got any ideas on how to get Ontario out of the hole your government has dug, why don't you listen to someone who does? Why are you not listening to us?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I do listen to a number of people. By the way, we are quite willing to take good ideas from either of the opposition parties, and we've done that. We'll continue to do that.

Today, RBC is out saying, "Still, at a time when we expect the pace of national growth to slow this year relative to last year, the ... acceleration of provincial economic activity is encouraging."

I'll remind him of what the National Bank had to say: "Business spending for machinery and equipment will continue to grow over the forecast horizon, which is worth mentioning after growth rates of 15% in 2010 and close to 20% in 2011"

There's no doubt that too many Ontarians are still looking for jobs. That's why we have our healthy homes tax credit, which he and his party have blocked—10,500 jobs. Please, let that pass. It's part of our plan, which is getting us back to balance as we protect the enormous gains we've made in education and health care, which are essential for a bright and growing economic future for all—

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Minister of Consumer Services. Mr. Speaker, in May I introduced Bill 98 to stop large companies from charging unfair international money transfer fees. Now we have learned that the two biggest money transfer companies operating in Canada, MoneyGram and Western Union, have registered to lobby both the Ministry of Consumer Services and the Ministry of Finance on this bill.

Has the minister met with these advocates for these powerful companies, and what are they saying to her?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member for the question. Certainly, consumer protection is an important issue for our government, and we are reviewing the bill that the member has put forward. As always, we're reviewing this bill with a view to improving consumer protection in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note as well that the federal government has a role to play in protecting consumers with regard to federally regulated financial services.

The ministry continues to analyze the bill, and we continue to look at options to improve consumer protection for Ontario consumers with regard to remittance fees. This is an issue which certainly impacts a great number of people in the province of Ontario, including myself and many of us in this Legislature—I would no doubt think that—and it's an issue that also impacts many people who are new Canadians. So this is an issue which we find very important to us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again to the Minister of Consumer Services: When Ontarians send their hard-earned money to relatives overseas, multinational companies should not be allowed to siphon off as much as they please. Powerful US-based companies are now fighting against a bill that would protect Ontarians.

Ontarians need to know, will the minister take action to protect Ontarians from predatory money transfer companies, or will she capitulate to the high-paid lobbyists for these US companies?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like the member opposite to know that this is an issue on which we continue to listen to all the interested parties, all the interested stakeholders, and certainly our consumers in the province of Ontario.

This issue, as I said, is a very complicated issue. There are many complicated factors that require a very thor-

ough review of the bill. Because of the complex nature of this issue, we continue to review this bill carefully, the proposed legislation that has been put forward by the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to look at other ways to protect consumers in the province of Ontario, which is an issue which is very important to me and to our government.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, my question this morning is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, I've toured many farms in Peterborough county and other areas of Ontario that are experiencing dry, hot weather over this growing season, which has impacted this year's corn crop. The weather has also had a great impact on the growth and availability of forages for the feeding of livestock.

While some of the corn was affected by the dry weather, the yield may have been impacted to such an extent that farmers are looking to harvest the damaged corn as silage to feed their own livestock or to sell as forage to livestock producers.

The coverage these producers have under the government's Production Insurance program will impact this decision. Can the minister please inform this House of how Agricorp, which administers the Production Insurance program, is assisting farmers with options for harvesting damaged or stressed corn to be used as silage?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I thank the member from Peterborough for the question. All summer I've been hearing from farmers about the impact weather has had on them and their operations. I want to emphasize that harvesting decisions are, of course, left to the producers.

Farmers with production insurance who are interested in harvesting damaged corn as silage should contact Agricorp to file a damage report. Once filed, an inspector will be out within 48 hours to do an assessment. Once that assessment is done and the damage is anticipated, arrangements can be made to facilitate the request of the farmers.

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OMAFRA also has a number of other resources as relates to other crops. The best advice is to contact Agricorp directly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister, for that superb answer. I think farmers in my riding will be pleased to know that OMAFRA and Agricorp are working to ensure that they have timely access to information that they need to make sound business decisions about their crops. These farmers and farmers right across Ontario take the risk of uncontrollable weather every day. It's a tough job and they do it very well.

I'm hearing from farmers in Peterborough county and from all over the province about their concerns over the effects of the hot, dry conditions we've experienced over the summer. Minister—through you again, Mr. Speak-

er—what other actions will your ministry be taking to assist farmers with the challenging weather?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Speaker, it is a tough profession, and there have been some real challenges this summer. The member may well remember that earlier this summer our government asked the federal government to work with us to initiate an AgriRecovery file as a result of the dry weather. While the AgriRecovery assessment is ongoing, interim payments under both Agri-Stability and production insurance are available to producers who are experiencing distress.

We are pleased—I want to repeat “pleased”—that the federal government has accelerated tax relief for livestock producers through the identification of the prescribed drought regions as we requested in early August. This is certainly going to help in future tax years, and it’s going to put money into the pockets of the producers who need it now.

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

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. Last week, Ontario’s job numbers were released. What was revealed by these numbers is that under your leadership, Premier, Ontario is still on the wrong path, a path that only leads to more debt and more unemployment. In August, 33,200 jobs were added to the public sector while 57,000 people lost work in the private and self-employed sector.

Premier, these numbers don’t lie. You would think that after being in government for nine years, you would have figured out how to create an atmosphere for jobs to be created in the province of Ontario. Instead, you create a new committee to tell you how to create jobs and new government programs to try and spend your way to prosperity. It is clear that the only way this Premier creates jobs is by making government bigger.

Premier, can you tell the people of Ontario why 300,000 more people have been hired in the public sector since you have been elected and why you, sir, are so determined to bankrupt the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, there comes a time when the opposition has to move away from slamming those who are working so hard to build our economy and recognize the progress that’s being made.

The fact of the matter is—and it is a fact—we’ve created 325,000 net new jobs since the recession. The fact of the matter is, we’re up at around 130% in job creation compared to 45% in the US and 71% in the UK. No matter how you slice that, that’s job growth. Our economy is growing.

Just look at what the finance minister shared with us earlier: Royal Bank disagrees with you. RBC predicts that the provincial economy will grow by 2.2% next year. That’s higher than the national average.

We’re on the right track. There’s more work to be done, but rather than slamming those working so hard to build the economy, he should start trying to work in partnership with them, like we are, to create jobs and create a stronger economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: Premier, I’ve always been taught to leave things better off than when you found it. I look at my nieces and I look at my nephew and younger Ontarians and believe it’s our duty to make things better for the next generation. You got this province when it was prosperous, Premier, and now you’re leaving it a disaster.

Ontario has the highest debt in history and the highest unemployment in the country. It’s a choice between bankruptcy and prosperity. Tim Hudak and the PC caucus aren’t going to allow you to bankrupt this province. We’re going to fight for jobs, fight for balanced budgets and fight for the next generation.

Premier, why are you standing idly by, watching Ontario fall behind? Why are you growing the public sector and the size of government as the private sector loses thousands and thousands of jobs?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, it’s time that the opposition started dealing with the facts, and the facts are these: The current size of the OPS is 14% below 1995 levels. It’s lower than it was back then. You ought to start dealing with the facts: 325,000 jobs of net growth is growth. It’s a sign of a growing economy.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll tell you what they could have done. If the opposition really cared about jobs in this province, they should have supported our southwest Ontario development fund in the member’s very own riding. They should have supported our eastern Ontario development fund; they didn’t. Worse than that, they deliberately delayed it. Worse than that now, their members are writing intimidating letters to local councils.

So I say to the Leader of the Opposition, call off your members. Stop that intimidating letter-writing campaign that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Brad Duguid: —tell Trent Hills council that you respect their view, their voice—

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: —and that they have a right to support those programs that are creating jobs—

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

CASINOS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Talks are currently under way between the city of Hamilton and OLG officials regarding a casino in Hamilton. But instead of having an open and public conversa-

tion, talks have been taking place behind closed doors. That's not how Hamiltonians like to have things done. Will this government direct OLG officials to discontinue any further meetings with city officials until a referendum has been held and the voices of the people of Hamilton have actually been heard?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The OLG has set up a system of reviewing the various casinos throughout the province and venues for gaming opportunities. There are a number of zones in the province. Nothing will proceed in an area, in a municipality, in a region where it is not welcome.

I look forward to those discussions continuing on. I know that we all look forward to the input of the people of the region into these important decisions as we move forward to make OLG a stronger company with safer and better returns to the taxpayers of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the minister knows very well that the timelines have been put in place, such that the OLG is now putting the squeeze on communities within those zones to make very, very speedy decisions.

A transparent process, including a city-wide referendum, is the best way forward, and it's the very least that the people of Hamilton deserve. The impact of a casino on traffic, noise, other local businesses, must be taken into account, and local residents must be contacted and consulted. Will this government order OLG to stop their discussions with Hamilton officials until after the people of Hamilton have had their say?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I have great confidence in local processes and local decision-making, particularly in that great city of Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, it was that leader and her party that brought casino gambling to Ontario. I recall my community was the first host of a casino. They did not require a referendum of our people in Windsor. The local council of the day put it on the ballot. I was a member of that council. It was a sounding board. I'd invite you to look at that, Mr. Speaker.

I have great faith in our local municipalities to make the right choices for the people in their communities, and I'm confident that the people of Hamilton and their elected officials locally will make the right choice for their community.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. Phil McNeely: Ma question est pour la ministre de l'Éducation. Madame la Ministre, une éducation de qualité est très importante pour mes commettants d'Ottawa-Orléans. Ils sont heureux de voir que notre gouvernement donne la priorité aux élèves et protège la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants à temps plein.

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Comme vous le savez bien, certaines écoles francophones avaient, elles, déjà la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants à temps plein depuis de nombreuses années. Je suis fier de voir notre communauté francophone être innovatrice de la sorte.

Madame la Ministre, pouvez-vous nous en dire plus sur les investissements de notre gouvernement dans l'éducation en français?

L'hon. Laurel C. Broten: Merci au député d'Ottawa-Orléans pour sa question. Quel plaisir de pouvoir répondre en français aujourd'hui.

En effet, ce sont les écoles francophones de l'Ontario qui, depuis longtemps déjà, ont reconnu tous les avantages de la maternelle et du jardin d'enfants à temps plein, et grâce à leurs idées innovatrices, on a appris beaucoup et on a mis en place un programme d'apprentissage, PAJO. Cet automne, 120 000 enfants à travers l'Ontario seront inscrits à la maternelle et au jardin d'enfants à temps plein.

Notre système scolaire français nous tient à coeur, et sous notre gouvernement McGuinty, nous avons augmenté le financement destiné à l'éducation francophone de près de 80 %, avec un financement de 1,3 million de dollars cette année. Je suis très contente de pouvoir demander le support et démontrer le support de notre gouvernement envers l'éducation en français.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci. Supplémentaire.

M. Phil McNeely: Merci, madame la Ministre. Je suis très fier de savoir que notre gouvernement soutient les francophones, et surtout du fait que le jardin d'enfants et la maternelle à temps plein est une innovation de nos écoles francophones.

J'aimerais poser ma question supplémentaire à la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Madame la Ministre, je sais que vous êtes très impliquée dans notre communauté franco-ontarienne. Pouvez-vous voir sur le terrain des résultats concrets de tous nos investissements en éducation dans notre communauté?

L'hon. Laurel C. Broten: À la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier le député d'Ottawa-Orléans, qui est un fier défenseur des droits des francophones.

Oui, sur le champ, on voit des résultats. Nous savons, entre autres, que nos jeunes étudiants au niveau élémentaire, surtout en troisième et sixième année, surpassent les normes provinciales en mathématiques, lecture et écriture. Ça se traduit au niveau universitaire, puisque les Franco-Ontariens ont un taux de graduation plus élevé que le reste de la province, qui surpasse même nos confrères québécois. Vous savez, 25 % de la population francophone en Ontario a moins de 25 ans. Pour nous, cela veut dire que pour renforcer le sens identitaire de notre communauté, l'éducation est, et doit demeurer, une priorité. Nous sommes fiers de nos investissements et, bien sûr, du programme de la maternelle et du jardin d'enfants à plein temps.

Et je dois vous dire aussi qu'il y a une autre initiative. C'est Petits pas à trois dans ma circonscription, où les enfants de trois ans commencent l'école. Alors, on va voir les résultats.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Minister of Education: Last week at committee, all opposition amendments to protect management rights for school boards and principals were defeated. As a result, school boards throughout Ontario are concerned that directives not contained within Bill 115 but within the OECTA MOU will be forced upon them.

Minister, I'm asking you today to clarify, is it your intention to force all school boards, including those that did not sign the OECTA MOU in the Catholic, French and public systems, to adhere to this memorandum that usurps their authority as democratically elected entities?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As the member opposite would know, at the time of introduction of this piece of legislation, of Putting Students First, we brought forward a piece of legislation in draft form and then we brought an amendment to recognize the issues that had been raised by the opposition.

That being said, we've been clear and consistent since the beginning of this process. On August 10, I wrote to trustees across the province to indicate clearly that under the Education Act, which is obviously the governing act for education, we would be putting forward a regulation to speak to the issues of fair and transparent hiring practices that do need to happen across the province, and that under the Education Act we would be releasing a PPM document that had—had conversations last fall, and that we would look to ensure that diagnostic testing is also clear and consistent under the authorities under the Education Act. Obviously, Putting Students First speaks to that within one context, but we will also look to ensure that we have processes right across the entire province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, this “My way or the highway” routine has got to stop. It's really unbecoming of them in a minority government. I need to remind the minister: On two occasions in this last 12 months, Ontario voters rejected giving that government a majority to do whatever they wanted to everyone in this province.

I'm going to ask again, given that only one Catholic board signed on to the MOU, because you took them over, and only four more Catholic boards signed on because they only endorsed it—God knows what they received, Speaker—we want to know from the Minister of Education, is she prepared to clarify today whether or not the boards that did not sign on to that MOU are bound to that OECTA agreement, yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Education?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Mr. Speaker, the one issue that is absolutely clear in this Legislature is that it is we, on this side of the House, who stand for fair and transparent hiring practices. Every single Ontarian knows a young teacher who wants nothing more than to stand in front of a classroom, and there are boards across this province that do not even post available jobs.

So on this side of the House, we support fairness and open and transparent hiring practices. We believe in that initiative, Speaker, and we will make sure that that takes place right across the province. It should not be who you know that helps you get a job to teach our kids; it should be what you know. That's what we believe in on this side of the House.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour la ministre de l'Éducation. Les parents qui veulent admettre un de leurs enfants dans un programme d'immersion font face à des barrières. J'aimerais demander à M^{me} la Ministre pourquoi une femme d'Ottawa, M^{me} Mikeala Read, est incapable d'admettre sa petite fille dans un programme d'immersion en première année parce qu'elle n'a pas été capable de l'admettre dans un programme de garderie dans cette école. La fille de M^{me} Read est en première année. Pourquoi est-ce qu'en première année, le gouvernement ne s'assure pas que tous les enfants puissent aller à l'école d'immersion s'ils le désirent?

L'hon. Laurel C. Broten: Comme j'ai eu la chance de dire auparavant, monsieur le Président, on est très fier des investissements qu'on a mis dans le domaine de l'éducation en français, où les investissements ont eu une augmentation d'à peu près 80 %.

Les détails de la question que vous me demandez, je ne les ai pas. Alors, j'aurais l'opportunité peut-être d'avoir plus de détails.

Mais ce que je veux dire c'est que les décisions locales, ce sont des décisions des conseils dans la région d'Ottawa. Alors, en première place, la mère dont la membre parle devrait demander au conseil scolaire dans sa région pour avoir de l'aide. Mais s'il y a une façon où on peut faire quelque chose de la part de la province—ce que je ne pense pas qu'on va pouvoir faire—je vais te demander les détails, et on va pouvoir en discuter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I was on a walk outside this afternoon, in front of Queen's Park on a beautiful day, and I ran into a new friend: Henning Askholm, who's here from Frederikssund, Denmark. He's here with a delegation of trade unionists, members from 3F, to study our labour system and immigration issues in Ontario, and I'm pleased to welcome him to the Ontario Legislature today.

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

Further introductions? The member from Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, you still remember. Thank you.

It's my pleasure to introduce today, from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Harvey Bischof, Earl Burt, Scott Marshall, Cindy Dubu  and Leslie Wolfe. Welcome.

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

With the indulgence of the House, it is my intention to introduce our new crop of interns, who have not arrived as of yet. So I will reserve that when they do arrive, if I can have an agreement. Thank you. I appreciate it.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: I would like to introduce—I don't think he's here yet—Greg Weiler, the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario housed in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. He will be here later to, I'm sure, take in the proceedings, and I'll have an opportunity to meet with him then. So I'd like to welcome Greg, if he's not already here, to the Ontario Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Last Friday, a large group of local horse owners, breeders, trainers and other employees gathered in my riding to voice their concerns about the imminent destruction of the entire horse industry in this province. Without exception, they talked about the loss of income they and their colleagues have already suffered, and they predicted even more bleak days ahead for the 60,000 employees in that important agricultural industry.

The government is giving up \$1.1 billion in revenue from the slots-at-racetracks partnership, and in its place they have proposed a very dicey arrangement for bingo halls and for possible casinos.

Through months of anxiety, frustration and heartache, the Premier has refused to meet with representatives of the horse industry. The revenue at the fall thoroughbred sales, last week, was down 36% from the same sale last year, and the price drop at the standardbred sales is expected to be much greater.

My riding has seen horse breeders dispose of their entire herds and sell their farms. We've seen other farms kill off all their horses because they see no future for yearlings and no future in the business for their own children.

What has rural Ontario ever done to you, Mr. Premier, to deserve such unbridled hatred and contempt, that you would actually kill 60,000 jobs and 13,000 horses just to be able to say you cancelled the program that was set up by the last PC government?

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: We've been getting complaints in our offices from people like Richard Macdonald from

Temiskaming Shores, who have written to the Premier regarding his decision to break his promise and try to privatize the ONTC and shut down our passenger train service. Since they have not gotten any replies, quite a few people are wondering if he even gets to see the letters that they are taking the time to write, or if he even cares.

I have a postcard that many northerners have sent to the Premier and I would like to take this opportunity to read it into the record.

“Mr. Premier,

“Having a wonderful time in northeastern Ontario; wish you were here. I am completely dumbfounded at your government's decision to cancel the Northlander train on September 28, 2012. Northern Ontario has some of the harshest weather in Canada, and with single-lane highways that are closed on a weekly basis either for accidents or weather conditions, we require alternate transportation, and the Northlander has served us well. Would you please reverse the decision made by the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and continue the Northlander train service? The ONTC is a vital and essential service that has become the economic engine to create and sustain economic growth in northern Ontario.

“Mr. Premier, in 2003, you pledged not to sell the ONTC. Please honour your pledge. Thank you, an Ontario taxpayer.”

This one is signed by Alicia Nelson from Cochrane. I would like to give this and the hundreds of other cards I have to a page to give to the Premier to ensure that these people receive a reply.

YORK SUBWAY EXTENSION

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I'm pleased to stand today and discuss the Toronto-York Spadina subway extension, a project that will greatly benefit my riding of York Centre and commuters across the GTA.

Since 2006, our government has invested \$870 million to support the extension of the Spadina subway line from Downsview Station to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre at Highway 7 in York region. The project is expected to create 20,000 jobs and, upon completion, is expected to eliminate 30 million polluting car trips each year, boosting our economy, easing traffic congestion and improving air quality.

Construction is well under way. All four tunnel boring machines are in the ground, digging both the southern and northern tunnels. I am pleased to say that all six station contracts have been awarded and station construction is also under way.

This landmark initiative will help extend subway service for the first time beyond the regional boundaries in the 416 to the 905 region, making public transit more convenient for everyone in the GTA.

This is just one more example of the McGuinty government's record investments in public transit in the GTA, including \$8.4 billion for four Toronto LRT lines

and the air-rail link service between Canada's busiest transportation hubs, Union Station and Pearson airport. In fact, since 2003 our government has invested more than \$13.4 billion in public transit across the province of Ontario.

VERNON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: In 1912, 11 women from the village of Vernon and the surrounding area rode horse and buggy or walked to the Orange Hall to organize the Vernon chapter of the Women's Institute.

One hundred years ago, Adelaide Hoodless and Erland Lee were determined to make life better in our community. While the century after them would bring great change, over the last 100 years, that noble goal has remained and it lives on with the Vernon Women's Institute members of today.

Over the years, the members of the Vernon Women's Institute gave generously of their "time, talent and money," as Mrs. Rolla Campbell said in their 1962 meeting. They supported both World Wars and the Great Depression. In later years, the women's institute brought concrete sidewalks to the village; established a library; ensured safer streets by purchasing lighting; they helped mark the Springhill Cemetery with signs; and they built a post office in the village. Over all this time, they've even sponsored an underprivileged child in the Far East.

Today, over 100 years later, the Vernon Women's Institute boasts 20 members who support local agricultural fairs, the 4-H, our hospital in Winchester and our care centre in Osgoode.

These are great women doing great things, Speaker, and on behalf of the Ontario Legislature I want to thank them and wish them a happy 100th.

CITY OF WINDSOR

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I rise today to share some news with my colleagues in this House which was released recently by Reader's Digest.

As the proud member of provincial Parliament for the riding of Windsor West, I was delighted to hear that Reader's Digest has named my hometown of Windsor the fifth-best city in Canada to raise a family.

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As someone who was born and raised in Windsor and who has been blessed to have the opportunity to raise a family of her own, I couldn't agree more with this very humbling article. Speaker, if I may, I know my friends here and everyone from our area can attest to this as well.

As Reader's Digest points out, for day-to-day parenting, it's the little things that count. With that in mind, they ranked Canada's provincial capitals and cities with a population of over 80,000 people into 11 categories. They looked at characteristics such as median age, day-care, cost of food, parenting groups, and park space—those elements of a community that make it friendly, welcoming and great for families. Windsor was ranked number five out of 42.

Speaker, I'm so proud that Reader's Digest has recognized what I have known for a long time, and that is that Windsor is a great place to be and a great place for families. I'm so proud to see my hometown of Windsor receive this great recognition, which it truly deserves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements. The member for Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel"—

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's not time for petitions.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock and reset. We'll move to statements. The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

WELLESLEY FALL FAIR

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, tomorrow marks the 159th anniversary of the Wellesley fall fair in Kitchener–Conestoga. This community event brings together families and friends to celebrate our local farmers and learn about the history of agriculture in Ontario.

This year's theme is Sow, Grow, Raise and Show. The festivities will kick off with the fair ambassador competition, which has attracted dedicated contestants who have been involved in the fair for most of their lives. I'm proud to see how great the finalists are this year, in fact. All the competitors are active youth in the community, and all show a great passion for learning in order to serve people better.

The best of luck goes out to Hayden Lorentz, 19, of St. Clements; Katherine Baer, 20, from Wellesley; Lianna Charlene Barnard, 17, of Wellesley; and Lisa Guenther, 17, also from Wellesley. Some of Kitchener–Conestoga's rising local talent will take the stage at this year's Wellesley ABC Idol semifinals. Again, I wish all these competitors the very best and look forward to an amazing show.

If you're coming, be sure to stop by my favourite event, the annual chocolate cake and pie auction.

It wouldn't be fall without community fairs like these. In fact it takes over 125 volunteers to put on a fair like this. So I'd like to thank all those dedicated folks who take the time out of their busy schedules to keep this event running with great success over the past 159 years. I look forward to seeing you at the fair.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It was interesting: About a week ago, the government made this wonderful announcement, they thought, in northern Ontario about the Northern Policy Institute—not that anybody in northern Ontario is opposed to the idea of somebody talking about northern issues. God, you know that we are trying to do that at infinitum, all of us in northern Ontario with this government.

But it beckons a couple of questions. The government is going to take \$5 million from the northern heritage fund in order to fund the northern institute for the first year. So there's \$5 million that we don't have for economic development somewhere in northern Ontario. Number two, in the second year, they've got to find the money from the private sector. Well, I wish you well. I hope that they're successful in doing that, but it seems to me that it's going to be quite possibly difficult to achieve.

The other thing is that northerners know what they want. Minister, the northerners don't want to be consulted ad infinitum. We want you to stop privatizing the Ontario Northland. Keep the trains running. We want you to deal with electricity prices so people like Xstrata don't shut down the refinery and smelter and move off to Quebec. We need you to deal with the issues that face northern Ontario.

The ministers of the crown and the opposition have heard from the mayors. They've heard from the councillors. They've heard from the chambers of commerce. They're saying, "Stop the talk and do the walk and do the things that we've got to get done so northern Ontario can be respected when it comes to this particular government."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Oakville.

BRANTFORD RED SOX

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I think you will be interested in this one.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am, but: Order.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It was once said that trying to sneak a pitch past Hank Aaron was like trying to sneak the sunrise past a rooster. But then again, Hank Aaron never faced Brantford Red Sox pitcher Chris Chavez. Thanks to the pitching of Chavez and the swinging sensation of two-run bomb Tyler Burnell, the Brantford Red Sox swept the Barrie Baycats 4-0 to capture their fifth consecutive Intercounty Baseball League championship with an 8-0 win last Wednesday. It all came together for the Brantford Red Sox with a strong offence and a quick-witted defence that has Brant-area residents roaring with pride.

The Red Sox, who hail from the same hometown as our Speaker, the Honourable Dave Levac, has a very proud history. They were founded in 1911 when they joined the Canadian Baseball League. After that league folded, unfortunately, due to World War I, the team went on to play in the Michigan-Ontario League and then the Ontario League. They joined the Intercounty Baseball League in 1950. They've won nine consecutive championships, with the last five coming in a row, tying an intercounty league record. Their Drive for Five is now complete.

Congratulations go out to Paul Aucoin, owner of the Red Sox; the players; and the support staff. Perhaps a

ticker tape parade is in the works, Speaker. Congratulations to all.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That was a really good statement.

JACQUELINE RASENBERG

Mr. Rod Jackson: Today, I'd like to recognize an outstanding member of the Barrie community. Jacqueline Rasenberg is a firefighter who holds eight world titles in the World Firefighter Combat Challenge over the course of her 10 years' competing. She has competed as a team member, in tandem and as an individual, and plans to represent Canada this year with her teammate Amber. Jacquie trains hard to ensure that the citizens in Barrie are protected and safe from fire emergencies.

The fire combat challenge annually attracts hundreds of US and Canadian municipal firefighters and fire departments from more than 25 locations and is now expanding to countries around the world, including New Zealand, Germany, Argentina, Chile and South Africa. The challenge seeks to encourage firefighter fitness and demonstrate the profession's rigours to the public. Competitors wear full gear and race head-to-head as they simulate the physical demands of real-life firefighting by performing a linked series of five tasks, including climbing a five-storey tower; hoisting; chopping; dragging hoses; and rescuing a life-sized 175-pound "victim" as they race against themselves, their opponent and the clock. It's no small feat to be one of the top firefighters in the world.

Firefighters make an exceptional contribution to our community in Barrie, risking their lives to protect all of us. I'm proud to say that we have such a world-class accomplished firefighter living in Barrie, right here at home. Congratulations to Jacquie and good luck on her endeavours as she represents our country.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I stand to correct my record. I apologize to the House. The interns will not be here until Wednesday, I've been notified. I got my list a little too quickly and too early, and I was too enthusiastic.

Thank you for allowing that to stand down. It's no longer needed. We will do the introduction of the interns on Wednesday.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): An order of the House dated September 5, 2012, provides an allocation of time for proceedings of Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. The order

provides that the Standing Committee on Social Policy shall report Bill 115 to the House no later than Monday, September 10, 2012.

The House not having received this report during reports by committees today, the bill, as amended, is therefore deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Shall the report be adopted? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 5, the bill is ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from my constituents in the riding of Durham which reads as follows:

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. (Hydro One) is proposing construction of a new transformer station on a 100-acre site in Clarington, near the Oshawa-Clarington boundary;

"Whereas the site is on the Oak Ridges moraine/greenbelt;

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"Whereas concerns have been raised by the residents about the environmental impacts of this development, including harm to wildlife as well as contamination of ponds, streams and the underground water supply;

"Whereas sites zoned for industrial and/or commercial use are the best locations for large electricity transformer stations;

"Whereas most, if not all, residents do not agree this project is needed and that, if proven to be necessary, it could be best accommodated at alternative locations such as Cherrywood or Wesleyville;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Ontario Legislature support the preservation of the Oak Ridges moraine, the greenbelt and the natural environment at this site. We also ask that the Ontario Legislature require the Clarington transformer station to be built at an alternative location zoned for industrial facilities and selected in accordance with the best planning principles."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Jacqueline, one of the pages.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

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

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I support this petition, I'll sign my name to it and give it to page Parnika.

RADIATION SAFETY

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

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiations in medical diagnostic and radiation therapy procedures; and

"Whereas the main piece of legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (HARPA), dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the act have kept pace with the explosion in imaging examinations, including image-guided procedures used in cardiology, radiation therapy, ultrasound, orthopaedics etc.;

"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 fully agree with these petitions, sign them and pass them to page Sydney.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"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 the petition and I’ll affix my name to it.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

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

“Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

“Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and successive governments in those two provinces have never repealed those laws; and

“Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

“Whereas the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and the long term as well as the well-being of its residents;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout.”

I fully support this petition, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Maggie to bring it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

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

“Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of no accountability, complacency, waste, patient neglect and substandard care in our health care system;

“Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and oversight of most health care agencies is done by that agency or sometimes through the ministry;

“Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces in Canada where our Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of health care services;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman’s mandate to include investigation of our health care services, including health units, hospitals, retirement homes, long-term-care facilities and ambulance services.”

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it with page Zakhar.

AIR-RAIL LINK

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

“Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

“Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

“Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

“Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

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

“That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

“That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’m going to give it to Parnika and sign my name, to be delivered to the table.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: “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 will sign this petition and will send it up with Jasper.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonnell: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government’s plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my doctor’s ability to provide” health “care for me and my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

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

“Reverse the recent unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care.”

I agree with this, and I will be signing it.

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DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government” has made PET scanning “a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients under certain conditions...; and

“Whereas,” since October 2009, “insured PET scans” are performed “in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with” Health

Sciences North, “its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly ... to make PET scans available through” Health Sciences North, “thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

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

ABATTOIRS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the number of locally inspected abattoirs is declining critically and the Harrietsville Women’s Institute is writing to express our concern over the decline of small abattoirs affecting our local food system;

“Whereas government red tape is killing small food producers. Forcing small, local abattoirs to follow the same rules as large corporations is putting them out of business. Many the regulations do not improve quality, but result in more paperwork;

“Whereas our petition includes signatures from our community as well as Women’s Institute members from five counties—this is not a local problem;

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

“(a) To have the Ministry of Agriculture and Food assist small businesses in meat slaughter, processing and sale;

“(b) To have OMAFRA interpret and implement regulations, taking into account the differences between small abattoirs and large corporations;

“(c) To have OMAFRA remove regulatory clauses not necessary to food safety;

“(d) To have OMAFRA license abattoirs to deal with the slaughtering of horses.”

We agree with this petition, and I affix my signature to this.

DOG OWNERSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

On behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized because of the way they look, I’m going to sign this, give it to Sashin and have it delivered to the table.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s, Alzheimer’s, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme disease in Ontario and to have everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I’m very pleased to affix my signature to this petition and send it to the table.

TAXATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a very short petition, Mr. Speaker, so I’m happy you recognized me. It’s one line.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario....”

To ask Premier McGuinty to “take the unfair HST off of hydro and home heating bills.”

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Ms. Broten moved third 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. Ted Arnott): Does the minister care to lead off the debate? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It is my pleasure to rise in the House again to speak in support of the Putting Students First Act. I’ll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, who has so ably worked on this important file.

Let me say from the outset that this proposed legislation was not our first option; dialogue, engagement and good-faith consultations were. Rather, this proposed legislation is what we need to do as a result of the circumstances we find our province in.

We have had six months of sincere discussions with our education partners, discussions that were tough but productive, challenging and constructive.

Sans nos efforts soutenus à la table de la négociation et sans les efforts déployés par certains de nos partenaires qui, par leur participation, ont fait montre d’un véritable leadership, nous n’aurions pas pu établir les bases équitables et équilibrées du projet de loi devant nous aujourd’hui.

I am, of course, speaking about the memorandum of understanding between the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association and our government. Had it not been for our hard work at the bargaining table and the hard work of some of our partners, who demonstrated true leadership by their participation, we would not have achieved the fair and balanced foundation for the bill before us today.

The memorandum of understanding between the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association and our government has formed the basis for other memoranda signed by the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO; the Association of Professional Student Services Personnel, APSSP; and a collection of associations representing 3,000 educational assistants.

This is the foundation of the proposed Putting Students First Act. As a result, the proposed act was shaped as much by the voice of teachers through their bargaining agents as it was by our government’s fiscal requirements and policy objectives. This fact should give us all confidence that the proposed legislation is fair, considered and designed to meet the interests of all parties involved, specifically teachers, education sector workers, students, and all Ontarians concerned about the province’s fiscal situation and economy.

Moreover, before we introduced the proposed legislation, we listened to the members of this House after proactively seeking their input. Some members were silent. Others were more willing to live up to the expectation of Ontarians and chose to work with us to find solutions. As a result, the bill before us today is also a reflection of our commitment to making minority government work, and it must, because failure to get

results cannot be an option when the stakes are as high as they are.

We must pass the proposed legislation as a necessary measure to secure the financial sustainability of our publicly funded education system and to provide the needed tools for stability in our schools. By passing the proposed act, we can protect the gains we've made in education while continuing to roll up our sleeves and to roll out full-day kindergarten, maintaining small class sizes and preserving 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs. Working together to pass the proposed act, we can reduce the provincial deficit in a fair, balanced and responsible manner while protecting the core services Ontarians rely on, including our world-class, publicly funded education system.

We must pass it quickly because time has run out. Already, teacher and support staff contracts, which have significant financial consequences for the government's fiscal plan towards a balanced budget, have rolled over. This legislation, however, requires that boards roll back the additional pay and benefits that have rolled over. This is an important tool, one we would rather not have relied upon but on which we will rely, as, without the support of the third party, this legislation was not able to be put in place before September 1.

The long-term sustainability of our publicly funded education system relies on our ability to be sound managers of the province's finances and also to stand firm in our commitment to maintain the progress we've made in our schools. This piece of legislation helps us do exactly that.

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No responsible government would sit idly by when, after six months—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pardon me?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just a point of order: I think the member meant in her speech "the support of the Conservative Party," not the third party. If you would correct, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's not a point of order, and you can debate the bill later on.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But I got it in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize and return to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much.

As I said, this is an important tool, and this piece of legislation does not have the support of the third party. As a result of not having the support of the third party, it was not able to be in place before September 1, Speaker.

No responsible government would sit idly by when, after six months of sincere attempts to reach agreements with all of our education partners, those who saw fit to walk away from discussions, never to return, are now threatening the labour peace and stability in our schools that we have carefully nurtured since taking office. Some of these parties only gave us one hour of their time before they abandoned discussions for six months.

We drafted this legislation. We based it on a fairly negotiated agreement with a union that demonstrated a clear commitment to its members as well as to taxpayers. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association should be commended for their hard work and their skill at the discussion table.

Through perseverance and problem-solving and our openness to their input and ideas, we reached a memorandum of understanding.

The OECTA memorandum, as those of AEFO, APSSP and others, are a win for families, teachers and all of us who depend on and benefit from our public services and the taxpayers who pay for them.

Frankly, Speaker, what we agreed to with OECTA is better than what we had first come to the table with, and that is because it is a fairly negotiated agreement with input from key education partners.

If passed, the Putting Students First Act would ensure that school labour and employment contracts fit the government's fiscal and policy priorities and contain measures to secure two years free from labour disruptions.

Meeting our fiscal and policy priorities means staying on track towards budgetary balance without compromising the gains and quality improvements we have made in the last nine years and without sacrificing 20,000 teaching and support staff positions.

We need to achieve the right balance between our important fiscal goals and the preservation of the classroom experience for children from junior kindergarten to grade 12 and to avoid significant job losses. This proposed bill achieves that balance by incorporating the parameters of the memorandum negotiated by the government and OECTA.

These parameters achieve our policy and fiscal goals, are fair and were subject to the give and take of good-faith consultations and discussions in our provincial discussion table process.

We went into the PDT process with a firm but fair position that would allow us to meet our fiscal and policy goals. Some parties, regrettably, decided not to engage with us and walked away from the table. Others stayed and did the heavy lifting with us. They brought good ideas to the table and, in early July, we reached a compromise which is reflected in the memorandum and which has been signed with OECTA. We had a road map for others to follow. From early July onward, we encouraged all of our remaining partners to follow the road map and use the summer months to continue the hard work of reaching fair agreements that serve the public interest.

Now we need our Legislature to step in and provide the legal mechanism that is needed to help the remaining parties finish what they are either unable or unwilling to do.

If passed, the act would require that school boards and local bargaining units of teachers and support staff accept local agreements consistent with the priorities reflected in the memorandum between the government and OECTA. If passed, the act would require that local agreements

include provisions and parameters consistent with those in the OECTA MOU, including a 0% salary increase in 2012-13 and 2013-14 and the freezing of retirement gratuity entitlements for the payment of unused sick days at the August 31, 2012, entitlement.

We took this approach because, in these challenging fiscal times, we had a choice: a choice to spend more on teacher and staff pay and benefits or to protect our investments in full-day kindergarten, small class sizes and teacher and support staff jobs. As stewards of our education system, we have the privilege and responsibility to ensure the long-term sustainability of the system we cherish.

“Sustainability” means we needed to address the rate of growth in education. We could have taken the advice of Don Drummond and others, who suggested we increase class sizes and halt the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Doing that would not have put students and parents first, and taking that approach wouldn’t have been putting teachers first either, because we would have seen the loss of 10,000 teaching positions as a result.

We’ve been fair, balanced and responsible in our discussions with our partners. We have fully engaged in the process of good-faith consultation and consideration, and the proposed act reflects the culmination of that process.

We respect the collective bargaining process between school employers and bargaining agents. That’s why the Putting Students First Act leaves the bargaining parties with ownership of that process and the flexibility to craft local solutions to local issues. Under the proposed bill, they still have time to reach agreements that are flexible to meet their needs. Such agreements will need to be substantively identical to the OECTA memorandum.

We’ve been fair, reasonable, responsible and flexible. We’ve given the parties plenty of time and encouragement to get the job done. When we were left with no other pathway forward, we did what we needed to do, and we drafted legislation.

The bill before us today includes revision, as I have said, that reflected the priorities of some members of this House, and we are grateful for their input and also for their anticipated support. Specifically I am speaking to language around fair hiring and diagnostic assessment. 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 in a collective agreement for any other union or board that has not already signed an agreement by August 31. That means that our partners, OECTA and AEFO, who have signed memorandums, would have those specific terms included in their local collective agreements. But other parties would not, unless they signed a memorandum on or before August 31.

To be clear, this would not affect the ability to make a regulation under the Education Act with respect to hiring practices, nor would it affect the Ministry of Education’s ability to issue a policy and program memorandum with respect to the use of diagnostic assessments of students

under that act. In fact, we still intend to do just that: to introduce a fair hiring regulation under the Education Act that will cover all school boards in Ontario, and to issue a policy directive regarding the use of diagnostic assessments.

Some have asked why we are pursuing these issues. The answer to that question is because, for years, teachers have spoken to our government about these very items, and during the 300 hours-plus of discussion with OECTA, fair hiring and diagnostic assessments came up again and again.

What we heard is that hiring practices, especially for young teachers seeking long-term or permanent positions, need to be more transparent, and they would benefit from having a uniform practice across all school boards.

Secondly, we heard that teachers, people who are highly trained in assessing students’ 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.

Ultimately, these issues will be pursued outside of the proposed act, and that is because we respected the position of our colleagues in the House. Their support is necessary to pass this bill expeditiously so that we can respond quickly to the automatic rollover of salary grid increases and bankable sick-day accumulation.

To ensure that our students enter their second week of a new school year, we have the legislative tools to achieve stability in our schools. This means that students will continue to have access to the world-class education system they deserve.

Soyez assurés : le système d’éducation de l’Ontario est l’un des meilleurs au monde, et c’est grâce à notre partenariat avec le secteur de l’éducation et aux objectifs communs que nous avons depuis que nous sommes venus au pouvoir.

Ces objectifs consistent à améliorer le rendement des élèves, à réduire les écarts de rendement pour les élèves en difficulté, et à renforcer la confiance en notre système d’éducation, financé par les fonds publics.

1350

En travaillant avec nos partenaires, nous avons réalisé ces trois objectifs. Les résultats aux tests sont meilleurs et les taux d’obtention de diplômes sont en hausse. Les élèves de l’Ontario se placent maintenant parmi les plus performants du pays et du monde.

Make no mistake: Ontario’s education system is one of the best in the world. That is the result of our partnership with the education sector and common goals since we first came to office. These goals are: increasing student achievement, reducing gaps in achievement for struggling students, and building confidence in our publicly funded education system.

Working with our partners, we have delivered on all three goals. Test scores are up. Graduation rates continue to rise. Ontario students are now ranked among the highest achievers in the country and the world. The Organisation for Economic Development Program for International Student Assessment in 2009 ranked Ontario students among the top 10 readers in the world.

According to the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program's 2010 report, Ontario students were the only group to perform above the Canadian average in all three areas of math, reading and science. In fact, Ontario students scored significantly higher than the Canadian average in all three subjects and were first when it came to reading, the only students to perform above the national average in that area.

Our efforts to close the gap—the student achievement gap and the socio-economic gap—are working. Ontario is now recognized as one of the few jurisdictions in the world where 92% of students are meeting or exceeding international standards, regardless of socio-economic background or first language, and that is astounding progress.

Perhaps our greatest achievement with our partners has been full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a decade—in a generation. As of this September, about 120,000 students and their families will be benefiting from FDK. That is up from 50,000 in 2011 and 35,000 in 2010.

The achievements of our students, teachers, educators and administrators working together have contributed to our final and important goal: restoring public confidence in Ontario's publicly funded education system. We've come such a long way in less than a decade. In 2003-4, the graduation rate in Ontario was 68%; now it is 82%. That's 93,000 more students with a high school diploma than would have, had the rate remained at the 2003-4 level. But our work is not done. We are committed to driving the grad rate up to 85%.

When it comes to how our students are doing, we just released yet another increase in test scores: 70% of our students are now meeting the provincial standard. That's an increase of 16 percentage points, but our goal is to get that number up to 75%. As a result of our hard work together, we've been able to energize our system and our students to achieve strong and equitable learning outcomes. Today's learning outcomes will help our students compete in tomorrow's knowledge economy, and that's why our commitment to Ontario's student achievement agenda is steady and unwavering and has been reflected every step of the way in our ongoing dialogue with our education partners.

These and other results are a true Ontario success story. They have put our education system on the map, our kids on track to a brighter future and our economy on a pathway to future prosperity, and we cannot risk these gains now. They must be protected. We cannot sacrifice the classroom experience for additional compensation and unaffordable benefits, and we cannot risk our fiscal sustainability, be it the sustainability of our publicly

funded education system or our province, in order to give more to those who have already received so much.

The proposed Putting Students First Act is a reflection of our government's commitment to protecting the gains we've made in education and to preserve the classroom experience by continuing to roll out full-day kindergarten, keeping class sizes small and protecting 20,000 teaching and support staff jobs.

I strongly encourage all of my colleagues and all Ontarians to move this proposed legislation forward. Doing so will be fiscally responsible and will provide Ontario families with the certainty they deserve.

But also, by passing the law quickly, we will help facilitate more effective local bargaining, a process this proposed legislation respects and provides room for while ensuring that many of the significant issues, such as compensation, are already taken care of. The best pathway forward exists in the fair, balanced and responsible proposed legislation at hand.

As I said from the beginning, the proposed legislation comes after six months of sincere outreach to our education partners. It is a crucial opportunity for us all to show Ontarians we are serious about the success of our students and the province. I look forward to your support for the Putting Students First Act and the certainty all of the colleagues in this House will help bring to the new school year.

I certainly look forward to the support of this legislation, and together, in this House, we can certainly put Ontario students first. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Did you not say you were going to share your time with the member for Mississauga?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Oh, in rotation. Okay.

The member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 115. Before I start, obviously I would like to thank a few members who have been working throughout this process, as I often like to do once we've been through committee.

This is the second big bill that this minister has brought forward. She's got our support on this one, and I'll outline why. Although we do not view this bill as perfect, it does address some of the measures that we have been concerned about for some time. But nevertheless, I do want to acknowledge the hard work of our Chair at social policy committee, MPP Ernie Hardeman, who was able to get through clause-by-clause, as well as deputations; my colleague Jane McKenna from the Ontario PC side—she worked very hard; I want to say thank you to her. I'll go towards my left: MPPs Cheri DiNovo and Peter Tabuns. Mr. Tabuns is, of course, the education critic for the New Democrats. I always find, regardless of our positions—and rarely do we agree on policy—that he's quite a gentleman to work with. I'd like to say thanks to MPP Bob Delaney, who was the Liberal

lead on the committee, as well as MPPs Tracy Mac-Charles, Dipika Damerla and Amrit Mangat.

You really get to know people in this assembly when you get down to brass tacks at committee. We had that opportunity, albeit it was, I think, fairly short. I will outline some of my frustration with the committee process at this particular point in time because there were a couple of votes where the Chair actually did have to make the deciding vote, and it didn't quite go our way. But Speaker, it brings me to why we're here today, and it should be no surprise to you or anyone in this chamber what the motivation is on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak.

For quite some time, we have been very concerned with the economy and how that has been managed by this current Liberal government. In fact, the financial state that we find ourselves in here in Ontario isn't a desirable one. It's one that actually does threaten our public services, particularly those core public services that we value.

Let me go into that a little bit, Speaker. This is a government that is facing a \$30-billion deficit. As I've stated time and time again in this chamber, don't take my word for it; take Don Drummond's, their hand-picked economic adviser, who said that we are facing a \$30-billion deficit and we must take steps to address that. As a result, on our side, we have consistently spoken about the need for a broader public sector wage freeze so that we can address the skyrocketing cost of government and save about \$2 billion annually across government so that we can put that toward the debt and the deficit, to get us out of that.

I also have a stat—I guess it's a stat—that is used by the Minister of Finance himself that says that the third-largest spending priority of this government—outside of health care and education, the big one and two—is servicing the debt and the deficit.

1400

What does that mean, Speaker? It means that every single dollar being spent to service the debt and the deficit, particularly when interest rates are low—they'll go up soon, and when they do, it's going to be even higher—is a dollar less for kids in our classrooms. It's a dollar less for patients in health care, and I must say that it is larger, that servicing the debt and deficit—we spend more money on that than almost every other single government department combined, outside of health care and education. So it is time that we get our costs in Ontario under control. You cannot continue to sign contracts you can't afford to keep. It's time for restraint, and that is where we're at.

Since the last election, our leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for a broader public sector wage freeze, as I had mentioned. In fact, he went so far as to meet privately with Premier McGuinty to talk about the need for a broader public sector wage freeze. I don't mean a broader public sector wage freeze just attacking teachers, and I don't mean a broader public sector wage freeze just attacking doctors. I'm suggesting, as was Tim Hudak,

that we're all in this together, and the best way to get out of this, if that JFK moment is true for Ontario—it's not what your province can do for you but what you can do for your province—together we had to work toward reducing the size and cost of government.

Mr. McGuinty rejected that advice and, as you know, he went forward with a budget that he negotiated with the NDP on, and we actually saw there were higher taxes for a certain bracket of individuals in Ontario and there was an increase in spending. That said, we continued on our course for a broader public sector wage freeze, and my colleague from Elgin-Middlesex-London, Jeff Yurek, put forward a piece of legislation that anyone in this assembly who was concerned about the debt and deficit could have supported. He had called for a broader public sector wage freeze then, back in May. At the time, the government was still rejecting this notion that we had to get our fiscal house in order, and they defeated that.

What happened over the summer, Speaker, was that I think they understood that there was a requirement to get their spending under control; otherwise it was going to compromise public education and kids in the classroom. That's when they came forward with a memorandum of understanding with OECTA.

Now, I'm going to be very blunt with you, Speaker. At the time—and we still do have reservations. We are concerned about the numbers in the OECTA deal. As you'll recall, whether it was in the press or throughout this period of time where we've had debate in the chamber about Bill 115, I've had serious reservations about the numbers in the OECTA road map, and here is why: We don't believe that this is a full wage freeze. A full, true broader public sector wage freeze means you freeze wages. You don't allow for grid movement. This is what this does. As a result, there will be \$450 million tacked on to the province as a result of that grid movement. Now, there are some offsets, and I will give credit where it is due. There are offsets were agreed to by OECTA that come to about \$150 million. The problem, Speaker, is there is still a \$300-million gap in the fiscal plan. When you're talking about a \$30-billion deficit, \$300 million is very significant in trying to address that, so there is a gap, and there is a gap that we are concerned about. It is a gap that we have continued to press the government on, and indeed, we are now concerned with that, but we're going to move forward.

We also know, for example, that the government, throughout this negotiation, changed its financial parameters. I'll give you an example. In the Ontario budget of last year, as well as on the Ministry of Education's own website, there was discussion that they would eliminate that grid freeze. They chose not to do that. In fact, a few weeks ago the minister did put out a memorandum or communiqué to the public that said that they actually changed their fiscal parameters. That is very problematic when we're dealing with a very serious issue.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It was negotiated.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I hear some concern here from the Minister of Health, and I may ask her just to sort of

read up on what's been happening, because I'm not sure she's got the memo that we actually said we'd support this. But we are allowed to voice our concerns here in the official opposition. That's why we were sent here: to remind them and to keep them honest.

Speaker, the other issue that we have very serious concerns about and reservations, and we've put forward amendments at committee, was stripping managerial rights from school boards and principals who weren't at the table with the government. That's a significant problem when you are talking to duly elected school boards and telling them that you're going to usurp their responsibility. That's why we put forward several amendments last week. Unfortunately, they were defeated.

The two areas of concern, of course, are diagnostics; that is, assessments of children in the classroom. We believe that school boards and principals still have a role in that. The other is hiring and making sure that the best people for the job are there. The government would be content in saying that it's the union's job to make sure those folks are hired. We're content in saying that it's the administrator's and the school board's job, as well as the principal's, to be doing that.

Nevertheless, while we are still concerned about the fiscal parameters and how school boards had to be treated, the official opposition had to make a very serious choice. It was one we had many discussions about together, and one we're very comfortable with.

As you are well aware, our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, has spoken at length about the constitutionality of a broader public sector wage freeze; our leader has spoken about the need for a broader public sector wage freeze; Jeff Yurek, our MPP from Elgin–Middlesex–London, has tabled legislation talking about a broader public sector wage freeze; and our finance critic, Peter Shurman, has been up, day in and day out, calling for a broader public sector wage freeze. So we had two choices: allow a 5.5% increase in wages come September 1, after calling for a province-wide wage freeze, or accept the fact that finally this government has started to listen to Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus and all those critics I just mentioned and partially adopted our plan for a legislated wage freeze.

It became very clear which approach we needed to take. It was the one that was going to cut the size and scope and cost of government. It was the one that was going to bring our fiscal house back in order, albeit not the perfect way to do it but close enough to the way we had put forward that we could support this piece of legislation.

I'm sure there will be much said in this assembly in the days ahead on this legislation, as well as in the public and in classrooms across Ontario. I do know, for example, that there will be anger at the government, and perhaps even at myself for supporting this legislation, by many of the teachers' unions.

I guess I would have this to say: We respect the work you do. Teachers do great work. I have a daughter in school, and I'm very proud every day that she comes

home from school and says she's had a great day. I know the Speaker's wife is a teacher, and I know that our Speaker, Mr. Levac, was a principal. Everyone in this chamber has the greatest respect for Ontario's teachers, and we know they do great work. But the problem we are faced with is that we cannot continue to afford wage increases. In fact, one of the problems we do have is that we have 3,999 more collective bargaining agreements to be negotiated.

This brings me back to why we in the opposition said that the best way to approach this would have been one piece of legislation treating every single worker in the broader public sector equally. It would have been fairer, it would have been more comprehensive and it would have saved \$2 billion a year to help us get our fiscal house in order.

They chose not to do that. Now, our concern in the official opposition is that this is going to be piecemeal, and every time they make an agreement with a union or decide they're going to move forward on a piece of legislated wage freeze for one other sector, we're going to have more legislation in this House and more division in Ontario, and we're going to be having duelling press conferences each and every single time. We don't think that's the right way to go. In fact, our biggest criticism to date has been how this has been handled. We think that Ontario can do better than this.

However, we are at this point, and as I've stated several times, we have a choice before us. We have a very important choice before us as we face a \$30-billion deficit in this province. It is to get our costs under control so we have long-term sustainability of our public education system, so that there is public education not just for my daughter but for my granddaughter. That is why we are here today. We have a choice. It is a very clear one: Support a 5.5% wage increase that this province cannot afford, or adopt a partial wage freeze that will ensure the sustainability and the longevity of our public education system.

1410

It is never an easy choice, Speaker, but it is a choice that must be made. We must make tough choices in this assembly. It sure as heck is easy to say anything you want to because you're not in charge of the fiscal problems of the Ontario government, it sure as heck is easy to say anything when you are beholden to special interests, and it sure as heck is really simple to say anything when you do not—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Name names. Come on, Lisa. You can do it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —have any concern whatsoever for the amount of taxes people pay. Speaker, it is never easy to do what needs to be done in this House all the time. Today, we are here and we are going to support Bill 115 because it is the right thing to do. It is the tough thing, but it is the right thing to do.

Now, to my hecklers from behind me in the third party, the rhetoric can be trumped up, and they can enjoy their time trying to malign us and the government.

They're trying to suggest that we hate a certain group of public sector employees or that we don't care about institutions; we'll just blow them up. I could say some equally rhetorical things; however, I won't, because it is beneath this House when they decide to go where they would like to go with people's lives and particularly with schoolchildren.

Did I get everything in this bill that I would have liked? No. Did we ask a number of questions of the government that we didn't get satisfactory answers to? We certainly did. We asked a number of them. However, when confronted with the very real choice of a 5.5% wage increase the province couldn't afford and a partial wage freeze, which is what we've been asking for—and which our leader says is half a loaf and to keep pressing—we chose the responsible thing to do for the longevity of the public education system. I'm proud that we're making the tough decision and the right decision and the one that's going to pave the way forward for the sustainability of public education.

As I said, it's never an easy decision. It's never an easy decision. But when you take into consideration all the facts—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's never easy being a bully.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —it's important to do the right thing.

I understand that our colleagues in the third party are very upset at this point in time. I think they'll use this to their advantage the way only they could do. But I remind people, particularly those at home who are watching, that decisions like this need to be made. They're never easy. You never want to make them. You never want to look at somebody and say, "We can't give you a wage increase. We know you've worked hard all year." But simply, if you're in a small community and your local business is the biggest employer in town and is not making a lot of money, they're not going to be able to give wage increases. That's where we're at here in Ontario today. If that's the case in our small businesses, we've got to really start to respect the private sector's ability to pay when we're dealing with the public sector.

Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to debate here. We will, as I said, be supporting this legislation. It isn't everything we would have desired, but it is a start, and we will continue to press the government for a broader public sector wage freeze—one we think can be done the right way, one we believe is constitutional and one that we believe will help us get out of the fiscal mess we are in.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity today, and I particularly want to say thank you to my Progressive Conservative colleagues, who have been so understanding with this whole issue and who have worked very hard, as I have, to bring this issue to the floor and to bring our concerns to the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: After that speech, I feel like that kid at the baseball game who says, "Let me in, Coach. Let me in."

A couple of things: I'm going to digress for one minute. I listened to the intent, and I respect the member from Nepean—Carleton—have I got the riding right? She's here because she believes in what she does, and she believes it fervently. I'm not going to fault her for that, but listen, trying to portray this as it's not an easy decision—it was a pretty easy decision for Tim Hudak and Dalton McGuinty to decide to do what it is that they did, and to try to characterize it as anything other than that, I think is a bit beyond the pale.

Let me make a couple of points. We know what this thing was all about. The government, right from the beginning, decided that, rather than listen to what had been offered by teachers, which was a wage freeze, at the beginning of negotiations, they wanted to create a crisis. This government needed to have a crisis in education à la Mr. Snobelen—remember the old former Minister of Education, the Conservative that was elected under Mike Harris, who said, "I will create a crisis in education as a means to achieve what it is that I want as change in the education system"? The Minister of Education followed the same thing that Mr. Snobelen had put forward.

It was not good enough that the people who arrived at the bargaining table, the teachers' federations and unions, who said, "We're prepared on the two-year wage freeze"; they had to be able to create a crisis. Why? Because the government was in the midst of trying to pull off an upset and to be able to win some ridings in by-elections to be able to change the tables in this Legislature so that they can have themselves a majority government. They certainly didn't want the people talking about the issues of the day. Did the government want people at the ballot box to be thinking about the Ornge scandal? Did they want the people at the ballot box to be thinking about having to essentially pay off companies for cancelling contracts in Mississauga and Oakville? Did they want the people at the ballot box to think of the killing of the horse racing industry that this government is perpetrating as a result of some decisions that they made recently? They didn't want people thinking about those things as they went into the ballot box. They had to change the channel. They had to say, "Don't look over here, where the Liberals are really kind of weak; look over here. We have something else for you." And that something else was essentially trying to bash public sector workers and teachers. That's what it was all about.

They looked at the polling numbers—and I'm sure the Conservatives have looked at it, and we've looked at it and others. Unfortunately in our society, there are people out there that like it when you bash unions and you bash teachers. So the government, in my view, of Dalton McGuinty decided to do this as a way to be able to garner votes. He figured, "If I can get people looking over here in this manufactured crisis of negotiations and I can get people to believe that the teachers really didn't offer a two-year wage freeze, that teachers really didn't say they didn't want to go on strike and that teachers really said they wanted to negotiate at the bargaining table, we're going to get this crisis so that people can look over here

and forget all about these things that are happening in the background that makes it very difficult for the government to be able to win that by-election.” That’s what this was all about.

The unfortunate reality is that we’ve squandered probably the best opportunity we’ve had in a long time to negotiate a fair agreement with teachers. When was the last time that you saw a bargaining committee come to the table and say, “Listen, we’re prepared to have a two-year wage freeze,” as the opening position? I’ve negotiated private sector and I’ve negotiated public sector; I’ve been on both sides of the table. I can tell you, if I had my bargaining agents coming to me as the employer saying, “I’m prepared to take a two-year wage freeze,” that would be the beginning towards an agreement. And yes, were there some issues that were outstanding? Were there some things that maybe the government needed in order to further meet its fiscal targets? Quite possibly. But a large part of it had been put to bed when the teachers offered up a two-year wage freeze. So this government decided to create this crisis as a way to be able to deal with by-elections.

I was told something a long time ago by a good friend of mine, Moses Sheppard, when I was in the union movement back then with the United Steelworkers. Moe was my staff rep, and I remember one time losing a vote at a membership meeting on something that I really felt passionately about. He said to me, “Gilles, never worry. The members are infinitely more wise than you give them credit for. If they didn’t vote for that particular motion you wanted, maybe there was good reason.” As I looked at it after, that was exactly the case, and that’s what happened in Kitchener–Waterloo. I think voters understood that what the government was trying to do was, quite frankly, unfair, it was unwarranted, and they weren’t about to reward a government for playing that card.

So I just say to my friends across the way and the Conservatives on this side of the table: You’re saying that this was not an easy decision. Of course it’s an easy decision. This government and the Tories don’t want to do the hard work that has to be done, which is to roll up your sleeves and sit down with workers and managers to work out a fair compromise when it comes to a constraint-type budget.

Do you think that unions across this country and across this province have never had to face negotiations behind the eight ball? I came out of the mining sector in the 1970s and 1980s. There wasn’t a collective agreement until after 1983—that was a collective agreement that we moved forward on. As steelworkers, we had to negotiate concessions with our employers. Why? Because we understood that the employer was having a tough time. The price of gold was \$270 an ounce. You couldn’t make a profit at that number, and everybody knew it. So the workers sent the union in—I was on that negotiating committee—to negotiate a very difficult contract for us, and it was essentially trying not to lose too much, doing some temporary concessions to help the

employer out, so that in good times we’d be able to get that money back.

1420

That’s what workers have been doing in this province for years, and the government just kind of forgot all about that. They forgot that at the beginning of bargaining the teachers said, “We’re going to give you a two-year wage freeze.” That’s regrettable because I think there was a willingness—and there still is a willingness, talking to the people I’ve talked to who are on the bargaining committee for the various teachers’ federations. I believe it’s still there. There was a willingness at the beginning of all of this to do what’s right for everybody, to protect those teachers, especially junior teachers who have just started in the system, who are making \$45,000 a year if they’re lucky, and look at ways of being able to allow those teachers to progress in some way—but that overall there would be a wage freeze. The unions were prepared to talk about, “Can we look at benefits in a different way? Are there different ways of delivering benefits that are able to deliver good benefits to our members for cheaper?” Those conversations were readily available to be had with the bargaining agent. Instead, what did the government do? It played this crisis, and I think that’s rather regrettable. As a result of that, the government has polarized this whole situation. I don’t know how it’s going to go from here. I’m not clairvoyant.

One thing I do know: If people work hard, there’s an agreement to be had. But trying to force these types of settlements on to people by way of fiat, essentially by way of this Legislature, I think, is wrong-headed. I’ll just speak to this for a little bit because I know our critic Mr. Tabuns is going to take up the rest of the time on this debate.

Democracy is a wonderful thing. We turn on the TV and see what’s going on in Syria. We saw what happened in Libya, what happened in Egypt and other parts of the world. We all see it and we feel it. Nobody in this House has a monopoly on this issue. In those countries, people are literally picking up guns, they’re strapping on bombs to put themselves and others in harm’s way, to get a democracy, a place where people are able to settle their differences by way of the ballot box in the institutions of democracy, and it’s quite something to behold.

Here we are in Canada, so fortunate, so lucky that we live in a democratic society. Not only do we get a chance to decide who’s going to be our government for the next four years and who will be our local representative, but we have institutions of democracy that allow a democracy to live and breathe. One of those things is the right for workers to join a union. It is a democratic right. Imagine a society where we decide, as legislators, or the House of Commons decides that you’re no longer going to have that. That you don’t like unions or hate unions is not the point. The point is, they’re part of our democratic institution that allows workers to negotiate with their employers for fair wages and a fair crack about how you do things within the workplace.

Once we start doing things like we're doing in Bill 115 that say, "We're going to take away the democratic right of citizens of this province, in this case teachers and educational workers, to be able to freely bargain," I think that's a real problem. I think it's an affront to our democracy. Democracy is not something that you all of a sudden wake up to every four years and go to the ballot box with. Democracy is something that lives and breathes every day between campaigns.

There are institutions such as the Human Rights Code that I believe this legislation violates. It's about having the ability to go to the courts to have your say if you think there's something that is not in keeping with the Constitution of Canada or the laws of this land, something that this legislation is taking away. When a government puts in legislation that you're not only going to trample over the rights of people to collectively bargain, but you're not going to give them a chance to get to the courts, you're not going to give them the chance to go to the Human Rights Tribunal—God, we're not even going to give the Labour Relations Board the ability to decide on this. You're trampling on people's democratic rights, and that's something that I think this Legislature should take seriously.

I don't care if you like unions or not. I don't care if you're Tim Hudak and you think everybody in Kitchener-Waterloo was a union boss—what a stupid comment that was. I wish there were 16,000 union bosses in KW. But I would just say, God—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Jeez. But my point is, to trample over the democratic rights of citizens, I think, is wrong. It's patently wrong.

Is negotiation hard? Damn right it is. It's tough. It's not easy from both sides of the table.

So what's going to happen in the end? Andrea Horwath has said it, and I think she will be proven right. As in British Columbia, this law will more than likely be struck down, because in fact, this law not only takes away the rights of people to freely collective-bargain, it tries to also limit their rights to the courts and to the Human Rights Tribunal and to the Ontario Labour Relations Act. So what happens a year or two down the road when this is possibly struck down? It means to say it's going to cost this province a whole bunch of money, probably more money than is being saved with this particular bill.

And then, here's the really ironic part of it—and this is what I think is so cynical on the part of the Liberals, because the Liberals are always about doing what's politically expedient for the Liberal Party and not necessarily doing what's right for the people of Ontario or Canada. You saw that federally, and you're seeing that now. It's probably not going to be a Liberal administration that will have to deal with this mess. It's a minority Parliament, and I've got to figure that within the next couple of years, there's a pretty strong possibility there will be an election before then. I would also think there's a pretty strong possibility that it's going to be

another government having to deal with it, either Conservative or NDP, and I would hope it's NDP. So they're pushing it off—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, God, we don't need four more years of Mike Harris-style government in this province. My lord. Whoa. So I just say—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We woke them up. That's so good. The sad part is that it's going to be—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Hey, don't you guys have bells to ring or something? Anyway.

So I just say it's a sad thing, because at the end of the day, this is going to cost us money. It will be to a future administration to deal with it, and I think that's really the cynical part of this whole thing.

So here we are. We're now into time-allocated third reading on this particular bill. We have about an hour and a bit left, and I want to leave most of our time to the critic for the NDP, Mr. Tabuns. But I just want to say that it's a sad, sad, sad day on a whole bunch of fronts: one, it's going to cost the province a lot more money if this thing is struck down; two, this is trampling over people's democratic rights. And there is an agreement to be had, if only the government would allow negotiations to happen.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, it is a privilege to follow my colleague from Timmins—James Bay, who spoke very eloquently and very passionately about an issue that I'm sure, as legislators, we all feel very passionate about. There are many things that he said with which I, frankly, agree.

Speaker, he said one thing that I thought encapsulated pretty much the entire conundrum that has us sitting here on what should have been the first day that we had returned. Let's use his exact words: "If people work hard, there's an agreement to be had." There should have been an agreement to be had.

So let's just put another perspective on this. Why are we here? It wasn't the fault of the teachers or the NDP or the Conservatives or the government or the people of Ontario that the bottom fell out of the financial markets four years ago. Nonetheless, we're all here with that problem and its ramifications to deal with.

One of the nations that's had the hardest problem getting itself out of the mire of the most recent recession has been our neighbour with whom we are joined at the waist, the United States of America. Even today, although the proportion of our total exports has been declining for years, some 78% of everything that Ontario sells to anyone other than ourselves is sold to the United States of America. What that means, Speaker, is that if our biggest customer isn't buying, we're just going to have to adjust what we do. We've got to get through that, and that puts us where we are here.

So it was important for everyone involved to work hard, because as some of the other unions discovered,

there was indeed an agreement to be had. It wasn't the agreement that the bargaining units had in mind when they went in, or even the government had in mind when they went in, but it turned out to be a good, solid, sustainable and affordable agreement. We just wish that we had had a chance to complete it, with people whom we know by face, whom we respect and whom, as individuals, we like, and like a great deal.

1430

Teachers across the province are busy in their classrooms during this second week of the school year. As the minister has mentioned, the proposed Putting Students First Act will allow us all to move forward and let us focus on what's the most important thing, which is supporting the achievement and the well-being of our students.

While the proposed legislation puts students first, Ontario is also taking important steps to help teachers. To help qualified teachers get into the classroom, the government will be filing a regulation to help ensure fair hiring practices for occasional teachers. This new regulation is aimed at promoting consistent, fair and transparent hiring practices across all school boards in Ontario, and this will better position our occasional teachers for long-term contracts or permanent jobs in schools. Our government will help Ontario's students succeed by ensuring the most qualified teachers get into the classroom.

There's been some confusion surrounding fair hiring practices, so I'm pleased to have this opportunity to address the topic of fair hiring practices. Currently there is neither consistency nor transparency in how occasional teachers, many of whom have provided services to their boards for several years, can access opportunities for more extended contracts and permanent jobs.

In fact, there's some wrong information that we've heard out there. We've heard claims that the new regulation will take away a board's right as an employer to hire the best candidate for a job. This is simply not true. Some have claimed that boards will be required to hire based on seniority, rather than getting the best teacher for the role. Again, this is simply not true. Some people think that retired teachers will get most of the jobs, because they often have 25 or more years of seniority with the board. No. This is not correct either. Others allege that teacher quality will be compromised by the fact that the board will lose control over teacher hiring. This is also incorrect.

Given that there seems to be a lot of misinformation out there, please allow me to clarify how the hiring process will really work. School boards will organize their occasional teacher rosters by seniority, meaning the length of time each teacher has been on the school board's roster. When a teacher has been on the roster for a minimum of 10 months and has worked at least 20 days in that year, the teacher may apply to be included on the school board's long-term occasional, or LTO, list. LTO contracts are important because, rather than day-to-day work, these are contracts that are for continuous work,

for two weeks or more. The board will interview the teachers, and the successful applicants will be placed on the LTO list. Once on this list, teachers can apply for long-term contracts. When an LTO contract becomes available, the board will interview appropriate applicants and select the teacher who best meets the job requirements.

The regulation is very clear that the government expects boards to continue selecting and assigning teachers based on the provisions of the best possible program, the safety and well-being of the students, and the teachers' qualifications.

If a teacher has not received an unsatisfactory evaluation from the school board following a minimum four-month long-term occasional contract, the teacher is eligible to apply for permanent jobs, as they become available, if they meet the requirements of the position. Boards must give first consideration to these qualified teachers to fill a permanent position. A board may fill a permanent position with a teacher not on the long-term occasional teachers' list if there are no LTO applicants interviewed who are able to meet the requirements of that job.

Boards must post and regularly update a long-term occasional teacher list on their website. A notice of upcoming long-term or permanent teaching positions must be posted on a board's website at least five weekdays before conducting an interview or making an offer. The applicants who are interviewed but are unsuccessful may request a debriefing to learn how they can better prepare for the next opportunity.

School boards will continue to apply their hiring practices so that they meet the requirements of this regulation and also respect their collective agreements. I should point out that this new regulation will not affect the denominational rights of separate schools nor the linguistic rights of French-language schools. I want to be clear, though: Management will still make the ultimate decision about whom to hire.

The real difference here is recognizing that that role comes with a responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood by all. Plus, the process should recognize the experience and contributions of the teachers whom boards have selected for occasional teacher roles. The result here will be that our government will make the boards provide a hiring process that is fairer and more transparent. Confusion will be replaced with clarity. Uncertainty will be replaced with the confidence of knowing that occasional teachers have been given a fair opportunity to secure an open position. We will create consistency across the province by creating a regulation on fair hiring.

Working together, we can protect our gains in education. Class sizes are smaller. Full-day kindergarten is available in about 1,700 schools this September. Student achievement is up. More students are graduating now than ever before. Ontario is preserving these gains while protecting some 20,000 teaching and support staff positions.

Speaker, I've been to visit my colleagues in the United States. I've listened to some of them, from both sides of their aisle, talk about some of the compromises they've been forced to make, and about how they've been forced to lay off teachers and close schools. We are not proposing to do that. We don't need to do that. But what we do need to have is an agreement that's right for these times and sustainable and affordable for these times.

Our government is taking strong action to eliminate Ontario's deficit and maintain our reputation as a worldwide leader in publicly funded education now and for the future. This province is working to give Ontario families and taxpayers the certainty they deserve, while being fair to our education partners.

For those who have supported the proposed legislation, we thank you for putting Ontario students first. On behalf of Ontario's students and their families, I look forward to continuing to work with you to protect Ontario's progress in education so we can ensure that we remain focused on supporting student achievement, which is, after all, our most sustainable and valuable competitive advantage in the 21st-century world. This strong action that our government is taking is in the best interests of students and their families. It helps put students first and maintains Ontario's reputation as a worldwide leader in publicly funded education.

I think everyone knows we're working hard to protect the extraordinary gains we have made together during the past nine years. They're gains we're all very proud of and should all be very proud of.

In closing, I want to say thank you to Ontario's teachers and to those who represent them, many of whom I know by face, several of whom I know are sitting here in this Legislature. I want to thank you for your commitment to our province's two million students, for your dedication to a challenging and rewarding profession, and for working with us to get ourselves collectively through this particular period.

1440

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again, speaking to Bill 115, we're standing here, in third reading. I think I would humbly suggest that, with some authority as the only teacher sitting in the House here—

Mr. Paul Miller: There are a few others.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Are there? Oh, well, then. My apologies to my former colleagues.

I can, however, speak with some authority on education, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, we have to start back with the origins as to why this collective agreement was even put in place a year after the general election. As alluded to by the member from Timmins–James Bay, this government does nothing that actually is perceived to help Ontarians, only the Liberal agenda, and they're pushing out their agenda and personal betterment for politics and political reasons only.

So here's why we're sitting here today debating this bill that shouldn't even have been brought forward for us.

So here we are. I think I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that as a member of OSSTF in good standing—and my wife's a teacher as well, for ETFO. When I talk and listen to my former colleagues back home and across the province in different ridings as well, teachers get it. They get it. They understand the fiscal bundle that they see that we're in right now, a \$15-billion deficit this year. We're spending \$10 billion a year on our provincial debt annually. That's \$10 billion, Mr. Speaker, that can go directly into front-line health care, front-line education in the classrooms to provide the resources needed so that we do have the best students in the world.

One of the reasons I'd just like to say I'm here today is because, quite frankly, I was frustrated with the policies that this Liberal government was bringing forward in the classroom and in education. For this government to say they put students first and teachers first I think is a little misleading, to say the least. Again, the reason I'm here is because those policies that the Liberal government brought in are doing a great disservice to the young people of this province.

They say that their standards are higher, that their test scores are so much higher. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can honestly tell you that the only reason they're higher is because the standards have been brought down so low you just have to step over the ladder or the bar. You can't do the limbo, because that's how low the standards are.

The Minister of Education made a point of saying that 92% of students met or exceeded international standards. Mr. Speaker, really? Honestly, I would love to see where the reference of that statistic comes from, because I can tell you, not even in my board of Kawartha Pine Ridge did 92% of students meet or exceed international standards. So for this government to sit there and throw around numbers on how great our students and our education system are is really disheartening, and personally I can't stand it. I can't stand sitting here and listening to what this government has done.

So here we are debating this bill. All the teachers want is a fair shake. They understand, again, the financial ruin that we're facing here. They agreed to a two-year wage freeze. What they don't understand is why this government attacks teachers alone—attacks the doctors.

What we're proposing, and what we proposed, was an across-the-broader-public-sector wage freeze that was fair, equitable, and that all parties could agree upon. That would save \$2 billion for this government, to go towards the \$15 billion that they've created already.

So here we are.

The member from Timmins–James Bay pointed out that one of the other things that teachers are upset about is the fact that the collective bargaining process—he alluded to the fact that members have a right to join a union. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would argue, then, why shouldn't an individual have the right to opt out of joining a union?

Interjections.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's fair. It's freedom of choice—the individual. So, the member from Timmins—

James Bay, you have the right to join a union. You should also have the right not to join a union, to opt out.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville made the point that hiring practices need to be looked at and reformed. I don't really understand where the member was going on that, saying that boards need to be a little more transparent. When it comes to transparency and the hiring practice in the teaching profession as a whole, I think the government has a duty, an obligation, to inform individuals who are getting their bachelor of education in this province of the opportunities that may or may not be there for them when they do come out from getting their degree in education.

There are a lot of young people, Mr. Speaker, who want to get in the classroom because they love children and the opportunities of actually seeing young minds expand, become critical thinkers and then productive citizens for not only this great province but for this nation as a whole.

I think the government needs to re-evaluate at times specifically how many job opportunities there are for young teachers coming out. If the government knows, for instance, there are 6,000 teachers retiring this year, why, then, are they allowing 10,000 students to enter into the bachelor of education programs throughout the province? That's 4,000 students who are not going to be able to find work. I think we, as a society, need to inform these young people of the shortcomings of what this does for them. Many of them are going to have to leave the province or the country to get a job. So I think we're doing a great disservice there.

Getting back to Bill 115, however: We're in this predicament again, propping up the misguided, misinformed decisions that once again this Liberal government has done, sort of like the horse racing industry. This government seems to scramble; they're very reactionary in their decisions. "Oh, I've got an idea," they implement it—and they implement it with very flowery titles, Mr. Speaker, for their bills. I mean, "Putting Students First": Honestly, who doesn't put students first? You would have to be some kind of, I don't know, degenerate ogre to not put students first.

Interjections.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They like that one.

Honestly, here we are, putting forward this flowery legislation, feel-good, like the home renovations health tax act. Here we are. The Liberals are masterminds at spinning this type of propaganda, and here we are, trying to make teachers—

Interjection: Do the honourable thing.

1450

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Working with the teachers, right? Doing what the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm having difficulty hearing the member who has the floor, and I would ask the members of the opposition and the third party to refrain from heckling him.

I return to the member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see that my colleagues to the left are paying close attention to what I have to say. They'd make very good students, Mr. Speaker. I wish my classroom was always that attentive.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: For attention or participation?

Anyway, this is why, again, we're propping up this government to make sure that they get the kids back in class. But, to the point, the students are already in the class.

I would like to pay some homage to the member from Timmins–James Bay. We were brought back early so that students would be in class. Then, when we get back here two weeks early—and that's fine. That's why we get paid the big dollars, Mr. Speaker: to do work here. But when we get here, the government who brings us back because there's a crisis in the classrooms brings forward motions and stalls debate on the legislation that we were brought back to debate. So, obviously, I would like to suggest and recommend that the Liberals again manufactured this crisis in the classroom because of the by-election prospects that they were facing.

Here we are again, when the NDP and the members alluded to the fact that the Liberals had done this—we can see it. We've been saying that, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned that last time we spoke to this bill, last week.

For us to sit here and waste time—literally, I would say, when there are more pressing issues facing this province like the deficit, job creation. We need to bring forward bills that are actually going to do something that's going to be positive for the people of this province, not attack a specific group or sector of workers, whether they're unionized or non-unionized. I would recommend that we move forward, looking at bills that are actually going to be productive and actually have an impact on the lives of Ontarians here today, a positive impact.

There are 600,000 Ontarians who woke up this morning who didn't have a job. I think that's a shame. We have put forward ideas to this government that are going to create more jobs—and good-paying jobs, I might add—to the province. Our one-to-one apprenticeship ratio will create 200,000 highly skilled, highly paid jobs here in the province. This is the kind of bold thinking and the kind of initiatives we need to bring forward that are actually going to do something positive here for the province of Ontario.

With that, I will bid adieu.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Do the New Democrats have more time? They do? Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It is a privilege to rise to speak on this bill today, but it is not a happy privilege. Everyone in this room, everyone watching this on television, knows that this was a bill born of opportunism. That is what is before this Legislature today.

A by-election was called in Kitchener–Waterloo and a crisis was needed to ensure that people were stamped

in the right direction. The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, driven by the pursuit of a majority in this chamber, decided that he would create a crisis and save people from that crisis. He presented himself as someone who could be the saviour of Ontario, and so this bill was brought before us, and within 24 hours, we will have a final vote on this bill.

Everyone needs to know that this bill has already failed in its primary purpose, and that's that the Liberals did not win in Kitchener–Waterloo. So those parents and students who have had to listen to stories that school won't be opening at the beginning of the school year, those teachers and education workers who have been dragged through the mud, those who care about the education system, who have watched this incredible pressure and abuse applied to that system—you should all know that that was done for naught, that the Honourable Dalton McGuinty did not get his way in Kitchener–Waterloo.

He needs to know that when you play politics with children, when you play politics with their families, when you play politics with the women and men who educate the next generation, you are playing with fire. This blew up in his face.

It became very apparent to people across Ontario that this bill had nothing to do with putting students first and had everything to do with putting Liberals first. That's what this bill was about and is about. Reporters, columnists, commentators, journalist after journalist, wrote the lines that parent after parent, student after student, teacher after teacher understood very quickly. This was a by-election strategy and that is all that mattered.

The women and the men who every day go out and educate our children, make sure that our schools are safe, give counsel to those who are in trouble, make sure that playgrounds are cleared of glass and hypodermic needles, got the back of the Premier's hand, and that has changed this province. Perhaps not forever, but for now, this province has been changed.

In Kitchener–Waterloo, there was a last desperate blizzard of Liberal flyers last Tuesday and Wednesday telling parents that their schools would soon be closed because teachers were going to go out. You have to read that flyer, the kind of misinformation that was being pumped out to parents and families all over Kitchener–Waterloo. And the sense was that surely this would move people to vote for the Ontario Liberal Party. But in fact what it did, Speaker, was it cemented in people's minds the idea, one that had been forming over the years, that the Honourable Dalton McGuinty would do anything, say anything, for power—anything.

So this bill has failed in its primary initiative. This bill has not delivered the goods that Dalton McGuinty wanted, but, as with so many other initiatives on his part, the bill is going to be delivered to us. The costs of this bill are going to be delivered to us. And I want to talk a bit about those costs, what they are and what this province will bear for years to come. There will be legal costs; there's the damage to the reputation of the education system and those who work within it; there's

the demoralization of those who work in the system and raise and educate our children; there's damage to respect for the law; and there's ongoing undermining of the authority of school boards.

1500

Let me talk first about the legal costs, because this matter came up very early on. A number of years ago, a British Columbia government acted arbitrarily and overruled the democratic rights of people organized in that province to negotiate and come to an agreement between workers and employers. The workers in British Columbia did not accept that their rights could be crushed like that. They took the government to court, and the Supreme Court of Canada found that a complete disregard for democratic rights, a failure to respect the Constitution and an undermining of the rule of law was something that could not stand. So that law was thrown out, and the province of British Columbia was assessed damages in the tens of millions of dollars. Here in Ontario, comparable numbers would generate damage costs in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Earlier this year, the Premier, his Minister of Finance and others in the Liberal cabinet spoke about problems with the wage freeze ideas and bills being put forward by the opposition. They said they were dangerous, they were reckless and they would incur huge costs for the province of Ontario. And yet they adopted those ideas. I'll say this for the Conservatives: They're right. The Liberals are finally picking up on their program. They're right about that.

In the course of debate over the last few weeks, I asked the Minister of Education to table the legal opinion showing that things were fine constitutionally; not that that would have made me feel this was a good bill, but at least to show that the government had done its homework. No legal opinion has been tabled. But as everyone in this House is aware, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has spoken up to say that, should this bill pass, should there be an action, they want to be interveners because they believe this bill is unconstitutional—violates the rights of the people of Ontario. When we violate the rights of one group, we put at risk the rights of all groups.

Speaker, we don't know what this reckless and cynical gamble with public policy will cost us, but my colleague from Timmins–James Bay said earlier—and he was right—that it is entirely possible that it will be a different government that has to deal with the fallout from all of this. This government—actually, the Honourable Dalton McGuinty—is very happy to gamble with public money and let others pick up the bill. Is this the work of an honourable man?

I want to talk about damage to reputations: to the reputations of those who work in the education system and to the education system's reputation. We are in a difficult time for families across Ontario. People face difficulty getting work. If they have jobs, they face difficulty with the stability of their workplace. There is a lot of anger, and there are a lot of different ways you can

deal with that anger. You can address the circumstances that generate it, and you can address people's understanding of what is going on. But when you go after people who work with our children and educate them, you do them a disservice.

I want to point out to people right now that if you think back to your interactions with teachers, with custodians, with the office administrators you have known over the years, my guess is, you will find many memories of interactions that made a difference in your life.

When my son was in grade 2, the teacher came to me and said, "Your son has a reading problem, a learning disability." I found it very difficult to accept, because he was in grade 2. He was a young kid. He had a lot of life ahead of him. She was very comforting. She made sure that he got into a special reading unit, encouraged me to buy whatever comic book he loved so that I could get him to try and read. She gave me that encouragement, and the reality is, she cared about what happened to my son, and my son got the support he needed.

There are people out there who can tell stories of being called by the administrators in their school's office, being told their child is sick or has been injured, and that administrator is caring for that child until that parent—worried, concerned—gets to the school and gets their child.

These are the people whom we trust with our children every day. They are not the people who are causing the financial crisis in Ontario. They cannot be blamed for causing that financial crisis. They should, in fact, be recognized for being willing to sit down and work through with the representatives of the provincial government to try and find an agreement that everyone can live with, to be creative, to look at the potential to rework benefits or the administration of benefits to save the province money, to look at how things can be done differently, so that the financial problems the province faces and the fair treatment that the teachers and education workers deserve can be matched together.

That didn't happen. As we are all aware, the Premier's main communication with those who work in our schools was a YouTube clip. Talk to those who tried to negotiate with this Liberal administration. Talk to the hand because they weren't going to talk back. Talk over here.

Speaker, when people try, on a good-faith basis, understanding the situation the province faces, to actually find a creative solution and are turned away, when they are treated with disrespect and, then, when they are blamed in the media, in public, in speeches, for the problems this province faces, when it's said to parents, "You can have small classrooms or smaller class sizes as long as we can cut your teacher's pay. You can have all-day kindergarten as long as we cut back on custodians, early childhood educators, office administrators. As long as we can cut their pay, you can have anything you want," you're setting up a conflict between those families and those who educate our children. You do a disservice to the people who work in our education system, and you

undermine the credibility of that system. That is not honourable, Speaker. It is not honourable at all.

I, like many of my colleagues, go door to door in my riding. I talk to people at the door, and I get a sense of the houses they live in, the apartments they live in, and I have to say to you, Speaker, that the attacks on people who work in education, as if they were the ones who lived in the largest mansions in this province, who drove the biggest cars, who had the most expensive clothing—to set up this sort of antagonism, portraying education workers and teachers as the privileged who had to be taken on for the rest of us, does them and does this province a disservice. That treatment is not deserved.

1510

I want to talk about the demoralization. I had a reporter ask me about this the other day: "Why would you say that teachers and education workers are not being well treated?" Speaker, I would ask you and anyone who is watching and anyone in this chamber to think about your experience dealing with a bad boss, a boss who, for a while says you're doing fine work and then, for reasons unknown to you, suddenly becomes cranky, snappish, diminishes everything you do, says that it's not good enough. What sort of atmosphere do you have in a workplace like that? Think about how you feel when unjustly, after having done the work that needs to be done for so long, you're suddenly turned on. There's disrespect. There's insult. There's a lack of willingness to work things through. Speaker, the impact of that is demoralization of people who work hard.

My sense is, because education workers and teachers come to my constituency office on the Danforth and talk to me, that they will do everything they can and need to do to look after the children that are in their care. But without a doubt, Speaker, any of us who have worked for a bad boss knows that it makes it harder. It simply makes it harder.

Today in Ontario, we found out that the Honourable Dalton McGuinty is not a good boss. He does not treat the people who work in our education system fairly.

Speaker, we've seen disrespect for the education system, for those who work in it, for families and for parents. But I want to talk about another element of this bill before us, and that is the undermining of respect for law itself, because not everyone has actually read through this bill. People need to know that the labour board, which was set up to provide decisions on labour law in Ontario, to fairly balance the arguments of all those who come before that labour board, has been given instructions. When it comes to this act, the labour board is to enforce the act. But for those who have issues, questions, concerns, who want to use the law to defend themselves—they're out of luck.

Interjection: The rules don't apply.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The rules are gone. The Labour Relations Act, the labour board, has been reshaped so that it's one-sided; it is not fair. Education workers and teachers cannot get a fair hearing by reason of law.

One of the fundamentals in this society is that we can depend on the law to put everyone on an equal footing. This bill undermines that. The Employment Standards Act has been suspended when it comes to people who work in the education sector, those who may have received an increase at the beginning of September. The law has been suspended so that, in fact, a practice that is not allowed, and that's a clawback, is now allowed—is now allowed. Extraordinary. If you work in the education system, the Employment Standards Act, in part, has been negated for you.

Speaker, there are going to be people this fall teaching in high schools who will have to go through the curriculum and talk about the fair administration of the law and how, after centuries, in our country we have the rule of law, equality before the law. They will have to answer questions about, “Well, is there really equality before the law or are some people dealt out?” With this legislation before us, a very large number of people will be dealt out of that fairness. They will not have defence. The defence will have been erased.

Speaker, this law continues a process of eliminating the power of local boards of education. Some people like their trustees; some don't. But across Ontario, eastern Ontario, northern Ontario, southwestern Ontario, people feel that their board of education should respond to them, that they should have voice and say—impact on the conditions of education in their community. Increasingly, that is being taken away, and I would say that loss of local control is of great consequence to parents, to families across this province.

Do you actually want every question about out-of-district children settled in this legislative chamber? Did we decide that becoming a trustee was our next move forward in being members of provincial Parliament? I say that's a huge loss.

If in fact we want local control, then we cannot consistently rip local control out of the hands of boards of education. We cannot say that everything is best settled in downtown Toronto, in the Ministry of Education, in the minister's office. No matter how good that minister may be, no matter how honourable that minister may be, you don't want everything decided in this room for the whole province. You will have no flexibility, no local responsiveness.

Speaker, the treatment of our children has not been honourable. The treatment of teachers and education workers has not been honourable.

It is not too late for the Progressive Conservative Party to say, “We are not voting for this bill,” and for them to say, “We're not going to prop up these Liberals anymore. We're not going to bail them out anymore.”

Mr. Bill Walker: Did you do that in the budget, by any chance?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I find it very interesting. I find it very interesting—

Interjection: Come on.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I say to the official opposition: Don't lose this opportunity. Now is the time. Don't vote for them, and let this bill die.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It's a pleasure to get up again to speak on Bill 115. It has been an honour and a privilege for me to not only have this position that I have, but to have been on the social policy committee when we discussed this bill.

I'd like to thank, first and foremost, the member from Nepean–Carleton, the critic for education, and our leader, Tim Hudak, for the leadership they took on this file, and it was a privilege for me to even be part of that. I'd also like to thank everybody who was there on the committee, because it is a daunting task. We are all very passionate and sit in the seats we sit because we believe in what we believe in. To listen and respect others and their opinions is a wonderful opportunity, and I am very grateful for that opportunity.

The wonderful thing about sitting there is that you have the opportunity to hear everybody come in—as much as we could. It was a very crammed, fast process. But the people who did come in are as passionate as we are, sitting there, trying to get their points across—because it is very frustrating when you feel that you've come to deaf ears. We all understand that you can only negotiate something when there are able negotiators, and when you can't, you do fall on deaf ears. A leader who doesn't have negotiation skills because all he's done is throw things at every problem with no output of what was thrown into the pocket of all the monies that were given out, creates chaos. And as we can see here today, we have chaos once again.

1520

The number one thing I know in my household, when running my budget, is that when you lose control of your finances, you lose control of your destiny. We have lost control of that. How unfortunate that we are even in the position we are in on the backs of the taxpayers. When we had people come in and sit down and speak, they talked about all the things they were looking to get, and rightly so. I mean, when you are the Premier of Ontario, you have an obligation to sit down and listen to the parties at hand and to be under one roof in that room. You don't continue, after nine years, to vilify one against the other, and you don't put people in a position to feel as frustrated as we feel sitting across as opposition when we're trying to get answers from the government, which we can't get. I clearly understand the frustration that everybody feels right now. You feel like your hands are tied and there is absolutely nothing you can do to change that environment.

But people say to me, “Jane, where's the clarity? Jane, what's the rhetoric? What are we trying to do? We're so confused.” I could clearly understand that when we knocked on doors in Kitchener–Waterloo. People were so confused at what was going on. I understood and sympathized with them, because I thought to myself, “My gosh, I've been here 11 months, almost a year, and it's so frustrating for me to be in the process here, to try to understand what exactly is going on.” The majority of

times, we don't know, because there is such chaos all the time, and smoke and mirrors constantly, that nobody really knows what's going on. You really have to sit down and be grateful for your colleagues who give you clarification on what exactly has transpired so you can go out, when you're knocking on doors, and people can understand what is actually going on.

When you look at Kitchener–Waterloo, knocking on doors there, and all of a sudden we had Vaughan come up, I had a fellow at the door the other day say to me, “What was the purpose of that?” I said, “Well, the reality was that we have to go over to Vaughan to knock on doors,” but at the end of the day, it's to say, “Well, you know what? I lost there, but I won there.” It's just smoke and mirrors. Reality is reality. You only needed to win there to get a majority. It had nothing to do with Vaughan.

The bottom line for us was that we wanted to make sure the government did not become a majority, and we are eternally grateful that we all worked as hard as we possibly could so that we didn't have that happen to us. I am very grateful for that.

But I want to say—again, back to the process of talking about Bill 115, as the opposition party—our leader, Tim Hudak, went to speak to the Premier in November, if I'm correct in saying that, and was given a frosty few minutes, 20 minutes or whatever, to talk about that situation across the board to have a plan. Then again, MPP Jeff Yurek here brought a bill forward in May for an across-the-board wage freeze to bring some clarity, so people could understand what we were doing to move forward.

We don't want to leave it to your children, your grandchildren, my children, my grandchildren to inherit this mess. We have an opportunity that's been entrusted to us by Ontarians to make this the best place it could possibly be. If it's not symbolic enough for you that we are receiving equalization payments for the very first time in our entire lives, then what else is there to say? We have to understand that we are in terrible shape. With all the smoke and mirrors that go on all the time, people don't understand how bad it actually is. We spend \$1.8 million more an hour than we take in, and 20% of it is borrowed money that we're spending to pay toward that. We spend \$10 billion on the interest on the debt every year. So if we spend 1% more, and the interest goes up, that's \$500 million that we could be giving to front-line health care, to the education of the teachers, to get things better instead of always—nothing has gotten any better.

We're at a place right now after nine years where we're patronized and constantly spoken to across here about, “Well, it just is what it is.” Well, it's not, “It is what it is.” You took advantage of the taxpayers and spent money on eHealth for \$1 billion, Ornge for \$1 billion, closed two plants for two votes—roughly, it's \$500 million, but it won't be that; it's going to be so much more. On top of all that, we have our green FIT program that we're all subsidizing from our homes which is double on our bill for global adjustment. For seniors that can't even pay their hydro bills—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much for your presentation. Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to join the debate here on Bill 115 this afternoon. I found the remarks from the member for Toronto–Danforth quite interesting, because I think what we discovered is that his short-term memory is in very good shape—he's been telling us about the by-election that was just a few days ago. His long-term memory, unfortunately, isn't quite so acute—

Interjection: Selective.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: It's a bit selective. What he doesn't seem to remember is the social contract. I remember the social contract. I was a school board trustee. I remember the legislation which actually overrode existing collective agreements, not stepping in as they expire. I remember a solution that involved getting rid of 5% of all the teachers in the province of Ontario. I remember a solution that resulted in class sizes throughout Ontario rising. But apparently the member for Toronto–Danforth doesn't remember that.

His medium-term memory seems to be a little bit shaky as well, because he seems to have conveniently not noticed that we've had a worldwide recession. If we've learned one thing from that global—

Interjections.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Don't tell me the recession doesn't matter, because if we learned one thing from the recession, it's that—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please take your seat.

I can't hear the member for Guelph. I would ask the New Democrats to come to order.

Member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Speaker.

We learned that debt matters and that we need to deal with the provincial deficit. We need to deal with matters of provincial debt.

So when we engaged Don Drummond to say, “Okay, how do we do this?” He came back in the education sector and talked about things like getting rid of full-day kindergarten, which of course means getting rid of teachers, and increasing class sizes, which of course means getting rid of teachers. In fact, he came right out and said, “Lay off 10,000 teachers, and lay off 10,000 education workers. That will let you solve your problem of financing the education sector.” We said, “No, we're not going to be like the NDP and raise class sizes and get rid of teachers. We're going to do it a different way.” That means that we all need to work together.

In fact, we did manage to work together with the English Catholic teachers and with the francophone teachers, because when we started, we said, “Not only do we want the salary to be frozen, we also want movement on the grid to be frozen.” We worked with the members of those two unions, and came up with a deal where they made some concessions in terms of financing for some other things and for taking some days off in the second

year. We said, "Okay, then we'll have the movement on the grid that the young teachers depend on, which sees the junior teachers continuing to get some salary increases." So, in fact, negotiations did take place, and they resulted in those teachers' unions with whom we were able to conclude agreements getting some of the things that they identified as important to them.

1530

I mentioned this whole idea of debt. One of the things that perhaps not everyone understands is that the debt and unfunded liabilities of school boards become part of the provincial debt and part of the unfunded liability of the province. If you look at school boards, they have two major sources of debt and unfunded liability. The first is retirement gratuities; the second is banked sick days. Those are the other two key components of this agreement that is laid out in Bill 115.

We're not dealing with retirement gratuities and sick leave issues because we want to be mean to teachers. We're doing it because that unfunded liability reflects back on the province, and we must deal with the provincial debt.

The issue of retirement gratuities varies greatly from board to board. The board in which I happened to have been a trustee had in fact grandfathered or negotiated retirement gratuities out for both its elementary and secondary teachers, so that I don't hear a lot about retirement gratuities. The sick leave issue is very important to the teachers in my community, and I find that there's a lot of confusion. The new sick leave plan is the sick leave plan that members of the public service who work directly for the Ontario government have; that is, members of the Ontario public service who are our direct employees.

I was talking to somebody who works in the hospital sector the other night. It's the same plan that people who work in the hospital sector already have. So we have a lot of experience with this plan.

It involves one sick day per month, which in the case of teachers is 10 days because they work the 10 months they're at work. I understand you do a lot of work in the summer, but sick days don't particularly play into that. But it also provides—and this is the piece of information that seems to have gotten lost. This plan also provides up to 120 days of short-term sick leave. So the panic that people are in, that if they have a serious illness they're going to be without pay, isn't actually true. If there is a serious illness, in fact the short-term sick leave can kick in for 120 days, and those people who are in the sector would know that at that point long-term leave kicks in. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate? Further debate?

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Wednesday, September 5, 2012, I am now required to put the question.

Ms. Broten has moved third reading of Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

I have received a deferral notice, signed by the chief government whip, asking that the vote be deferred. As such, this vote will be deferred until tomorrow after question period during the time set aside for deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has withdrawn his late show request filed last Wednesday, September 5.

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT
(AIR AMBULANCES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES
(SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 6, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this bill, the member for Oxford had the floor, and as such, we are now asking for questions and comments with respect to the presentation made by the member for Oxford. Questions and comments?

Further debate? Does anybody wish to debate Bill 50? The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It pleases me to rise to speak to Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. It should have the tag-on "and to take the heat off the Minister of Health and this present government." That should be what it reads at the end of that.

Mr. Speaker, in doing my research for today I'd like to draw your attention to a news release from the Auditor General of Ontario dated March 21, 2012. What it says is, "The Ontario government has given Ornge \$700 million since 2006 to provide ambulance service in the province without sufficiently monitoring how well Ornge was doing its job or whether it was following appropriate public sector business practices, Auditor General Jim McCarter said today on the release of a special report entitled Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services."

It also says in this that the ministry didn't follow proper procedures when they were looking at Ornge, and they had the ability to do so. This is clearly a mess that the government has made by itself, and that's why they brought Bill 50 forward; to try to take some heat off what they didn't do where it concerns Ornge.

It said: "When it assigned the operation of Ontario's air ambulance service to Ornge, the Ministry of Health

and Long-Term Care said that it would set standards and monitor Ornge's performance against those standards to ensure fiscal and patient-care accountability." Obviously, that wasn't done, even though red flags were being put up that something was going wrong with Ornge, and yet the present Minister of Health chose not to acknowledge those red flags.

My colleague the member from Newmarket–Aurora has led the charge in the public accounts committee to get to the bottom of this scandal. His diligence uncovering the mess goes above and beyond anything that Bill 50 has to offer.

This government was warned about financial irregularities and compromised patient care at Ornge. They were repeatedly warned about this, and what did they do? Nothing. They did not respond to the many red flags that were raised.

At the public accounts committee, we have heard from witness after witness about the financial mismanagement at Ornge. We've also heard about the questionable business practices that went on there. Most frightening of all, however, is what we have heard about how the lives of patients were put at risk. Actually, Ornge purchased helicopters that didn't even allow paramedics to adequately do their job; they couldn't administer CPR.

1540

The Minister of Health claims that she did not have the authority to exercise proper oversight at Ornge. She said the performance agreement was weak and that it wasn't adequate. The Auditor General clearly disputes that. It was her government that signed this performance agreement, and it is disingenuous for them now to say they that didn't have the proper authority to act. Bill 50 is a little too late.

The Ornge scandal is one in a long list of things that this government has mismanaged. They spent over \$190 million to cancel a power plant in Mississauga in order to save Liberal seats. The bill hasn't come in yet for the Oakville power plant cancellation, another Liberal seat-saver program. Then there is the eHealth scandal, with millions more taxpayers' dollars wasted. We currently have around 600,000 people out of work in this province. We have hydro rates that are soaring, and the Auditor General tells us that by 2015, hydro rates will be up by 46%. Then there's the Samsung deal, the health care premium and cancellation of the slots-at-racetracks program, and it goes on.

This reckless spending for the past nine years at Queen's Park has to end. We've run out of money to throw at the problems created by this present government.

What is the record of this government? An exodus of manufacturing jobs, three credit downgrades, soaring hydro rates, increased unemployment, increased spending and increased taxes.

Bill 50 cannot fix this government's Ornge scandal. That's what they're trying to do with it. They're trying to fix a problem that runs far deeper than what this legislation does.

Speaker, there are some other things that the Auditor General said in his report of March 21. It says that one of Ornge's subsidiary companies bought a building for \$15 million to be used as Ornge's head office and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate that an independent appraiser retained by the Auditor General said was 40% higher than the fair market value. This enabled the subsidiary company to obtain \$24 million in financing for the building. The \$9-million difference between \$24 million and \$15 million was intended to be flowed to a related for-profit company that at the time of the audit was controlled by Ornge management. Again, if the government and the Minister of Health had looked at the red flags that were being thrown up, a lot of this could have been stopped.

In addition to the \$700 million provided by the ministry, Ornge borrowed almost \$300 million, primarily to finance the purchase of helicopters and airplanes and its new head office. Although Ornge's own analysis indicated nine helicopters and six airplanes were needed, Ornge purchased 12 new helicopters and 10 new planes. Ornge is repaying this debt using provincial funding it gets to provide ambulance services.

Ornge also received government funding to secure a land ambulance service to transport a projected 20,000 patients a year, starting in 2008. Instead, the land service transported only about 15% of the projected number, at an average per-patient cost that was nearly as high as the cost to transport a patient by air.

This bill is, as I said, a little bit too late in its coming. Actually, it's a bill that probably didn't even have to be there. If you read the bill over, it spells out certain things the government can do to help with their investigation of this ministry. However, it is well documented through the committee meetings that the way of investigating what was going on at Ornge was already there and it was neglected; it was let go. Unfortunately, there were precious dollars in the health ministry that went to support this helicopter service, the ambulance service, and it was wasted. It was wasted. This was taxpayers' money that was just wasted, and it's too bad.

The people at Ornge—the ordinary pilots, the ordinary people at Ornge—just want to do a good job. They're committed to doing that, and they've been tied up in this scandal. Now we have a piece of legislation that's been introduced in order to take the heat off this government for their mismanagement of this whole file.

It's too bad that, back a number of years ago, the government didn't take seriously what has going on at Ornge. We brought this to the attention of the minister a couple of years ago, and it was not acknowledged.

Again, we have a piece of legislation that's a smoke-screen this government is trying to throw up in front of this Legislature and, indeed, trying to get the good people of Ontario to believe the government is actually doing something to get over this scandal.

Those dollars are gone. We're not going to get them back again. At the cost of health care and the dollars we need to run that ministry, it's really too bad that things weren't done a few years ago.

This is just one of a group of scandals this government has been involved with. For some reason, over nine years they just haven't gotten a lot of things right—billions of dollars of the taxpayers' money wasted to go toward projects we should have been working on in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to comment on the comments of the member for Perth–Wellington.

G50 is an act to amend the Ambulance Act, hopefully to prevent further Ornges. But along with changing the act, you also have to have the intent to change, and it's up for debate whether the government really has the intent. If they had the intent, they would have included freedom of information under G50. G50 would have had the scrutiny of the Ombudsman. That's something that if you're going to change it anyway, let's do our best job and do it right. But that wasn't included.

Something else that's telling, from our position: If the government really wanted to clear this up quickly, then what was stopping the Premier from going in front of the committee and, if everything was fine, giving his version? That would have solved—a lot of people had misgivings. If the Premier, in his position, had gone in front of this committee and answered questions, it would have cleared the air considerably and we could have moved on to other things. But now the Ornge scandal still hangs in the air.

We in this corner of the House want to move on and make things better for Ontarians. The way to do that, if you're facing a scandal, is to face up to it, open the doors and move on. Deep down, this amendment doesn't achieve that. Is it better than it was before? Yes. Is it solving the problem? No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: First of all, I do want to assure the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane that this government is very much committed to increasing accountability under Bill 50, the Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances). I'd like, if I may, to briefly speak to the key points in this legislation that will help us move forward and increase the accountability that I think members opposite are looking for.

To recap in terms of what is key to this legislation, it provides for the appointment of a supervisor or special investigator where air ambulance service is not being operated in the public interest. It allows the minister to give directives to air ambulance service providers, like at a hospital. It prescribes performance measures and standards. It allows the ministry to establish terms that are deemed to be included in a performance agreement between the ministry and the air ambulance service provider. It also requires appointment of provincial reps on the air ambulance provider's board. That's very key to transparency and accountability. Further, it provides whistle-blower protections for those who disclose information to an inspector, investigator or the ministry. It

also provides a means for the current air ambulance provider, Ornge, to become a provincially incorporated organization, which will even further increase accountability of the organization.

1550

It's important to note that this legislation will apply to Ornge's critical care land ambulances but will not impact municipal land ambulance services. The current proposal is the best option to allow us to move forward swiftly while not disrupting seamless patient care and to allow the good employees of Ornge to continue their good work in the best interests of Ontarians and the health care they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's interesting to hear the need, all of a sudden, for this bill. I sat in on a few of the committee meetings, and the executive was very clear: The oversight was there. They asked a very simple question: "Do you think we would have been here, or continue to work through, if they stopped paying our salaries?" If they stopped paying Chris Mazza \$1.4 million, would he have been there or would he have listened to what their concerns were? The problems were, they ignored the whistle-blowers. The meetings they had with Ornge—they were very clear that they made sure that this government knew of their plans. But no, they didn't listen and they didn't get involved, especially in an election year; they didn't want these details to come out. It was only when the Toronto Star reported it after the election that they finally had to take action. Then we sit here and they complain about delaying this bill. For months, they failed to call it for debate. If they were truly serious—or again, were they afraid to have this brought up during something as simple as the by-election? This government has been hiding behind the paperwork or this legislation trying to gain some credibility that they had no oversight.

First of all, if they didn't have the oversight it's the failing of the Liberal government, because they actually instituted Ornge and put the oversight in place. Now they basically are saying that they failed in that oversight as well. But it's time that the government started to look at some of the scandals and the waste. Just think of the money that this waste would pay in the line of health services. Instead, it's all a smoke-and-mirrors diversion. While they should be getting down to this and actually getting at government and making a difference or picking a fight with one of 4,000 public service agreements, you've just got to wonder about where they're going or if they really have the backbone to do what's right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Whenever we approach government Bill G50, or any time we talk about Ornge, the government wants to say, "We have G50. Let's just vote on G50." This has been addressed, and I want to reiterate this because it's a very important message. Anyone can fix a problem once a problem has come to light. Once you see a problem and you say, "Okay, I can fix it"—

that's not what we're talking about. We want to catch the problem before it becomes a scandal. That's really why we have the Ornge inquiry; that's really why we have an extensive process with the committee: because we want to have a process whereby it's not the Toronto Star or the media that exposes a problem and then the government reacts. We don't want a reactionary government; we want a government that provides proper oversight so that these types of scandals don't occur in the first place and so they're caught early, not after the fact. We can do as much as we want now and make the strongest performance agreement in the world; we can take all the precautions now, but there's nothing in G50 that ensures that another Ornge-type scandal won't occur in another area of the ministry. That's really the heart of the question. That's really the essence of what we want to get to. We want to create a mechanism that we respond to red flags that are raised, whether it's by the third party or whether it's raised by the official opposition. We also want to be able to respond to whistle-blowers. If there are any red flag or any indication of a problem, the government should respond early to prevent precious resources from being wasted, not after the fact once has been exposed: "Now we're ready to put forward a bill that's going to prevent anything from happening in the future." That's not good enough. We need to find out how the government failed to oversee and prevent this from happening in the first place. That's why it's essential that we continue with further committee hearings to get to the bottom of this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments.

The member for Perth–Wellington has two minutes to reply, if he chooses to do so.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Pickering–Scarborough East, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Bramalea–Gore–Malton. Gosh, I guess we're going to have some changes in ridings. I hope we can get these names squished down a little bit. It might be easier to remember them all.

I said in my statement, when I first started, that this is a bill that, in my opinion, just tries to take the heat off this government and the Minister of Health. It is also trying to take the heat off the Premier himself. The Premier has refused to testify at these hearings, and that's unfortunate. The leader of the Liberal government, the Premier of Ontario, shouldn't be holding anything back, in my opinion. If he has something to say, he should be there, and it's very unfortunate that's not happening.

This bill is a smokescreen; that's all it is. I read through the bill. A lot of things in the bill are already in place, as far as oversight goes. It was there, and the minister, the government, chose to ignore it, hoping it would go away. It went away with millions and millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that could have gone to front-line health care to hire nurses, hire doctors. But that money is gone. As far as I know, Mr. Mazza has not repaid any money, and whether that's ever going to

happen, who knows? In my opinion, this is just a smoke-screen for this government: "Please take the heat off of us right now. We don't want to have to deal with Ornge anymore." That's what this bill is designed to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

M. Taras Natyshak: Je suis content d'être ici aujourd'hui pour ce débat, ce discours important sur le projet de loi G-50, that will deal with the Ambulance Amendment Act—from what we have experienced in our term in this House as one of the biggest scandals we've seen so far. This outweighs, I think, even eHealth. Although it might not be the same in terms of monetary impact—we know eHealth bilked taxpayers about \$2 billion, billions—this really strikes to the heart of our confidence in the government to manage one of the most fundamental aspects of our health care system: the transport of those who are in critical condition to hospitals from accidents in incident areas. What they've done is they have abdicated their responsibility in that role, first and foremost, which I think is where we can pinpoint where the problem started.

They said—and I'll commend them on this—"We're not competent enough to deal with the transportation of patients, so we're going to outsource it." That's something that right from the outset we think was a mistake, but obviously, they realized that their health minister at the time may not have had the ability within their own ministry or within themselves.

Secondly, what happened is that the deal that was brokered to provide transportation services for critically ill patients was brokered in the backrooms of the Liberal Party, with insiders who were architects of not only this deal, but many others. Alfred Apps, again, was a long-time head of the Liberal Party. He was the president of the Liberal Party. He's well known within this House. He's well known within the federal party as well. He was there; it's on the books. He actually got paid a lot to be able to broker this deal. You wonder who ultimately benefited. We know that it wasn't the patients who had to wait hours and hours for helicopters that didn't come and fixed-wing aircraft that didn't have the capability to transport folks. Now we know, thanks to an effective opposition, an opposition that has never relented on the quest to find some truth here—

Mr. Robert Bailey: We're working together.

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Mr. Taras Natyshak: Absolutely. I commend the Conservative members as well. I've seen them operate in committee, and they've asked pointed questions. They've asked for the minister to do the honourable thing time and time again, as my honourable friend from Northumberland–Quite West says so eloquently. But they've also asked the Premier to testify at committee, which he has reluctantly—refused to do.

What we are seeing now is a bill come forward as a reactive measure, in hindsight, and of course, hindsight is 20/20, but that is how this government deals with every big-ticket item, and actually smaller ticket items that face

the people of this province. You know what they're good at? They're good at getting it right the second time or maybe the third time, but we can never trust that they'll get it right the first time. Here we are: G50 is a "get it right the second time" bill: "Here are some of the issues that our insiders missed when they brokered this deal."

One of them is certainly that Bill 50 will provide whistle-blower protection. You would think that when you're going to hand \$250 million to a guy who hires his front-line staff from wakeboarding schools, you'd want to provide some whistle-blower protection.

There are massive things that are missing, of course. Still, to this date, despite the questions that come from the opposition members, there will not be the ability for Ornge to be subject to freedom-of-information requests, one of the most basic tenets of a transparent democracy: the ability for us to ask questions and get answers and compel you to give us those answers. But, again, that is excluded from this G50 bill.

Ornge will, of course, not be an organization that can be called to government agencies. That, again, is through the conscious construct of the Liberal Party, the minister and those who have been instrumental in building or putting together this bill, G50.

But what we really want and what we've asked for is a government that owns up to its responsibility, not just for fixing the problem. I've said this time and time again to the minister: It's not enough to take responsibility for fixing the problem. We can all do that here, with hindsight; we will all have the ability to do that. But it's not enough to take responsibility for fixing the problem. You have to take responsibility for creating it in the first place; you absolutely have to.

I submit to you, honourable members of the government side, that one of the most important lessons you should learn from last Thursday is that the public is prepared to hear that you've made mistakes. They're prepared to hear that issues within your government, within your bureaucracy, don't work as well as you would like. What they don't want is distraction and diffusion and deflection of the true issue, which is, here, at the heart of the Ornge air ambulance scandal, that you put someone in place to head up that important, vital program who only wanted to pad their pocket, who was not looking out for the best interests of Ontarians, who did not have a focus on playing the important role that air ambulance and emergency transportation should play.

It should be a cautionary tale, not only within Ornge but within all other ministries you're prepared to outsource and divest to, because you're handing over the reins of really, truly important programs without any accountability, without any frameworks of transparency. That certainly is something that our side, as New Democrats, are concerned about and continue to sound the alarm on: the fact that you're building these contracts that will potentially jeopardize further the fiscal capacity of this province.

They blamed the accountability agreement on everyone else but themselves. They said from the outset that

the performance agreement didn't have those mechanisms built in. But through committee we heard, time and time again, that at any point the government could have intervened, should have intervened but did not and failed to do that. Then they blamed the opposition for not asking those questions, as if we were the ones who initiated the program in the first place. This, in spite of questions we asked dating back to 2010. Our former leader, Howard Hampton, asked, I believe, on the order of a couple of dozen questions that hit at the heart of the transparency and accountability that was lacking, and your minister at that time did not have any answers whatsoever, so she was in the dark—she was either in the dark purposely or truly did not know.

All the more reason to continue to highlight the ineptitude of this government when it comes to those critical issues and those critical systems that we all need to play a part in the delivery of our health care system, that it shouldn't be tampered with, it shouldn't be messed with and it certainly shouldn't be given to fly-by-night—pardon the pun—organizations that don't have any credibility, who certainly don't want to be accountable with public dollars and ultimately lead to disastrous results, not only again for the public purse, but for those Ontarians that have now lost confidence in our ability. God forbid you should be in an accident and have to wait for an air ambulance that doesn't come or is late, and it costs you your life. That's what we're talking about here: the ability to build a program to deliver those services with accountability, transparency and performance that I think a government that is on the job can do.

I'll tell you, I don't have any hesitation telling you that our critic for health, France Gélinas, would make a fantastic Minister of Health, and I can tell you for certain that her ability to provide oversight would be—she'd be on the job, you'd want her on the job and, in fact, you should be happy that she is on the job because she has played an instrumental role bringing about some of these issues and helping you potentially fix them, we hope.

I look forward to the day where our health minister is on the job and provides that tangible oversight that obviously was lacking back when this deal was constructed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I listened very carefully to the remarks from the member from Essex, and I appreciate his remarks in general dealing with the Ornge air ambulance. But the focus today is on the bill. We're still doing second reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

The government introduced this bill back on March 21, 2012. Here we are on September 10, 2012, still doing second reading debate and not bringing this bill yet into committee where we can make changes to the bill, amend it and bring in the public to speak to the bill, then bring it back here—maybe it's amended—so that we can have third reading debate on this.

Part of the problem is that the focus has been on the public accounts committee and the questioning of various witnesses. I appreciate the work they're doing, but I think the government is taking two important steps that have not been recognized by the opposition. First of all, quite a while back, the Minister of Health requested the OPP to investigate this incident, and the investigation is still ongoing. I think that's important to realize. The other focus has been on the public accounts committee and the work they're doing there.

But the most important thing is to focus on Bill 50, the bill that was introduced quite a while back by the Minister of Health. It deals with the air ambulance act. It brings very important amendments forward, amendments that are much needed. I think the most important one, in my view—one of the most important ones—is to allow special investigators to investigate and report on activities of a designated air ambulance service provider.

Let's get this bill into committee and discuss it there.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise to the member from Essex's comments today. I guess there's a little bit of confusion around this particular piece of legislation and who is actually blocking it. I understand this was the second bill actually called in this Parliament. I can tell you that I don't think I've seen any signs from my colleagues, or from the third party, that this was actually blocked by anyone. I'm just trying to figure why they keep answering that in their questions. I'd like a nice clarification from the government members, when they actually get up and debate: How did we actually block this bill that they keep referring to?

Obviously, we know there were really serious problems at Ornge; we all agree on that. We on this side of the House agreed to a select committee. I think the government members agreed that that would happen, and a majority of this House agreed that there would be a select committee. That has never happened. We keep hearing comments from the public accounts committee. They say, "Well, you know, you blocked the bill in the House." I just need that explanation. Someone please explain to me how we have blocked that bill. I think it's important that the audience and the people at home know how the third party and the opposition would actually do that in this House.

It has been some time now. We are finally debating it. Quite frankly, people in my constituency talk to me all the time. I listen to them about their concerns, and one of the concerns they have is to get to the bottom of the scandal around Ornge. Even after public accounts, even after Bill 50, I still think we need the select committee. I think that's something this House agreed to, and for the sake of the citizens of Ontario, and probably up to a billion dollars in expenditures now, I still think the proper thing to do is to have that select committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My comments on the statement made by my colleague from Essex—my colleague from Essex is right. This bill may have some elements that are useful in it, but in the end, this bill doesn't put a requirement for freedom of information into Ornge, it doesn't give the Ombudsman jurisdiction and it doesn't give the agencies committee the ability to call Ornge before that committee: three major tools for public accountability, three major tools that would allow people to probe for problems, that would allow politicians from all three parties to say, "We've got a problem with this operation. We need to step into it. We need to get at the heart of it." That isn't allowed in this bill.

We've just gone through—sorry, we are going through what has been a searing experience on this organization. We have had extensive hearings. I agree there should have been a select committee; we voted in favour of that. Nonetheless, we've had hearings that, even in their limited format, brought forward information that I think was disturbing to people across this province—certainly, right around this Legislature.

I hope that when this bill goes to committee, when this bill is amended, that the necessary safeguards of freedom of information, Ombudsman oversight and making sure this organization can be called to the agencies committee are incorporated into the act, because in the end, this problem will reproduce itself, either with this organization or another part of the government in future, without those safeguards.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to speak in support of Bill 50 and to respond to the comments of the member for Essex.

As somebody who has been sitting on the public accounts committee, I think it is important to clarify a couple of things. The policy direction to proceed with Ornge was actually given, it would appear, in the early winter of 2003. Some of you will recall that at that point, Tony Clement was the Minister of Health on behalf of the Eves government. The job of negotiating the performance agreement was given to Fasken's, and one of the principals at Fasken's was Lynne Golding, Mr. Clement's wife.

Mr. Clement has never appeared before the committee, but his wife, as a principal at Fasken's, has. She absolutely did say that it was a wonderful performance agreement. Of course she said that, Speaker; she negotiated it.

Interjection.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Well, the people did at her direction, and when you look at the record of the billing, she was in on a lot of the conversations. But she defended her firm most vigorously at the hearings.

What this legislation actually does do is some things that are not currently in legislation around Ornge. It gives the government the ability to appoint somebody to the board. That was previously lacking, which meant that this board was sort of freelancing out there, creating all

these weird spinoff for-profit companies, and there was no communication back to the Ministry of Health until it was pretty much a fait accompli. With this legislation, the province could have a board member sitting on the board and actually have an understanding of what was going on while it goes on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the members from Simcoe–North, Scarborough Southwest, Toronto–Danforth and Guelph.

The member from Simcoe–North asked why it's taken so long, as this was the second bill proposed, yet it comes—well, close to 10 months certainly until it appears again in front of us as members of this House. I would submit and I would argue that the government side was waiting to see the outcome of the two by-elections in order to potentially bury this thing forever. Who knows what would have happened to this legislation had a majority government been delivered to this government? It could have gone the way of the dodo bird. Thankfully—and that's one of the things I think the folks in Kitchener–Waterloo understood quite clearly, that an opposition is not only effective in bringing about clarity where there is none and transparency where there should be, but also is prepared to stand up to a government, unlike some of the backbench members who should have and could have when you saw this thing get built. You should have said, "Man, we are playing with fire here. We are jeopardizing the lives of Ontarians," yet you stayed silent. Your ministers, various ministers—you went through three of them in the time that Ornge was constructed—stayed silent. They gave it the green light, they signed the cheques, and they are culpable in this mess.

We hope that this is one measure—but the member from Guelph said that now, the government can appoint people to the board. That's what we're afraid of. We don't believe you're competent enough to appoint the right people. Who are you going to appoint?

It's time to change the government. I couldn't be any clearer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I've been eagerly looking forward to the opportunity to speak to this legislation, given the passage of the summer and some of the new information that is constantly emerging about what's happening within our air ambulance service, and one service in particular—I think you probably know which one I'm talking about. Speaker, I find it particularly interesting that the members opposite would request from us support of Bill 50 when the bill is simply a last-ditch effort to save the health minister, who members of this House have consistently proven to be vastly incompetent. Members on this side of the House have called for her resignation numerous times, in fact.

If the government were truly interested in gathering support for their burdened health minister, if they were

truly interested in tackling the problems that exist at Ornge, well, they had the option of forming a select committee. They chose not to do so. They could have presented a bill that had real teeth and real protection for whistle-blowers. They naturally chose not to do so. This is the first glaring hole in this legislation that I'd like to address.

1620

Speaker, the Ornge situation was a tragedy. It affected numerous lives, and the ripples of those deaths will be felt for some time. The inability of an Ornge helicopter to reach a young girl in Windsor—an area close to my own, in Chatham—resulted in a tragic loss of life and calls from the family to get to the bottom of what has happened. In order for that to happen, and in the absence of this government forming a select committee, we need to rely on people intimately involved with the inner workings of Ornge.

To the layman, those people are known as whistle-blowers: workers and civilians brave enough to risk exposure because they understand the terrible truths that must be brought to ensure that this does not happen again. These folks need protection in order to reveal what they know. They have called for real, stronger protections. This bill makes only a passing effort to provide those protections.

What it does not do is far more obvious. It does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers, something that I think would be clear to anybody, even with a cursory knowledge of the situation.

The bill also dictates what members of this Legislature the whistle-blower may approach, a suggestion that flies so completely in the face of the entire idea of what a whistle-blower is attempting to do: expose the truth.

The bill does not provide a formal process through the Ombudsman that will ensure proper protection for the individuals who bravely come forward to share what they know.

Speaker, these are three basic features of any strong whistle-blower protection, and all three are missing from this Liberal legislation. Could it be because they're not interested in hearing what the experts inside the Ornge organization have to say? Well, the evidence certainly bears that out. Meanwhile, families wait anxiously to hear the truth about why their loved ones are no longer with them because of the incompetence of this ministry and its complete inability to oversee what's happening right under their noses.

It's baffling to me that the government could have spent precious time and resources crafting a do-nothing bill. Our health care system is facing unprecedented challenges: a logjam within our long-term-care homes, an aging-population challenge that has not been properly addressed by the government, and a fiscal crisis of unprecedented proportions. If there was ever any time for the government to get serious about addressing the problems within our ambulance services, this was it. If there was ever a time when a little accountability would have gone a long way, this would have been the moment.

Yet, still, the obfuscating continues. Dr. Chris Mazza tells our public accounts committee that he met with the Premier numerous times, and the Premier flatly denies it. It's nothing but "he said, she said" from that side of the House, while we on this side are desperately trying to get answers for the affected families and for Ontarians as a whole, so that we can move on from this and turn our attention to the myriad issues that confront our health care system, because make no mistake: This bill does none of that. It's simply a mechanism to appear to be doing something about the Ornge scandal. But that horse can't be put back in the barn; it's long gone. This government is tinkering around the edges while serious questions remain about who in this ministry knew what, and when they knew it.

My colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound mentioned a few months ago that this bill is nothing more than grist for the mill, something to chew up time while this government stalls and attempts to deflect the hard truth it is faced with. This has been scandalous wasting of precious resources at a time we can ill afford significant waste: \$750 million in taxpayer money has been funneled into Ornge, and the result is 26 deaths since 2007, a Ponzi scheme set up by Dr. Mazza and, we now know, ignored by senior members of this government despite numerous warnings. It's a complete lack of accountability—top to bottom.

Bill 50 does nothing to address that. Where is the apology from this government for dropping the ball? Where is the remorse for a mistake that was made under their watch? A promise to do better? It's not here; I can tell you that.

The first thing that should happen is that this health minister resign her post. We know she won't do that, and we know that there is such a lack of accountability on that side of the House that her boss, the Premier, certainly won't ask her to do that. I think that's a scandal in itself, and it's wrong. But frankly, we've come to expect nothing less of this government.

Our party, the Progressive Conservative caucus, will continue to fight for the protections that whistle-blowers require and for someone to be held responsible for what has happened since 2007. Ontarians deserve better than what they've been getting thus far.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, you know yourself—you've heard a lot of this debate—that a lot has centred around, ultimately, the salary that was paid to Dr. Mazza for his performance at Ornge. What's interesting is that at this point within this bill, Ornge may still remain off of the sunshine list.

It's particularly interesting because in 2008, we know that Dr. Mazza was making \$298,000 a year—a lot of cheddar there—but somewhere after 2008, Dr. Mazza's name disappeared from the sunshine list. He certainly didn't stop making over \$100,000 a year. When full disclosure was made—thanks to a lot of investigative journalism by the Toronto Star, where this party got a lot

of its information from—he was making \$1.4 million a year. Nothing in this bill stops that from happening again. We won't be able to know how much those folks at the head of Ornge air ambulance will be making when, in fact, we certainly need to know. We need to know what their compensation rates are. We know to know their bonus structures. Are they outside of the framework of any of these agreements? Where are they getting paid? How much are they getting paid? Are they worth what they're being paid?

It certainly begs this House to ensure that there's a comprehensive review of this legislation, that when it gets to committee, all those important aspects of the bill, like this in terms of being transparent with the salary disclosure, are built into it.

I can tell the government right now, and you should be prepared, that you're not going to get this bill, as presented, through committee. You're going to have to do a lot more work to ensure that there's transparency and accountability built in. Maybe you just want us to provide that, which we are, of course, ready to do. But there are certainly some fundamental aspects that are lacking in this bill that New Democrats are totally prepared to deliver to the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to speak to Bill 50 and perhaps speak about some of the things that are actually in the bill, because nobody else seems to be doing it.

1630

I spoke before to the fact that this bill would give the government the power to have some representation on the board of directors so we've got a direct pipeline into knowing what is going on, and actually just even the viewpoint of having the provincial interest as opposed to the Ornge interest, which unfortunately, we found out, are not necessarily the same.

But another thing that was lacking with the performance agreement the way it was previously written was any authority, once the Ministry of Health understood that the agreement was flawed, to unilaterally step in and demand that the performance agreement be upgraded. This legislation actually gives the ability for the minister to direct that certain provisions be added to the performance agreement. It also gives the minister the authority to give direction to Ornge with respect to operational issues. Finally, it sets up the legislative framework that is required for the minister to have the authority to step in and appoint a supervisor. That ability exists in the Education Act, in the Hospitals Act and in the legislation that sets up community care access centres, but it doesn't exist in the Ambulance Act. So this would provide the minister with the authority to step in and take over the organization in the future if, God forbid, it should ever go off the rails again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to speak to this and to support the good thoughts that my colleague Rick Nicholls, from Chatham–Kent–Essex, provided for us.

This is nothing more than hypocrisy and political opportunism. The Liberals could have called this at any time they wished, but we're nine months later and we're still not here, until today, talking about it. It goes back to the fact that the select committee—we've asked the Premier to speak so we can truly get to the bottom of the truth and ensure that this never ever happens again. Once again his arrogance says, "I do not have to show up and state my claim and stand in front of you," even though in this House they said, "If it's the will of the people, we would do that."

It's a cover for the minister's incompetence. The original performance agreement allowed her to intervene at any time and has all of the powers that she's now coming late to the party asking for. Her comment, "We will do better," is becoming a little bit tiring in here and it's a bit of a sad saga for the Liberal government. Think about eHealth. Think about the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants. Think about the OMA doctor agreements. Think about the teacher negotiations. "We should have thought about that. We'll come back and revisit that. We maybe should have consulted those people first." Well, you know what? This is yet another one of those. They had the ability to write that agreement right in the first place. It's too little; it's too late.

Specifically, with emergency air ambulances you don't always get the second chance when you're dealing with people's lives. Every time those workers go out they need that they have that support of their superiors, that they have the ministry behind them, who are prepared to listen and fully support them. The whistle-blower needs to be free to expose the truth and to be protected, and their interest is always—those front-line workers only care about patient care. They don't care about government; they don't care about politics; they don't care about spin. They're there for one reason: When they step forward, you know darn well they're doing it because of the conviction they have in their careers.

I ask you: Why has the Liberal government taken so long to call this bill? They control the agenda. The Liberals control the agenda, not us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, speaking to Bill 50 and the initial comments from the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, the one thing that's interesting about this one is that, most times, you hear, "It's the last government that did this. It was Mike Harris." But who wrote the original accountability agreement? It was the Liberals. The member from Guelph would like to talk about the things that are in the bill, but we would like to talk about the things that aren't in the bill. Because if you're actually going to clean this up—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Send it to the committees. We'll work on it.

Mr. John Vanthof: You know what? We could have sent it to committee a lot sooner if the government had

called it, but they didn't call it. One thing they haven't done—a couple of things. Freedom of information is a really important part of this whole package, but is that in Bill 50? No. So if you were really going to—and my honourable colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton said that one of the important things is, you want to create stuff to fix it for the next time. So if you're going to fix it for the next time—freedom of information. Wouldn't that be a good thing to put in?

Another thing that I've just learned since I got here, this novel thing, how you can call ministries to government agencies and actually review them. If you were going to fix something, especially with all the experience since you wrote the original agreement—and there are really some big flaws in the original agreement. Since you wrote it, you would say, "You know what? It would be a good idea if this time they could bring it to government agencies. We could catch it earlier this time." But guess what? It's not in there.

So if the intent from the government is really to fix the problem, you would put in double-check and triple-check; you would actually make it want to work. Hopefully, when it gets to committee, we can change it to actually make it so it protects the people, because at the end of the day you wrote it, and I guess we'll have to help you to rewrite it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I would again like to thank my colleague from Essex. I would also like to thank my colleague from the government side and Guelph, as well as my PC caucus colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and, of course, the member of the third party opposition from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I want to thank you very much for your comments. Your input is invaluable.

What we find is that the government has been stalling on this particular bill. Would this have really been necessary had the government followed through on a statement made by the Minister of Health that said, "I am prepared to do the will of this Legislature"? The will of this Legislature was to in fact create a select committee that would give us wider and deeper ability to get to the bottom of this. Those were her words; those were her comments. However, this government has stalled on every occasion. They've road-blocked us every bit along the way.

Whistle-blowers need protection, and this bill is not providing the protection that whistle-blowers need. As a result of that, this particular whole issue on Ornge has in fact had to go to the public accounts committee for hearings, where we have heard good testimony from individuals. But we need more, because we're not getting to the bottom of this the way we need to get to the bottom of this thing.

They have wasted countless dollars, taxpayer dollars, throughout this entire process, and they've taken up a lot of valuable time. To get to the bottom of it, you have to ask the question: Why? You have to ask them why

they're doing it. They know. They know full well why they're doing it.

I've heard from front-line people in London taking taxis to Windsor to take care of situations where air ambulance was not available.

As a result of that, I want to thank the members for their comments and conclude my statement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to stand up and contribute to the debate on Bill 50, Ambulance Amendment Act.

What we're really discussing here is accountability and oversight. While this takes some steps to prevent what happened at Ornge from happening again, it does not get to the root of the problem, which is really government-wide. We can claim that this is a problem with an organization that has gone wrong, we can try to grandstand and make a whole lot of noise to get our names in the headlines, or we can acknowledge that something is seriously wrong with accountability and oversight, not only at Ornge but across government.

The simple fact is, governments and opposition members have a duty to be stewards of the public purse. This money that is spoken about so easily at times is not our money; it's taxpayers' money. If we are to make investments in any program, they need to be made with the realization that there has to be a greater level of accountability and transparency. The government is not a private investor hoping to make a strategic investment that will result in more wealth. The government is the people of this province, and each dollar spent by this government is money from not only from the wealthy, but also the working poor. And that's something we have to remember, the families and the hard-working individuals that pay taxes, whether on income or goods and services, and we have a responsibility to them to be open and honest about every single cent that is spent.

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But too often we forget that. Too often we forget that government can irresponsibly throw money around in an effort to make it look like it's doing something when in reality it's not. Whether it's millions of dollars at Ornge with no public accountability or millions of dollars to a company that hopes to produce Popsicle sticks, we need to demand further transparency and accountability. Too often we hear of companies that have received government money or promises that fail, not because the product was bad but because, outside of announcing the money, the government has failed to ensure a return on investment by making sure that other steps, such as securing the proper wood supply, for example, have been made. We live in a society where everyone is rushing to make an announcement so quickly but fails to properly investigate the business plans to properly ensure there is accountability.

The government can say anything it wants about Ornge. They can say it was one bad apple or it was an organization that went awry. But the fact is that this

government on the opposite side here, the Liberal government, created it; they did. Whether it's through their arrogance, their incompetence or whatever, they rushed to make the announcement and tell the world what a great job they were doing without putting the necessary steps in place to ensure a mess like this didn't happen.

We can listen to the government tell us, "Well, now we've learned our lesson and we're cleaning up the mess." But the fact is, they haven't learned. Not only does this bill not do enough to ensure that taxpayer dollars are protected at Ornge; it doesn't do anything to restore public confidence in the entire government funding model, and that's where things have to change.

Taxpayers should be allowed to know where every single penny has gone, and that does not happen. Organizations, boards, agencies or companies that receive government grants should all be subject to reviews that the government can put in place, whether it's freedom of information, a review by the Ombudsman or being subject to review by a committee. That doesn't mean that each and every \$5,000 grant means a company or individual will be subject to a judicial review. It does mean that if there are questions, though, we should be able to seek answers without jumping through hoops or investigative reports.

Honestly, I don't know what it is with this government. Facts and figures like \$100 million are thrown around like they're nothing. But \$100 million isn't nothing to me. I look at the \$180-million price tag cancelling the Mississauga gas plant and ask myself, "What could be done with that money?" In my region, that's dozens of new schools, hospitals, improvements in health care, an extension of government services where there are gaps. That's a lot of money. In fact, that's the budget of about five or six good-sized municipalities in my area. That's a lot of money, and that should be a criminal act.

The government will sit here and say, "Well, everybody promised it, so we shouldn't be blamed." Well, I will stand here and say that nobody should have promised it; it should not have been done. This government is closing travel information centres that provide a vital service to an essential industry. That may, if they're lucky, save \$250,000 annually. But it's perfectly okay to waste \$180 million because of some NIMBY protesters. It just does not make sense. It's not right; it's not fiscally responsible. Just for the record, that power plant closure comes at what the travel information centres would actually cost—they would have burned through \$180 million in about 360 years. That's what's really, really shameful.

Of course, at the same time, we've got the Minister of Education, one of the MPPs who benefited from the deal, parading across the province saying we have to tighten our belts and fabricating a war on teachers. All this talk about accountability and belt-tightening and being a strong guardian of the public purse just doesn't fly, not because of the power plant, but because for eight years this was the government that negotiated those deals they're now desperate to get out of.

They can't blame the past government, as was mentioned. They are the past government. So I think it's fair to say, on behalf of taxpayers, what were you thinking? If this deal was so bad, why did you sign it? It's the government's responsibility to think about future impacts to ensure that decisions made today don't have negative impacts tomorrow. So what exactly were they doing here? And it brings us back to Ornge.

The simple fact is, it could be that Ornge hid the money and maybe they weren't upfront. That's giving this government the benefit of the doubt. But the problem is, the structure was allowed to be created this way. That's the problem. The fact that they can now look back and say "oopsie" doesn't quite cut it—it's not good enough—because this bill only takes steps to fix Ornge, and even that doesn't go far enough.

If we were serious, we'd bring in real, meaningful legislation that ensured accountability for all funds provided by the government to all organizations, agencies, corporations and whoever else asks for money. It's not a violation of their privacy if they agree to it. I think that we need to say once and for all that if you want help, then you need to open up your books; we need access to your books to know where the money is going.

I honestly think that we can do better. I honestly believe that we're in this financial mess not because there isn't enough money, because there is—we remember the HST; that's a huge influx of cash—but it's about the decisions that this government makes, and throwing money at a problem and hoping that it goes away isn't an acceptable answer anymore. It should never have been an acceptable answer.

This bill does provide some help to ensure future accountability at Ornge, and although it falls very short of what it should provide and does nothing to address the other departments and agencies of government, I will be supporting it. It's my hope that more sweeping legislation is coming because I do realize that efforts like this do take some time. The government has had plenty of time, but I will be supporting this legislation, as I said. At best, it is a half measure, but at least it increases some level of accountability, and that's something that my constituents and people across all of Ontario deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments made, once again, by the member from Kenora–Rainy River. Again, what's in front of us is Bill 50.

I just stepped out for a minute, trying to get a count of how many hours this bill has been debated. It's been debated nine hours—nine hours of debate. On top of that, members of the opposition rang the bells on this bill.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Oh, I remember that.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes. One member was from Haldimand–Norfolk, and the other one from Cambridge. They rang the bells. Once, on April 30, one hour was spent on bells—that was the member from Haldimand–Norfolk—and another 30 minutes by the member from Cambridge. So if the members of the Conservative Party—

Mr. Jeff Leal: There were so many bells, I thought it was Christmas.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes, it felt like Christmas bells.

If members from the opposition want to criticize this government, they should first try to explain to us why they rang those bells. There's no explanation. Nine hours were wasted. Meanwhile, people are now saying, "Why did the government not call this bill?" The government called this bill. If there's any white elephant in this room, the white elephant is the Conservative Party wasting all their time ringing bells instead of trying to work.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's the symbol of the Republican Party in the States—the elephant.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes, yes. It's probably why they use that. It's a good idea. I never thought of that before.

Anyway, getting back to the comments made by the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the member from Kenora–Rainy River is criticizing this bill—actually, criticizing the whole air ambulance issue. This bill addresses those issues. Let's get it into committee. Let's get it into committee and let's work on the amendments that would come up in committee instead of wasting time here grandstanding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As mentioned recently, why did the member from Haldimand–Norfolk ring the bells? The reason being that we need a select committee; I think we need a full-blown inquiry on this. And as far as this particular legislation, I listened to the comments from the member from Kenora–Rainy River. We have legislation. It's Bill 2; it was introduced last November. It's virtually obsolete now, given the information that we have received in the public accounts committee. I sit on that committee. In 16 days of hearings, we've heard from over 50 witnesses. So much of what we heard during those committee deliberations is not reflected in legislation that was crafted last November—legislation that has yet to be passed, legislation that really has gone over its shelf life.

1650

But you know, Speaker, there is more work to be done. There's one piece of the puzzle that remains. There's one elected representative in this House who has defied the committee, who has not come forward to explain from the Premier's perspective what is going on. We need that kind of information. Obviously, we need that information to ensure that Bill 50 is amended. Even though it's not up to snuff, at least all of us have a crack at coming up with some half-decent legislation. We need that legislation. Both Premier Dalton McGuinty and his senior health policy adviser, Sophia Ikura, refused to appear before the committee. We have to find out what they are holding back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, what I want to address—again, I touched on this earlier; I want to just flesh out my argument or my idea a bit further.

The bill presents an amended performance agreement which stipulates further requirements and benchmarks that the transfer payment organization has to meet. But what it doesn't do, and what I would like to see a bill do—and this would restore some confidence in the government, restore some confidence in our ability to oversee transfer payment organizations—is: What will the government do on a systemic basis when they receive a freedom-of-information request from the opposition party? What will they do when they receive a question about salaries of a transfer payment organization? What will the government do when they receive information that there are improper activities going on at a particular organization? What will the government do in those particular circumstances, if we had some assurances that a request made by the opposition party would result in an answer, if a freedom-of-information request regarding salaries would be met with an answer?

If the government took those requests and those inquiries seriously and legislated a systemic approach, that, if we receive any concerns about a transfer payment organization, we will investigate them seriously; if we receive any complaint about the manner in which the services are provided or the quality of the services and we will address them immediately, that would be a more meaningful approach, because it wouldn't just be solving Ornge; it would be a systemic solution to any type of scandal that could occur regarding any transfer payment agency.

That's the type of legislation that would really instill some confidence in myself, and I'm sure that would instill some confidence in the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Bill 50 was the subject of a lot of questions to the senior lawyer from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care when she came before our committee. I think if members had sat there with all those 55, 60 witnesses, they would have seen that we had a very thorough going-through of this whole thing.

The senior lawyer sat there and answered the questions and said that Bill 50 will satisfy the concerns that we had. She answered those questions very specifically, and she is a senior lawyer with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. She was the one who prepared this bill. She was chosen because she had not had any dealings with Ornge before, and she went through and answered the questions. We should get Hansard around to everyone so they can see that Bill 50 is the bill we need. It's a bill that the minister has been calling for for some time now.

We know that the Conservatives, when they were trying to set this up in 2000, were looking at a private-enterprise system for partly this system. We know that it was Minister Clement's wife was the lawyer for this for

seven or eight or nine years, that \$9 million was billed to Ornge by her firm.

This was a situation that got out of control, where the professionals were not looking after—and there were some greedy people within the organization who took actions that really were against the best interests of all the taxpayers of Ontario and all the people who use that service. This happened.

We have the OPP doing their investigation. We have the Auditor General looking at this. We had all those witnesses come before us. We know what this is. Let's get down to business. Let's approve Bill 50 and get on with making Ornge the best system we can to assist the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I return to the member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'd like to thank the members from Scarborough Southwest, Haldimand–Norfolk, Bramalea–Gore–Malton and Ottawa–Orléans for contributing to the discussion here.

I wanted to hone in on some of the comments made by the member from Scarborough Southwest, who said this bill does address the problems that we have with Ornge. I just can't agree with that. There is no way that this bill—what there is to the bill, all, what is it, a page and a half? I'm not even sure how long it is. Okay, it might be about eight pages. There's no way this addresses the systemic problems that I've outlined here today.

A couple of things I didn't mention: It won't do anything to help the private companies that have been forced out of business and out of this province because of this duplicitous venture. It won't do anything to fill the gap caused by the loss of these businesses.

Something that we've been hearing about time and time again, more often now than ever, is the number of Ornge helicopters and planes that are grounded. Ordinarily, what would happen if there is a mechanical problem or a staffing shortage or whatever problem there might be—we would have some alternatives; we would have some other companies that would be able to step in, like a company that operated in Fort Frances, in my own riding. But this has been structured in a way that is not competitive, in a way that has a gross disregard and disrespect for taxpayers' money. Something I remember hearing from the company before they did go out of business is that they operated in Fort Frances and they would not get a call in Fort Frances because an Ornge plane or helicopter would get called from Sudbury to go and pick up some patients in their area. It's disgusting. We've lost those good-paying jobs in our community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I wish I could say that I'm happy to talk about Bill 50, but to be honest, Mr. Speaker, it's disheartening, this whole travesty surrounding the Ornge scandal. When you look at how they've handled Ornge and the scandal with Dr. Mazza and the whole intricate scheme that this health minister allowed to

occur, there's a lack of accountability, a lack of responsibility and a lack of leadership, which has become the hallmark of this Liberal government which is out of gas and out of ideas.

Here's the thing: The health minister has the power, the insight, the influence to have addressed this issue long before the unfortunate deaths of 26 individuals here in the province of Ontario.

This government has yet again presented to us and the people of Ontario the contempt that they have, the arrogance that they have when actually looking at the issue, how it got to be such a huge scandal, how Dr. Mazza went from making \$280,000 a year to over \$1.4 million a year. When I heard that figure, Mr. Speaker, I thought perhaps he was on the third line of defence for the Toronto Maple Leafs. Probably, the result was the same: You pay a huge amount of money, but the result is still a failed attempt to do something.

1700

I heard earlier today, during debate on this bill, the member from Scarborough Southwest allude to the ringing of the bells before we broke for the Christmas break. He asked why we were ringing the bells here in opposition. I want to make it very clear as to why we were ringing the bells. The member knows exactly why we were ringing. The reason why is because the Minister of Health said that she would, if it was the will of this House, support the creation of a select committee to get down to the bottom of the scandal at Ornge. The NDP will recall as well. We voted for that resolution. It passed. The will of the House was set. A select committee should have been formed, if the Minister of Health had done the honourable thing.

Let's be clear to the people of Ontario: When you spin the optics of "the OPP are investigating the scandal at Ornge," the parameters or the mandate of that OPP investigation are very constrictive, to say the least. It's restrictive also in the sense that they are not allowed to do a full investigation. This is why we were ringing the bells: to put pressure on the government to do the honourable thing, to create the select committee so that we could get down to the bottom of this scandal. This didn't happen. Unfortunately, this is one of the tactics we have at our disposal in opposition to bring pressure on the government to do the right thing, to do the thing that they should have done in the first place. People's lives were at stake.

Here we have, again, the arrogance of the Premier, who we have asked to come before the committee to talk and address the issues that we have, answer the questions that we have. What is the Premier hiding from, Mr. Speaker? Who is he protecting? Himself? Alfred Apps? We're not sure. But one thing is clear to me: The Premier, again, is doing a great disservice for what democracy is, and that's making sure that each and every one of us here, as elected representatives of our constituents and for the province of Ontario, does the honourable thing.

One of the problems we have with Bill 50 is the fact that there's nothing substantive in this piece of legis-

lation. And one of the things I find particularly upsetting, disturbing, is the fact that it doesn't have anything to protect whistle-blowers.

I can speak to this personally. I have had correspondence and discussions with a paramedic who, even today, is being harassed because of the concerns that he brought forward into a death in my riding. I contacted the chief coroner and the chief coroner brought this forward to the investigators, who are now harassing this paramedic. They're essentially bullying this gentleman around for doing the right thing, the honourable thing, and that's sticking up and looking out for the best interests of each and every individual who has used the air ambulance and land ambulance services. In fact, this lack of insight by this government and the lack of supervision by this minister—I'll give you an example of the type of lack of oversight.

According to this gentleman now currently being harassed, in Peterborough, the land ambulance building was deemed to be unfit, unsuitable. They got rid of the building and had to build a new facility for \$9.6 million for the land ambulance service. What did they do with the old building that was deemed basically condemned?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Jeff Leal bought it.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: No, the member from Peterborough did not buy it. However, the Ornge air ambulance service moved in to do some refurbishments. Here we go with, again, money being wasted in Ornge, but more importantly, lives put in perilous situations that may have been prevented if this minister had the proper oversight of Ornge. How can you put a price tag on somebody's life?

This goes beyond any upsetting situation brought before this chamber since I've been in session. It pales when you take into consideration the lives that have been put at stake versus eHealth and the \$2-billion boondoggle that this minister has allowed under her watch.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has to do the honourable thing, and I ask for her to resign.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to speak after the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. I agree; it's not a pleasure to be talking on this issue.

I'd like to spend a minute to talk about a tale of two Ontarians, one a person who was formerly from my riding, Trevor Kidd, a paramedic who worked at Ornge, who saw problems, who tried to fix it and who lost his job, who gave up his job to make the system better. He blew the whistle and he was ignored. He continued to warn people; he was ignored. He came to my predecessor's office, the former member for Timiskaming—Cochrane, and you know what? Nothing happened. He appeared in front of the committee. I can distinctly recall when he was sitting in the members' gallery and everybody had to mention Trevor Kidd's name, all the good things that he had brought to light in this scandal. I'd like to commend Trevor Kidd.

But there's another Ontarian who refused to appear before that committee, who could have shed so much

light on this and who could have made Ontario so much better, especially in his position of power and, hopefully, respect. He could have; he should have. It would have made us all feel a lot better. I hate to compare this man to a true Ontarian like Trevor Kidd, someone I wish—I hope—that at some point the Premier steps up and becomes the Premier and steps into that committee.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to stand up in the House today to speak about Bill 50. First of all, let me congratulate the Minister of Health for redressing Ornge. When she heard about this anomaly, to say the least, at Ornge, she stepped in and asked for a review of Ornge. She changed the management and appointed one of our best deputy ministers, Mr. McKerlie, to manage Ornge.

I want to pay tribute also to those who came forward to say what was happening in Ornge. As a health care professional, it's so important to make sure that when an accident occurs or when someone is ill and needs to be transported by air ambulance—usually it's a very serious case, and we need all the good professionals at their best and working in the best condition possible.

The minister appointed a group of very responsible people, very good administrators, and also a new board of directors. The board of directors of Ornge had nothing to be congratulated about, because they were given a very great responsibility and they failed in their responsibility.

I hope that with Bill 50, this will help to redress the situation forever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Congratulations to Northumberland–Quinte West for a great dissertation.

I've been hearing all day about how it's not their fault, that it's the previous government's fault for any problem that occurs in this province. On behalf of my riding, I'd like to say that after nine years, maybe your government can actually take some responsibility in governing this province and start dealing with the issues that you've been ignoring so far.

Bill 50 is nothing but a red herring. Frank Klees, in his opening speech months ago, stated that all the powers are there for you to deal with this issue. It has just been ignored. It has been overlooked by previous health ministers. The buck stops at the top. It's just proof of the further mismanagement of this province. If you go around how this government is failing, we're starting with Ornge—billions of dollars lost because the Minister of Health was absent from her job in following up.

We've got the destruction of the horse race industry because the government decided not to consult before going through and ravaging an industry that brings a billion dollars into our coffers.

We've got jails being closed continually, even though there's huge overcrowding going on throughout this

province, and violence where jail guards are now at risk of being injured or killed on the job.

The most disdainful of this whole thing is the fact that the Premier has been called to talk at this committee, to give his knowledge to the people of Ontario of what's going on, and he refuses. It's pure disdain for the people of Ontario. He has knowledge that could help us come to the bottom of this problem. He's protecting his health minister. She should be fired. The Premier, by avoiding going to this committee, is dishonouring this province and he should resign.

This is all in the fact that we could have had the select committee on Ornge that this House motioned and the government ignored. Last week we motioned Lisa MacLeod's bill to have the Auditor General review horse racing. Let's hope they don't ignore this also.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm always pleased to rise to speak to this important issue here today. I think what we're missing is the originality of the direction that the government had taken. Its primary focus was on the privatization of the ambulance service. I understand that prior to Ornge ambulance, the service had been delivered in a mixed model as well, using private service providers, and it didn't necessarily function too well. But ultimately, our health care system is predicated on the principles of universality and also the fact that you should not benefit financially from others in your country or your province who are sick. You should never benefit from the illness or sickness of your neighbours, of your community, of members of your community. Here we have Mr. Mazza, who benefited quite handsomely—ransomly—from this system. It was designed for him to be able to do that without oversight, without accountability.

They're having a discussion in the United States right now about their health care system. They're talking about a whole host of issues: private, public models, pre-existing conditions. The fact that this guy was given the ability to spend \$250 million on our system is as banal as standing up and delivering a speech to an empty chair. It doesn't make sense. It should never happen. It's a mistake. The only pre-existing condition is ineptitude, Mr. Speaker.

I submit again that there was no one watching the henhouse, as it were, and here we are today to try to fix some of those problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the number from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'd like to thank the members from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Ottawa–Vanier, Elgin–Middlesex–London and Essex for their comments on Bill 50. This is obviously, Mr. Speaker, something we need to take seriously, and I think we have shown on this side, both our NDP colleagues and ourselves, that we do take this seriously. In fact, this Minister of Health has failed the people of the province. Bill 50 is nothing more than a band-aid solution to a broken tibia problem.

It amazes me that this government never takes responsibility for anything, Mr. Speaker. It's remarkable: After nine years almost of being in power, they do not take responsibility for any misdoing that goes on here in the province. If they can't spin it on us and past governments in the province, they try and blame our federal counterparts for the misfortunes of the province of Ontario and what we're seeing now.

The Premier needs to show some semblance of leadership and appear before the committee. He also needs to clear the air on what he's hiding from. What could be so damning that the Premier refuses to do the honourable thing, Mr. Speaker, and appear before the committee and clear the air so we have a better understanding, more information as to what actually went on? Is he protecting the Minister of Health's incompetence on her file, Mr. Speaker? I would argue, that's precisely it. But it goes even deeper than that. That's why we were calling for a select committee. This minister needs to resign.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, this afternoon we're going through Bill 50, the Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances), 2012. This bill allows cabinet to appoint representatives to the board of designated air ambulance service providers and appoint a supervisor or special investigator, as can be done with a hospital. It allows the minister to issue directives to air ambulance providers. It allows for the amendment of the accountability agreement at any point without consultation with the service provider. Bill 50 will provide whistle-blower protection to air ambulance providers. None of those things are negative, Speaker. They may potentially be helpful.

However, Speaker, there are omissions from the bill that are of consequence. Ornge in particular will still not be subject to freedom of information, nor will Ontario's Ombudsman have oversight of the agency.

1720

As I was saying earlier, this province has just gone through a very scarring experience. We've seen an agency of this province used for personal gain. We've seen extraordinary salaries paid out, salaries that were covered by a web of bureaucratic screening—a web that prevented the public from knowing, under the sunshine list, what people were actually being paid.

If this bill was going to ensure a repetition of this kind of problem—if it was going to make sure that the public was able to ferret out these kinds of problems, make sure that they did not fester in the dark, then this bill should have included a requirement that freedom of information and the Ombudsman have jurisdiction over this operation. That's missing.

Ornge will continue to be an organization that can't be called to government agencies. The ability of the public and opposition parties to hold the government to account is, unfortunately, limited. One of those tools that we have is to call an agency to a committee of the Legislature, question them, probe, find out precisely what has been

happening and, frankly, follow up on questions that have been raised with us in the course of our day-to-day contact with the wider world. This bill doesn't provide for that kind of openness, doesn't provide for that opportunity for accountability.

This government has had an accountability agreement with Ornge, and as my colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton or my colleague from Nickel Belt can attest, the government has not even used the instruments that it had at hand to ensure that there was accountability and operation by this agency in the best interests of the province as a whole.

Without the proper structure and without the proper instruments being put in place for use by public, opposition and stakeholders, the potential exists for us to relive the Ornge mistakes and scandals in another form, but again and again.

The Minister of Health introduced this bill, the one we're dealing with today, on the same day the Auditor General released his damning report on Ornge. We saw that as an attempt to change the channel, but even then, the bill falls short.

The Minister of Health and the Premier would like us to believe that they had no part in creating the disaster that was Ornge. They blame a faulty accountability agreement, yet their oversight fell short of the instruments, the tools, that they had in hand.

I have to repeat: Without making sure that the Ombudsman has jurisdiction, without making sure freedom of information applies, without making sure this agency and others have to be accountable to committees to the Legislature, we will simply see the problems of the last few years reproduced at another time in another agency.

We've been told that Ornge was unaccountable, inaccessible, because it was a federally incorporated entity, and somehow this prohibited the government from exercising the necessary oversight, in spite of the fact that many of Ontario's hospitals are federally incorporated, and that has not changed the ability of governments to, in fact, oversee their operations. Whether they have used that power, whether they've used it intelligently in the public interest, is a matter for another debate. But it has not stopped them, when they felt the need to act, from acting.

The officials of Ornge have been blamed by the government, and, I would say, rightly so. We share in saying that there was much wrongdoing at Ornge, much that should have been addressed by those who were in a position to act and protect the public interest. However, in committee hearings, Ornge officials have told legislators that the government was briefed at every step of the way. Government blames the bureaucracy in spite of the fact it is clear that MPPs were shielding themselves from information, and it's clear that elected representatives were aware of what was going on and should have acted.

At times the government has even tried to blame this whole scandal on the opposition, implying that we could have done more, this in spite of the fact that we asked dozens of questions at estimates about Ornge in 2010 and

that these were never answered. I have to tell you, Speaker, as someone who goes to the estimates committee, who tries to get answers and who tries to find out exactly what is being done with public funds, I can well imagine that very critical questions were asked about Ornge, questions that revealed fundamental problems, and that they were simply brushed aside. That is a substantial problem for Ontario and for this government.

This party filed freedom-of-information requests. Those were denied, and the information, such as Chris Mazza's salary, was hidden from us and, thus, from all of Ontario. The NDP was stonewalled by this government, and yet the government has the audacity to turn around and blame the opposition and the NDP for not having probed far enough. We've been told that alarm bells were raised in January 2011, and then we were told that no, in fact, they weren't. We were told that the board had been fired at Ornge, and then we were told that the government didn't have the power to fire and that people resigned voluntarily.

It's clear from the hearings that happened to date and would be clearer if committee, as this Legislature requested, had been set up to probe more deeply, that the stories that the government has put forward have been unravelling, and that we've seen more than incompetence or mismanagement at Ornge. We see an organization that was fleecing the Ontario public, an organization that built a complex web of corporate schemes to benefit a few at the top of the organization. But we also see a government that was not willing to pick up on the points that were made in committee by the opposition, by the NDP, when it should have done that much earlier on.

This bill should go to committee, and this bill should be strengthened substantially.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Toronto–Danforth. They're thoughtful comments, and they talk about the issue of the air ambulance issue in front of us for several months now.

One thing I wanted to say about his comments: Unlike the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, he mentioned a number of things about why he didn't like Bill 50, saying that the bill doesn't provide whistle-blower protection. There's lots of things in Bill 50 that are worth reading, including the whistle-blower protection that's clearly in this bill and—

Mr. Jeff Leal: What section?

1730

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: The section is 7.7, subsection (1).

Mr. Jeff Leal: Section 7.7; okay, good.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It says right here, "Whistle-blowing protection"; it's in plain writing. I wish the member from Northumberland–Quinte West had addressed that.

But the member from Toronto–Danforth is addressing parts of the bill. I understand his concern that it may not

go far enough, but my argument is, let it go to committee. We've been debating this for over nine hours. Unlike the third party, the official opposition has rung the bells twice, on April 30 and on May 3, regarding this bill; they're unsatisfied with this bill and continue to obfuscate what the problem is with this bill.

I think there's no harm. The public accounts committee can still meet and call witnesses. I think the important thing is that this bill, Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, go to committee. That's where the hard work is done. That's where we can get the public to be invited, questions to be asked and also amendments to be made. Then you can find out where the government stands on some of these amendments and—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Leave no stone unturned.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes, leave no stone unturned, but at least debate this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm happy to speak to Bill 50. I can tell you, it's one of the things I hear most about when in the riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. I will say it's in heavy competition with the power plant that was moved from Mississauga, but that's a discussion for another day. It equally gets as much attention.

I will just comment quickly. The member previous did mention the fact that there was some—"obfuscate" was the word he used. I definitely agree with some of my colleagues that had spoken earlier. The Premier is the one who is clearly obfuscating this House in terms of not attending the committee—to have him be a witness at committee. It's unfortunate that he does, in fact, have something in common with Dr. Chris Mazza, and that's the fact of him not wanting to come to committee and clear the air, literally, on this mess.

We've highlighted today some of the issues that we have with Bill 50. Obviously we truly do believe this is a way for the minister to provide cover in the failure of oversight and leadership on the file over at Ornge. We do have some specific concerns with the whistle-blower protection section within the bill, as mentioned earlier. Trevor Kidd was one of the whistle-blowers. We must commend him for taking his role in being active on bringing this to attention.

Obviously, the bill does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers. Again, back to the minister: They did have the power to intervene at Ornge under the original Ornge performance agreement, as well as the Independent Health Facilities Act.

I only have about 10 seconds left. It is a shame what happened at Ornge. It continues to be a concern of a lot of my constituents, and I definitely don't think that Bill 50 does anything to really address the true concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My seatmate, the member for Toronto–Danforth, listed a number of positive points to this bill, and I agree with him on those. He also listed a

number of things that are missing, and I agree with those as well.

In addition, one of the most troubling things about the bill and one of the most troubling things about the previous performance agreement was not what was in the performance agreement but the fact that the government didn't make use of the tools that were available. My seatmate spoke about this, but let's make it very clear: There were a number of clauses contained in the previous performance agreement, there were a number of tools that were included in this agreement, and we heard extensive testimony about the strength of that performance agreement and the tools that were simply overlooked and absolutely not used whatsoever. The oversight requirements that existed weren't implemented, weren't used.

So what confidence do we have, how do we know that with this amended performance agreement that the government won't just overlook again and won't implement those tools, won't utilize these oversight mechanisms? How do we know that the exact same thing that happened previously won't occur again? If, before, there were certain tools that were available to the government and the government didn't make use of them, and now we give the government some more tools—we give more oversight mechanisms, more clauses, more legislation—if the government chooses not to act on that at this time, we'll be in the same position as we were previously. That's why it's so concerning that the government is entrusted with precious resources—that they actually conduct oversight in a meaningful manner, and if we do pass this bill and I support it, how can we guarantee that mechanisms in place will actually be used and implemented?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I want to again discuss Bill 50. This was legislation prepared by a senior person from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, a senior lawyer who has been with the ministry and had nothing to do with Ornge. She spent a considerable time at the committee answering questions from committee members. Certainly, my recollection of that—and I'd like to have Hansard in front of me but I don't have it—is that this is the agreement that's needed. It's been well-prepared. It's going to give the government the proper oversight. You can look through it. It's got whistle-blower legislation. It's got everything. This has been well done in order to satisfy people in this Legislature and satisfy the people of the committee. There were about nine people on the committee, chaired by the able member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. That evidence was given.

So read Hansard and see that it's the right thing. This has been prepared by the senior solicitor at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. They have a few agreements around with health givers across the province. That issue should not be on the table. That issue should be settled by just reading the Hansard of what happened in committee.

The new performance agreement is there as well. The minister took all the right steps, starting with changing the board and bringing in the OPP.

I find we're a select group on that committee. You talk about a select committee, but I think we're a select group on the public accounts committee. There are enough of us there. We've heard from 60 witnesses. Information has come out. We had a witness who said that his objective was to bring down Ornge. Well, we have to look at all that information that came in.

I'm very pleased with Bill 50. I think it should go ahead as fast as we can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Toronto–Danforth for his reply.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Scarborough Southwest, Kitchener–Conestoga, Bramalea–Gore–Malton and Ottawa–Orléans. My colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has been very close to this issue. He sat on committee, questioned witnesses and has seen the larger dynamic at play.

Two critical pieces that we all need to understand, that even the limited tools that were available to the government prior to this all blowing up were not fully utilized: In 2010, Howard Hampton in estimates asked about the fact that Chris Mazza's salary had disappeared from the radar. At 280,000 bucks, he should still have been publicly disclosed as receiving more than \$100,000 a year. Nothing followed from that, and in the intervening time his salary ballooned to \$1.4 million per year. Even at that time, in 2010, Mr. Hampton's question hit the nail on the head. Something is being obscured and covered up here—part 1.

Part 2: I have to emphasize again that this bill, without providing for freedom-of-information access, for Ombudsman jurisdiction, for referring this agency to committee so that legislators can ask questions and do the job of securing accountability—this bill, in the long run, will fail. Whatever good there is in this bill, it would be buried because it lacks critical tools and locks out the public and legislators elected by the public to hold government accountable. That's the weakness here.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I feel sad that I have to stand and talk about Bill 50—probably more aptly put, the red herring bill—

Mr. Michael Harris: The Ornge herring.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Yes, the Ornge herring may be a better way of putting it—as it tries to hide the real issues here. It's interesting with this government as they try to cover up things.

As one of my colleagues was saying, it's 73 years ago today that Canada declared war on another tyrant, and that's what we're seeing here. The people of Nazi Germany didn't know what was going on, and over my time here I find it hard to believe how hard it is to find

out what's going on and how easy it is for the government to hide things.

They've done everything to deceive this Legislature. First, they ignored the warnings of the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: First of all, under section 23 of the standing orders: We've heard the words "cover-up" and a comparison to Nazi Germany, which I find extremely offensive, particularly since members of my family served in the Canadian armed forces in the Second World War to defend Canada and the Commonwealth and others—the Allied army against the Nazi tyranny. Those kinds of comparisons are very insulting and, I would say, inappropriate language in this Parliament.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I know the member has heard the comments from the member for Peterborough. It's important that the Speaker act to ensure that order takes place during the course of debate, so I would ask the member to consider those thoughts as he continues with his debate on Bill 50.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I hope they take it in the perspective it's intended in.

I look at some of the history behind this, and I look at the leader of the third party, who stood here in December 2010 and brought this issue to light. Of course, it was discarded. Then our member from Newmarket–Aurora, in April 2011, brought it up again. Of course, the comments that were made were, "It's well in hand. We know what's going on. It's not an issue." Of course, with the impending election, there was no way, I believe, that this government would want to bring that issue up at that time.

After the election, the Toronto Star brought this up, and all of a sudden it was an issue. I guess we have to thank them for their hard work in bringing this up. But then again, this government promised—to get through the Christmas session, hoping it would die—a select committee if the House decided to put one in place. Of course, we all saw what happened later on with this promise. The House, in March of this year, voted—in fact, a majority voted for the select committee. Then, once again, the government refused to call it; another issue about trying to hide from the people, or trying to not get to the bottom, I guess, of what was going on here.

It's funny: When I was going through Kitchener–Waterloo this last week, I noticed a sign, and I think this indicates just what the people of Ontario might be thinking. I'll quote the sign; it says, "No, Mr. McGuinty, not this time." I think the people of Ontario are waking up to some of the issues that are happening there.

Another point is they tried to send it to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, another issue of not trying to get to the bottom of what was going on here. With this committee, it would be limited in time, limited in the power to make decisions, limited in providing employee protection. In fact, this has already happened;

we've seen an employee let go for testifying. We've seen a legal letter issued to the employees, threatening that they should not testify or they could be fired or legal action could be brought against them.

So we stood up for the people of Ontario, and we tried to force this government to actually put the select committee in. I've heard them referring to this as the ringing of the bells. But how quickly their memory seems to lapse, because really, that was all about putting in the select committee, something that they promised to do—promised this House and then would not follow through on.

The more resistance went on with this, you really wondered, what are they trying to hide? Why the resistance to getting to the bottom of it? They talk about Bill 50, something that would give them the ability to get to the bottom of it, but they seem to have no wish to. You wonder just what's going on.

I want to quote a member from their party on October 8, 2008, on one of the issues that seemed to be a problem at that time, so this is no secret: "[I]t's time for the ministry to consider additional providers for transport services. My expectation is this organization that has the contract with the ministry to provide the service does so in a timely fashion.

"There is a performance review process within that contract, and perhaps it needs to be reviewed to ensure they're living up to its obligations."

It's the Liberal member from Sault Ste. Marie. Obviously there are some issues on the table here, and you just wonder.

I go on to some of the issues with this committee. I sat in on the second session. I went down and it was interesting. It started somewhere around 8 o'clock that morning and, of course, had to be over by quarter after 10 for question period. They were discussing the use of a lawyer who belonged to the Legislature. This went on for an hour and a half, and it was getting close to adjournment. They had witnesses there waiting to testify. Finally, our member from Newmarket–Aurora stood up and said, "Look, I will put on the table that we ask the lawyer to leave. There seems to be an issue with this. The Liberal Party asked for this lawyer to be present. It seems to be causing a lot of issues. The clerk said that it wasn't out of line, we agreed with it, and now it's creating all kinds of problems." Then I came up to the House for question period just a few minutes later, and the first thing that came up was the House leader stood up, and his comment was, "I don't know what the PC Party is trying to hide. They just tried to fire the lawyer." I just wondered, how smart is this? Who thought of this? So if you were sitting back in front of a TV, the implication was, we were trying to cover something up. Is this how this government runs? Is it a matter of deception or are we really trying to get to the bottom of something?

We can see this bill being put in place. It doesn't give any authority to the government agencies to actually review—which is an easy thing to do. All they have to do is appoint a member in a manner that allows that to

happen. If that had occurred in the first place, we probably wouldn't be standing here with this huge scandal.

I heard implications earlier today about Mike Harris. I was wondering, because I thought it's probably the first issue I have not heard Mike Harris blamed for. I guess that takes it away. Even though this got established well after he was here, there's still that idea that it must be his fault. Is this a government that can't stand up and take credit for anything? There was a time that it was proud of this organization, but unfortunately, it didn't go the full step. It didn't put through the oversight that is required, and now we're dealing with the problems. All they're looking at is either trying to make sure that we don't see those problems or blaming somebody else. I think if we truly want to get to the bottom, we need to do that.

I sat in on some of the testimony, and the executives at Ornge were very clear that this oversight already existed. It was a simple matter of not sending the cheque somewhere. If you want to have somebody listen—and I can't believe that Chris Mazza would be working for this organization if they didn't agree to pay him that \$1.4 million. If the cheque quit flowing, he'd be gone.

Then we have the committee, through its limited responsibilities, trying to get witnesses in, trying to get Mr. Mazza back—can't listen to him. He refuses to appear. They've asked the Premier; he refuses to appear. The Premier's executive assistant refuses to appear. You really wonder now: If we're going to believe that you want to get to the bottom of it, why aren't these people appearing? What's the problem?

It's just a matter of hearing one thing—but as I go back to that sign that I saw last week: "No, Mr. McGuinty, not this time," I think that the people of Ontario are starting to wake up, and third place is probably going to look pretty good for you next time.

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, thank you, Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to speak on Bill 50—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We're going to try and do the questions and comments. I would ask the House to come to order.

Again, I return to the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and to comment on the comments from the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. He made some good points—some questionable ones but some good ones. Howard Hampton, in 2010, asked questions on Ornge, and he got stonewalled. Trevor Kidd did his best to bring some of the problems at Ornge to light, and once again, he got stonewalled. He lost his job in trying to do it.

The organization that brought the most light to this issue was the Toronto Star—interesting. It is one of the jobs of the press. We're very proud in this country to

have a free press, and they brought it to light. Then, some would say that the government is trying to stonewall with Bill 50 by clouding the issue, and the governing party across would strongly disagree, but there's one thing that they left out in this bill. Considering that a public organization like the Star, a news organization, actually brought this to light, you'd think that they would have included, and I hope they amend it to include, that the organization will be subject to freedom of information. That's one of the great things: If you have freedom of information and if you have a free press, it adds a layer of scrutiny to all forms of government and all forms of bureaucracy. I strongly urge the government to consider that, because it would make this bill much stronger and hopefully help to prevent such fiascos in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to speak again about Ornge. I'm learning so much about Ornge today. Yes, I'm learning a lot.

What I wanted to say today is that Ornge failed Ontarians. Those who created Ornge in 2002, the minister of the time, Minister Clement, failed the people of Ontario because they didn't put a firm structure in place that will prevent all of this from happening.

The management of Ornge failed Ontarians because they went and took a lot of money from the taxpayers, misused the money of the taxpayers. It's embarrassing. I'm not here to apologize for what they've done. It's so embarrassing, and I hope that it will never happen again.

The board of directors of Ornge failed Ontarians.

So this bill, Bill 50, will go to committee, and I hope that if it's not good enough—make recommendations to improve Bill 50 to make sure this does not happen again.

The opposition was speaking about who was missing before the committee. The Premier answered hundreds of questions in the House. But one person that was missing, that was called and never showed up, was the first Minister of Health who put Ornge together, Minister Clement. His wife did show up before the committee—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The family was represented.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, the family was represented. The wife was there, but Minister Clement never came before the committee.

Perhaps you can use your power to make sure that Minister Clement comes before the committee to answer questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to say just a few words regarding the excellent comments made by my colleague the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry with respect to Bill 50. I think what we're talking about here is a bill that falls far short of the comprehensive bill that we need in order to make sure that another Ornge fiasco doesn't happen again.

The member commented that this makes it very difficult to obtain information, but it's very easy for them

to be able to hide it. We heard something earlier about obfuscation. The master obfuscators are over on that side when they're trying to blame a previous Progressive Conservative government for the huge fiasco that was Ornge.

In fact, what we have is a situation where we've called the Premier on two occasions to appear before the public accounts committee, and he has failed to show up; a senior adviser from his office who is responsible for the set-up of Ornge also failed to show up. We've had conflicting testimony—serious discrepancies in testimony—between what the Minister of Health has said, when she has been appearing before public accounts, and Dr. Mazza, on the day he appeared.

We have got some serious issues here, and for the Premier to say, as he has of late, that we should be coming forward and making recommendations from the public accounts committee because we've sat for so many hours and heard from so many witnesses—we haven't really even begun to scratch the surface of the mess that is Ornge. Until we really know what the problem is, with the greatest respect, how can we possibly make any recommendations that are going to have any kind of meaning?

We really need to go back to the drawing board on this. We need to continue to have the public accounts committee sit—a select committee would have been preferable, but we've got the committee now; we're working with it. What I would say is that we should be able to come forward with the witnesses that really have the information, starting at the top. We need Premier McGuinty to come and tell us what he knew about Ornge, and then we'll be able to talk about solutions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I wanted to stand up and contribute to the discussion a little bit, especially based on what the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services said. She said that what happened was terrible, that Ornge had misused and wasted taxpayers' money, but she's not here to apologize for them. I think that's part of the problem. Earlier, my caucus colleague said that the public could understand if there were an apology. People will accept if a government is sorry; if this was a mistake, and they were to apologize, people could generally understand that.

It actually speaks to this bill, Bill 50: that, if the government were truly sorry about what had happened, they would have put in stronger and tougher measures to make sure that this doesn't happen again. This is a terrible situation; don't get me wrong. But it also provides us with an opportunity to make things right—not just make things right for Ornge and what has happened with this particular scandal but to make things right, to make sure that this doesn't happen with any department ever again.

We aren't hearing either of those from this government. We're not getting an apology, and we're not getting comprehensive legislation that will make the concrete changes that we need. This is a government that has no remorse, and it makes it very difficult for the public to accept this.

It also makes it very difficult for the public to accept that this wasn't an inside job. If this were truly unacceptable to this government, this government would go above and beyond. They would do this in earnest, and they are not doing that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We still have two minutes to allow the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry to reply.

Mr. Jim McDonell: We seem to have a rousing debate over this last issue.

I want to thank the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, as he brings up some good points. Where's the freedom of information that should be in this bill? Are we truly interested in getting to the bottom of it or are we worried about too much information coming out?

To the Minister of Correctional Services: I hear this Harris issue again. This organization was set up under the McGuinty government. You can't blame the previous government because it wasn't there nine years ago. Actually, I have to commend you for showing some embarrassment for what happened. I think all of us members should be somewhat concerned when an organization can take public money like they did. I almost feel sorry for the Minister of Health, because it wasn't on her watch. I mean, there's no question; she inherited that. But let's get to the bottom of what's happening.

The member from Oshawa, who talked about her efforts to get to the bottom of it—the Premier and the senior advisers refusing to show up—because there's no question that there were many contradictions in the witnesses that we've heard so far. So I think really we have the requirement to go back to the public with the true information.

The member from Kenora–Rainy River: She really has a concern for making sure this doesn't happen again. It's fine to hear a slight apology, but let's get to the bottom. One's got to wonder—and I think I heard it before in this House today—does this not justify a full-blown inquiry? Let's get to the bottom.

The more this government fights not to let information out, it really makes you wonder that maybe we should be going after it and finding out where all these arrows are pointing.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It is 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
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