

No. 82



N° 82

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 24 September 2012

Lundi 24 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Deborah Deller

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



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 24 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 24 septembre 2012

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Frank Klees: I'd like to welcome a special guest today: Major James Stocker, of the Queen's York Rangers. Major Stocker is stationed at the Denison Armoury. Welcome.

Also, Speaker, I want to extend a special welcome to Mr. Darryl Wolk, my former executive assistant, who is now a strategist with the Fair Share for Peel Task Force, and his colleague Krista Barnett. Welcome.

I would also take this opportunity to welcome representatives of COCA, the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, who are here today to share with us some of their insights into the challenges facing the construction industry. We're all going to be effectively lobbied. I want to give fair warning to all members of this Legislature to be alert and to listen to what they have to say.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear ribbons in recognition of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation's pink bus tour.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's deal with that first. The Minister of Health is seeking unanimous consent to wear the pink ribbons in honour of the pink bus that's visiting today. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me welcome to the Legislature guests from the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation on their pink bus tour today at Queen's Park. Dr. Gurmit Singh, the board chair, is with us; Sandra Palmaro, the CEO of the Ontario region; Beth Easton, VP, grants and health promotion; Karen Malone, VP, development; Adrienne Palmer, director, comms and GR; Megan Primeau; Dr. Betty Power, who is a volunteer advocate and a woman affected by breast cancer; Bruce Cole is a volunteer advocate with a family member personally affected by breast cancer; Michael Cheung, a pharmacist from Shoppers Drug Mart; Sean Webster, VP, public affairs, from Shoppers Drug Mart; and Sean Beharry from CIBC. Welcome all.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Ian McKay and Helen Grace, who are here to watch their granddaughter be the page captain today.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I have four guests today in the gallery: Alan and Nancy McQuillan, from London West, and their friends Gerald and Margaret Duffy, who are visiting from London, England.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to introduce today the family of our page Maya Stibbards-Lyle. We have Nicola Lyle, Adam Stibbards, Lily Stibbards-Lyle, Ian McKay and Helen Grace.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'd like to welcome Don Gosen, chair of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, COCA, and staff and representatives from their 30 member associations from across the province, who have joined us today for the fourth annual COCA Construction Lobby Day.

COCA's 30 member associations represent over 10,000 construction employers that employ over 400,000 skilled workers from across Ontario. Please join me in welcoming them here today at Queen's Park, and I invite all members of the Legislature to join them for their lobby day reception in the legislative dining room from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. today.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to join my colleagues in welcoming members from COCA here today, particularly two members from my riding and the area of Windsor-Essex county: Jim Lyons, who is the executive director of the Windsor Construction Association, and Dan Hanson, who is president of the Windsor Construction Association. I welcome them here today and look forward to working with them on an ongoing basis.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Please join me in welcoming to the members' gallery and the Legislative Assembly Mr. Naguib Kerba and Mrs. Donna Kerba, outstanding citizens and local volunteers in Mississauga South. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome Isabelle Tremblay, who is the mother of our page Mathilde from Ottawa Centre. I also want to acknowledge Mathilde's father, Jean-Marc Papillon, and sister Léa Papillon, who came to Queen's Park this weekend and got a great tour of this great building of ours. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to welcome and introduce the family of page Zakhar Husak. His mother, Danusia, is here and his father, Ihor, as well as, probably, his brother Lukian.

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to welcome a constituent of mine, Victor Wong, who is a University of Toronto Scarborough campus student visiting us today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for introduction of guests is over.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I have a question to the Acting Premier. One of the debates with our arbitration system is around the notion of ability to pay. I do want to remind you that as finance minister, you have increased spending dramatically. The costs of the public service are now well above 46% to 50% in wages and benefits.

It has had a snowballing impact on municipalities. Municipalities will argue that ability to pay should mean with the existing tax base. Arbitrators have said that ability to pay means that municipalities can go back and increase taxes.

Who do you stand with, Minister, the municipalities or rogue arbitrators who say municipalities can always increase taxes, that they have bottomless pockets?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that he was part of a government that amended the Arbitration Act to demand that arbitrators take into account the ability to pay. That has not had the effect, I think, that the government of the day desired.

This is a complicated issue. In our budget, we laid out a number of changes to the arbitration process that were taken right from Leader of the Opposition's campaign document. What they did, Mr. Speaker, was they voted to remove those sections of the budget.

So I welcome his desire to discuss this issue in terms of moving forward. I would ask him if, at this point in time, he would now be prepared to support those changes, which we believe would have helped give clarity, timeliness and better decisions from arbitration.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have a suggestion for the finance minister: Why doesn't he support the Ability to Pay Act to make decisions reflect the ability of ordinary taxpayers to pay those bills? Mayor Francis, in your home municipality of Windsor; Mayor Scarpitti, in Markham; Mayor McCallion, in Mississauga; and Mayor Watson, who you sat with for a number of years, have all called for comprehensive reform to the arbitration system to reflect the ability to pay.

1040

One of the arbitration decisions that municipalities regularly get upset with is for Thunder Bay firefighters, who saw a pay increase between 3.25% and 5.8% for multiple years. I'd ask the minister: In the so-called reforms that you brought forward, can you point to the schedule and the section where you address ability to pay, and how would you have made a difference for Thunder Bay taxpayers who saw their assessment fall by 39% in their industrial base?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would refer the Leader of the Opposition to his government's Bill 26, the Savings and Restructuring Act, 1996, which was introduced by my predecessor, the Honourable Ernie Eves, Minister of Finance, and which put into the Labour Relations Act the requirement that arbitrators look at ability to pay. The

Leader of the Opposition is being a little bit disingenuous, Mr. Speaker, in that context, recognizing that power exists.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did hear something that I would consider unparliamentary. Please withdraw.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I withdraw that, Mr. Speaker.

I think the Leader of the Opposition is not conveying the fact that the powers he's asked for are already within the act, and that is part of what challenges us.

I would again ask him: We brought forward a number of reforms to arbitration in the budget which his caucus systematically removed from the budget, even though they were taken from his platform. I'd invite his reconsideration of that decision.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, what a weak answer by the finance minister. No wonder he's going to go down in history as one of the weakest finance ministers in the history of the province, adding more to the debt than any—since 2008 alone, you've added \$100 billion to the provincial debt, spending is up \$22 billion, and I get that kind of supercilious response from the minister on such an important issue.

I'll ask the minister again: He may have seen some of the clippings on Friday. Peterborough firefighters were just given a 10% wage increase. The municipality was forced to withdraw almost \$500,000 from its contingency fund. If the reforms you put in the budget are the best you can do, could you please point out exactly where in your so-called reforms it would deal with issues like Peterborough firefighters that got a 10% wage increase that taxpayers simply can't afford?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In the interest of what I would call a meaningful discussion, as opposed to just cheap rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, the reforms we provided in the budget would have strengthened the ability-to-pay provisions that the government he was part of put into the act. I regret that his caucus removed the following schedules from the budget: schedule 1, the Ambulance Services Collective Bargaining Act; schedule 22, the Fire Protection and Prevention Act; schedule 30; schedule 52; schedule 56; schedule 68. All of those amendments were taken from that party's campaign platform. They chose not to do what they said they would do. I'd invite their reconsideration of that matter, as we believe it's an important matter to ensure that we get back to balance in a timely fashion.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Minister of Finance, who seems to be calling it in on this issue. You reference your own legislation, which I have. I have the schedules you referenced; I've read them in detail. But, Minister, I assume this legislation stood in your name and you would understand your own legislation, but your legislation does not mention anywhere ability to pay. You do

allow for decisions to be made within 12 months by arbitrators, and it goes to 16 months, and then it can be appealed beyond that at the Ontario Labour Relations Board. You ask for written decisions only if requested. We think they should be mandatory. We think the period should be three months. These are real reforms to legislation. If you want something that reflects where the PC Party stands, it's the Ability to Pay Act, standing with hard-working taxpayers who simply can't afford these increases.

Minister, since you've run out of ideas and you say you're using PC ideas to write your legislation, why don't you do the right thing? Follow the PC plan and vote in favour of the Ability to Pay Act so taxpayers can start affording the bills.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, Mr. Speaker, he was part of the government that put ability to pay into the act. It's there. That's why we put in these amendments to strengthen that ability to pay. They were ideas taken from their platform; I have enumerated the schedules.

Our desire is to make the system more transparent, more accountable, more fair, so that all workers in the public and broader public sectors in Ontario are fairly treated. The amendments we put forward in the budget would have achieved that. They were recommended to us by the official opposition.

My hope is that if, at some stage in the coming days and weeks, we bring forward those sorts of changes again, the Leader of the Opposition this time would do what he said he would do in the campaign and support them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: There's an arbitrator named Martin Teplitsky, who's commonly used in these decisions. He gave professors and librarians at U of T salary increases of 4.5% over two years, I'd remind you, Minister, in the time frame that you said you were going to bring in a wage freeze.

When Teplitsky was questioned about this, he said that arbitrators are not the "minion of government," and they won't respect your voluntary wage freeze. That cost the university \$20 million and probably resulted in higher tuition fees or 100 fewer professors. We're going to stand up to the Teplitskys of the world. We're going to have independent arbitrators who will respect the ability to pay and taxpayers who pay the bills.

Minister, I ask you: Who calls the shots? Is it the province of Ontario or rogue arbitrators like your friend Martin Teplitsky?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that arbitrators routinely have rejected the amendments you put into the act when you said they would work. I will point you to the Hansard; the quotes are there.

We brought forward a number of changes that would, in fact, provide for clarity, transparency and better accountability on arbitrated decisions. These were recommended to us by the official opposition. We put them into the budget bill in the form of a number of schedules.

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing reminds me municipalities were very supportive of them.

I would again urge my colleague, the leader of the official opposition, that if you're willing to support those, we will likely bring them forward at some point in time again. This time, we hope that the position of the official opposition will be consistent, to do what they said they would do, which, in this case, they failed to do.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think the minister must be distracted by other motivations. The minister knows that AMO in fact called your reforms weak. They said that they would not address ability to pay; ours will.

Another rogue arbitrator named Kevin Burkett recently gave 3,400 electricity workers increases of 6% over two years at Ontario Power Generation. Mind you, this was at a time there was supposed to be a voluntary wage freeze. Mr. Burkett said there is "no binding force or effect" to the Liberal two-year wage freeze.

They're thumbing their noses not only at you, Minister; they're thumbing their noses at taxpayers across the province of Ontario. We say enough is enough. It's time for bold reform that'll respect the ability of taxpayers to pay the bills. We'll look to local economic circumstances. We'll toss out the rogue arbitrators and put in place an independent panel that will have respect for taxpayers who pay the bills.

Will you support our legislation and bring real change for the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Acting Premier.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, when the Leader of the Opposition was given the opportunity to make the arbitration system clear, transparent and more fair, not only did he not support it, he took the sections out of the budget that would have done just that. He disappointed the mayors of this province when he did that. They were supportive of those initiatives.

Those changes would have brought greater clarity to decisions. They would have improved and enhanced the ability-to-pay provisions that the government he was part of put into the legislation. The Leader of the Opposition can't have it both ways. You can't demand change, then vote against change. You can't ask for fairness and clarity, then vote against clarity and fairness.

This is about doing the right thing that's fair and responsible for all workers in the public and broader public sectors. I'd urge the leader of the second party to reconsider his decision to not do what he said he would do and support those amendments which will enhance the ability to pay and provide greater clarity and transparency to all arbitrator decisions.

1050

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. The government has committed to releasing documents relating to cancelled private power deals in Mississauga and Oakville not too long from now, a little bit later today. While we wait, I'm just wondering if the Acting Premier can give us an estimate of the cost of cancelling those plants.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The leader of the third party is quite right. We will be complying with the order of the Speaker, as I always said. All of the documents going out with respect to the Oakville and the Mississauga matters will be released. The Oakville costs we've spoken to in the documents earlier—sorry, the Mississauga costs we spoke to in the documents earlier.

I am pleased to advise the House that agreements have been reached which will result in the relocation of the Oakville gas plant to the Lennox facility in eastern Ontario. I'll be speaking to that later on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the government said that they're still negotiating with the private power interests. It looks like they've cooked up yet another deal. I guess the question that we really have is, what's the cost of the deal that they cooked up this time? Can the Acting Premier tell us exactly what's on the table? How much is it that the company, that did not build a power plant now in Oakville, is going to gain at the taxpayers' expense?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The memoranda—there are two of them—relating to the relocated power plant to eastern Ontario will be released today. Both will be released today, as will a statement with respect to costs: the sunk, unrecoverable costs. The unrecoverable costs from that are \$40 million. The cost of the net revenue requirement, the monthly cost of the new contract, is less than the old contract, and equipment that has been purchased will be repurposed and has gone into part of the calculation of the lower, new contract.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Only the Liberals can congratulate themselves on the mess that they've created here, Speaker.

When the Liberal government embraced private power, they started signing these great deals. They promised they'd be taking the politics right out of electricity, with the goal of having a system that was transparent and accountable and, most importantly for families, affordable. Instead, we had a Liberal campaign team ripping up contracts, scrambling to keep them from the public, and the most expensive electricity in the entire nation, Speaker.

Is the government proud of what they are giving to the people? Are they proud of what they're getting in these private power deals?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, we did what we were elected to do, and that's to listen to local residents

and listen to elected officials. We did not proceed with either of those plants, a position supported by both opposition parties. We have now entered into negotiations and relocated both plants: the Mississauga one to an OPG site in Sarnia–Lambton, the Oakville one to an OPG site in Lennox, where there's already a gas and oil facility. We have done the right thing by listening to the people of the local municipalities, and both plants will contribute to the needs of the power system in the province of Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Acting Premier. Unfortunately, after nearly a decade in office, people see a bit of a pattern with this government. A government that was elected to put people first has been putting themselves first. A government that was elected on a promise of change now plays the same cynical games that they used to be critical of. Does the Acting Premier realize that the private power mess that they are in now is a sign that this government has long ago lost its way? If so, what exactly are they going to be able to do about it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Energy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thanks very much, Speaker. As I indicated earlier, your ruling was clear with respect to all of the documents, as I indicated the day you delivered it; they'll all be released today.

We listened to the local residents in both Mississauga and Oakville. We listened to the elected officials. We decided not to proceed with the plants; interestingly, a position both opposite parties took. But we didn't stop there. We negotiated hard, we've relocated both plants, they will contribute to the needs of the system, and we've delivered value to the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's much better. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, who they listened to were Liberal campaign operatives during the campaign.

People want to see their government focused on the challenges that they're facing, not the challenges that the governing party happens to be facing. Now, after nearly two years and hundreds of millions of dollars, we're beginning to get some of the facts behind some of these private power deals—deals made by the Liberal Party and paid for by the people of this province.

Has the government learned any lessons yet, Speaker?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Just to remind us, when all parties in this House took the position—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: —that those power plants would not proceed, all parties knew there was a cost attached to them. Contracts had been signed.

What have we done? We have negotiated hard, following up on our commitment to residents and local officials, relocated Mississauga to an OPG site in Sarnia–Lambton and, as of this morning, agreed to relocate the Oakville plant to an OPG site in Lennox, in eastern Ontario, where there has long been a gas-fired facility. We've followed up on our commitment to residents and our commitment to the people of Ontario, negotiated hard and delivered value to the system for the people of the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To all members, I did say please.

Leader?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats, of course, are the only party in the Legislature who proudly and consistently stand against any kind of private power scheme.

The people of this province—the people of Ontario—are worried about some pretty fundamental things. They're worried about holding on to a job; they're worried about finding a doctor. But they're also scrambling to pay the bills at the end of each and every month, and they're paying the highest electricity bills in the entire country. They have a right to know how their money is being spent.

Will the government acknowledge to the good people of this province that they were wrong in the first place to try to hide the cost of cancelling the gas plants from the hard-working families who pay the tab, and will they commit to being transparent in future, the way they used to be in the past?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I say, Speaker, when all parties made the commitment not to proceed with those plants, it was very clear to all parties—very clear—that there was a cost to that commitment. We've negotiated hard to relocate the plants and deliver value for Ontarians at the same time as we've been rebuilding an electricity system, bringing on the generation that people need, getting out of coal and cleaning up the generation system so that we're better able to breathe the air in this province. The fact of the matter is, during four of the hottest months in Ontario history, we had reliable power, enough power, and it was cleaner than ever before.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Speaker, I've had the privilege of sitting in this chamber for 22 years, and never have I seen such a shameful display from a government. This will be a sad week for democracy in Ontario as the Liberal government is held accountable and could be reprimanded by this House for its grotesque abuse of power. The cancellation of two power plants amounted to nothing more than a selfish and desperate political manoeuvre to cling to power.

So I ask the minister, why is he a willing participant in this scandal? Why is he determined to protect the very same people who have ruined his career?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I said in my earlier answers, when the Speaker gave the ruling, we indicated we would comply. All of the documents are going out today. I indicated very clearly that I would comply. All the documents are going out today—thousands and thousands of pages of documents for all to see.

We happen not only to have taken the position endorsed by the party opposite and third party not to proceed with the plants, knowing there was a cost, as all did; we negotiated hard, have relocated the plants, have agreements for both, and they'll contribute good value to the people of the province of Ontario as they're built and plugged into the supply system.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again, to the Minister of Energy: The eyes of the parliamentary Commonwealth will be watching as the Liberal government's arrogance and profound sense of entitlement meets this chamber's powers of accountability.

The McGuinty government has delayed releasing the power plant documents for months. At every turn, they made fallacious arguments to justify their secrecy. Liberal members of the estimates committee, acting on instructions from the Premier, obstructed and stymied the committee from fulfilling its mandate. This is why, Speaker, we will pursue the contempt motion against the minister to combat the dangerous precedent set by this government and to ensure that abuses of power do not go unchecked—doing our jobs, I say to the minister.

So I ask the minister: Who cancelled the two power plants, and why are you protecting them?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It took me a while to click in, but I believe the member may have used a word that would not be acceptable in the House. I just re-caution him and remind him that, not having a—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me.

Interjection: Throw him out, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And you, as well.

I caution him about that. I don't have a thesaurus in my pocket, but I do believe he did say something, and I would caution anyone from using unparliamentary language.

Minister of Energy?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think members need to realize that there was an order by this House for the production of all documents related to the Mississauga and Oakville plants. That order will be fully complied with. Within about an hour, all members will have access to every single document.

I must stand here, Mr. Speaker, and say how disgusted I have been by the callous and vindictive way in which the opposition have come to the table to try to negotiate this. The Minister of Energy is a man of honour. He is a minister who rolled up his sleeves and sat down, as he just announced, and got a deal in this matter. He has

worked to protect the public interest, and the attitude and approach of the official opposition have been beneath them and have been beneath any member of this House. They owe all of us an apology for their behaviour, particularly to the Minister of Energy.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to remind all members—and I'll try it again. I would like to remind all members that when I stand, it gets quiet. Number two: When I do get that quiet, you don't use it as an opportunity to give your parting shots. I do not want this to escalate; I want it to be brought down.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Centric Health Corp., one of the fastest-growing for-profit health care organizations in North America, recently purchased Shouldice Hospital. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Shouldice is operating as a for-profit hospital under an exemption, but now the minister must approve the transfer of the hospital to Centric.

The minister has frequently spoken about the importance of not-for-profit care. My question is simple: Is the minister going to allow the sale of this hospital to an American for-profit company?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I know this is an issue that has captured the attention of many people across Ontario.

What I can tell you, Speaker, is that there is an application that is before the ministry; there is due diligence being done at this time. I can assure you that our commitment is to publicly funded health care; to public, not-for-profit care. We will not be adding any new for-profit beds in this province. Our commitment is to do what's right for patients.

There are a small number of hospitals that were grandfathered when medicare came into effect 50 years ago. Shouldice is one of those hospitals. I can assure you that I will look carefully when it does reach my desk.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: In the process of due diligence, I'm sure the minister is receiving just as many letters as I am from nurses, from physicians and from many, many concerned Ontarians. They are concerned about the impact on patients, the precedent this sale will be setting and the government's ability to regulate the care at this hospital. They simply want the minister to uphold the Canada Health Act.

I ask the minister again, will she listen to the care providers and to the people of Ontario and reject this sale?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that I always listen very, very carefully to the patients and to the care providers. Our commitment to public health care is as clear as any government's

could be. This is in the early stages of application. Due diligence, as I said, is under way now. I will make this decision with the best interests of patients in mind.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation. As a member from Toronto and from Scarborough Southwest, I can tell you that one of the priorities on the minds of my constituents is jobs and the economy. On Friday in my constituency office I spent the day meeting with constituents who are concerned about many things, including jobs and the economy.

We often hear members of the opposition talking down Ontario's economy. At the same time, every economic indicator that I've seen would confirm that our economy is growing and our economic plan is working. I understand that Site Selection magazine has recently recognized Ontario as being the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada. This is a magazine that comes out of Georgia in the United States.

Can the minister outline what the recognition says about Ontario and the progress we are making to build a strong economy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question. I'm very pleased that Ontario has been recognized by Site Selection magazine as the most competitive province in Canada for the third straight year.

Site Selection magazine is a prestigious international publication. Their focus is on economic development and corporate real estate. The honour is presented to the provincial economic development agency that performed the best between June 2011 and May 2012, and our government has been recognized for our partnerships with companies like Flying Colours, Knorr Brake, Cytex, IBM and the auto sector. This third party recognition confirms that Ontario is Canada's most competitive jurisdiction and one of the best places in the world in which to invest. Our efforts to build and strengthen our economy during these uncertain times are working.

Ontario is recognized the world over because of the strength and competitiveness of our economy. It's time for the opposition to stop talking down our economy and join us in trying to build it up. Third party recognition indicates we're going in the right direction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Interjections.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Maybe we should get a copy of Site Selection magazine to the opposition so they can read it.

I'm always rewarded to see people outside Ontario recognizing our success here in Ontario. Sometimes Ontarians can get caught up in the negativity of the opposition parties when we together have so much to be proud of. It's great to hear Ontario's economic plan is so well regarded internationally.

At the same time, I'd be interested in knowing whether the success is mirrored throughout the province. I'm

wondering what else Site Selection magazine's analysis of Canadian cities says about Ontario's communities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I find it hard to believe that the opposition just don't want to hear good news about Ontario. It's pretty obvious by the heckling on a very positive question.

But let me share with you some of the findings of Site Selection magazine regarding some of those cities and communities, many of which are represented by those members.

Toronto was in the top three cities for corporate development, with 15 projects under way. Hamilton was number one, with more than \$527 million in corporate facility projects. London is expected to have 3.6% growth this year, the sixth highest in Canada. The Belleville-Quinte region was recognized for helping bring more than 600 jobs to the area, and Waterloo region was recognized for a number of expansions.

While this is great news for Ontario and it's great news that we have created 325,000 net jobs since the recession, it's also important to note that this success translates throughout the province. The opposition continue to talk these efforts down, but we'll continue to work with communities to build our community up.

1110

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

In our parliamentary system of government, the opposition is compelled to hold the government to account—this is our job—and it is increasingly clear that either the Minister of Energy or the Premier signed off on the decision to withhold the Oakville and Mississauga power plant documents until after the by-elections were over. But it now appears that the minister is the one who has to answer for this most egregious political manoeuvre. If there is any hope of correcting this unprecedented deceit, the full extent of the Liberal campaign team's involvement in cancelling the gas plants must be revealed.

Will the minister commit to this House today that all the internal emails to and from the Liberal campaign team relating to the cancellation of the gas plants will be included in the documents that he releases today?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, the opposition cannot take good news. The simple fact of the matter is that the estimates committee had asked for certain documents. We tried to put forward—in fact, we put forward the case that there were certain public interests that needed to be balanced. There were discussions that were held between the House leaders. The House leaders indicated that they did not care about these public interests, that they wanted the documents as requested by the committee. As a result, in a very short period of time, I think in roughly about half an hour, all the documents that were asked for by the committee will be made public.

They will be tabled in the Legislature and copies will be made available for any members who are interested, as well as the general public.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock for a moment, please.

In the to and fro of question period and the volume—the noise that goes on—at any time, I do my best to hear all of the questions and all of the answers. I do not always catch the things that are said that may or may not be somewhat unparliamentary or very unparliamentary. I hold the members responsible for using language that is deemed to be parliamentary. If at any time anyone does use unparliamentary language, it is not just my job to catch it; it's all of our jobs to catch it, in that all of us are charged with trying to find a way to make our point, to ask our question, to answer the question in a way that's deemed appropriate in this place.

Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: My supplementary goes back to the Minister of Energy.

The people of Ontario rightly expect that each and every member of this House will uphold the public trust, acting in the best interests of the people we're privileged to represent. However, this government has violated these principles of trust, putting their selfish political interests ahead of the people of Ontario.

It appears that in following orders, the Minister of Energy's actions have potentially placed him in contempt of the Legislature. We implore the Minister of Energy to make his next decision the right one, which would begin to restore some semblance of credibility to his tattered reputation. Will he guarantee that the full and complete scope of the involvement of the Liberal campaign team in the decision to cancel the gas plants—all correspondence, internal emails, telephone messages, notes from meetings—will be disclosed with the document that he releases today?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, as I said, all the documents that were requested by the committee will be made public. But let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, and through you, let me tell members of the House about the hard work of the Minister of Energy. Let me quote from a statement that came out this morning. This is the work of the Minister of Energy:

"[A]n agreement has been reached between the Ontario Power Authority and TransCanada Energy to relocate the proposed 900-megawatt natural gas plant originally planned for Oakville to lands at Ontario Power Generation's Lennox generating station site near Bath, in eastern Ontario's Lennox and Addington county....

"The new site will take advantage of existing transmission lines and other infrastructure, as well as the expertise of local workers. The construction of the plant is expected to provide up to 600 construction jobs and approximately 25 permanent jobs.

"The total costs that cannot be repurposed at the new site are approximately \$40 million. This includes all payments"—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The government announced last week that the Eglinton rail line will be run by a private company. The TTC says that it will not subsidize the operating costs of this privately operated line.

My question is, why is the government pursuing a plan that will either increase provincial costs or hike fares and reduce services for transit users?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. I think the member clearly doesn't understand Infrastructure Ontario's alternate financing and procurement. It's a system that has evolved tremendous savings for the province of Ontario. It's a system that has been accepted by anybody who has anything to do with procurement, whereby the person who is delivering the project is responsible for the cost of any overruns or the cost of not finishing on time.

We have done 52 projects worth \$21 billion in the province of Ontario. We have saved billions of dollars from our original budgets. It's one of the most successful processes in North America. I will wait for the supplementary to answer this issue a little more specifically.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I say to this minister and to this government: We are about to embark on another 407, and you took them to court, even.

The government's plan to shut out the TTC from operating the Eglinton LRT means one of three things: The province is going to have to subsidize a private operator; fares are going to increase; or service levels are going to be reduced.

Why is the government increasing provincial costs and hurting public transit users by shutting out the TTC?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The NDP is off the rails on this one. First of all, they have no plan. We are committed to building the safe, reliable transit that Toronto commuters expect and deserve. Customers will pay one fare, and we will ensure seamless transfers between the LRT, subways and buses. We have been clear from day one that we are committed to using alternate financing and procurement to deliver Toronto's new LRT lines. In fact, Metrolinx have been at the table with the TTC for the last five or six months. They are about one centimetre away from negotiating, by agreement, the process to move forward with \$8.4 billion of investment in the city of Toronto's transit—\$8.4 billion delivered by this caucus, when that caucus has no plan whatsoever for transit.

Interjections.

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

New question. The member from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

New question. The member from Scarborough—Agin-court.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Students have returned to post-secondary institutions as of this month to pursue their education. This is also a period of time in which many new students are entering our system and getting their schedules, figuring out the books they need for class and organizing themselves to manage their time.

The Ontario Student Assistance Program, also known as OSAP, helps Ontario students pay for their education. This loan helps students keep more of the income they earn while they're in school. Many students in Scarborough—Agin-court have brought to my attention they have not received their OSAP funds yet.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, can the minister let us know if the students are receiving their OSAP funds on time?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member from Scarborough—Agin-court for her question. For 50 years, this week, the third week of September—or the past week—would normally be the week in which students would get their OSAP funds. In fact, it was several weeks ago that students started to get their OSAP funds. As of last week, with our new OSAP express service, no one had to wait in line—no lineups this year. This was the first time in Ontario history where if you went to a campus there were not lineups for OSAP. Why was that, Mr. Speaker? Because it was all online this year. Students went online; they could sit in their bedrooms, or they could do it in the classroom. The lineups are gone.

1120

The second thing we have to report, Mr. Speaker, is that as of today, 215,000 students, 86% of those who applied for OSAP, already have their money. That's a record—

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

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Minister. It's great to hear that students are getting their OSAP faster than last year because of improvements our government has made to the system.

I was lucky to receive post-secondary education here in Ontario. As an immigrant, I benefited from the financial assistance provided through OSAP. When looking back, the single best investment I ever made in my life was post-secondary education.

Each year, OSAP enables many students to pursue education in their preferred field of study. If not, they would have to work for more hours while taking heavy course work in a college or university.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, how is the minister ensuring that our students have access to the financial assistance they need?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Just to finish the math that I started before I was interrupted, that leaves about 30,000 students who haven't yet got their OSAP but will shortly. They get it within five days of registering. These are stu-

dents who either did not provide complete information, or a handful of colleges and universities have not been able to adapt to the new software program, which they will be on track for in January. This is the biggest step forward we've had in turnaround.

They're also getting \$1,680 in universities, and \$730, Mr. Speaker, because this government has tripled the amount of money for student aid in the last eight years from just over \$300 million to over \$1 billion. We capped student debt at \$7,300.

The party opposite, the ones who were just chirping, who are so concerned about student aid, the ones that never have a political motive for anything, put students behind their own political interest and cut student aid by 48%, followed by the second party, who then went and cut it a further 41%—

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

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Energy. Here we go again: another sole-sourced contract announced by the Minister of Energy yet again this morning. A little history: This summer, when pressed, the Liberals finally came clean with the fact that the cancellation of the Mississauga gas plant was political. It was a seat-saver. Then they finally came clean with the amount of \$190 million, and we don't even get one megawatt of power for that amount of money. Then we learned there's a sole-sourced contract to relocate the plant to Lambton. Now they are pulling the same stunt here in Lennox.

My question to the minister is, how much cancellation money is buried into that new sole-sourced contract?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, we listened to the residents, and you know what? All three parties supported not moving ahead with those two plants—all three, all of them in this House. So we negotiated the relocation of Mississauga with the same proponent that had won the competitive process, competitive agreement, to begin with. It's a relocation. We've negotiated the relocation of Oakville with the same proponent, the same entity, that won the competitive one in the first place. They're the same-sized plants, the same type of plants, to contribute electricity to the same system for the people of the province of Ontario. This is good value for the people of Ontario pursuant to the contracts originally signed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, you just announced another scandal in the making, another secret sole-sourced contract to Lennox. Minister, you've kept hidden from us for two years the cost of this politically motivated cancellation of the Oakville power plant, and now we know why. They're burying additional cancellation fees into yet another sole-sourced contract.

Speaker, when will this charade end? Minister, when will we know the true cost of your contemptuous politics?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: You know, Speaker, the party opposite supported not moving ahead with the Oakville plant; they supported that. There's a cost to that. So what have we done? We have taken the same-sized plant with the same proponent—it's going to be contributing to the electricity system on an OPG site near Lennox. It's going to mean 600-plus construction jobs, millions of dollars' worth of investment, many permanent jobs and taxes most probably to the local municipality. I think that's good value for the electricity system, good value for the people of Ontario and certainly good value for eastern Ontario.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Acting Premier. Thanksgiving weekend is usually the busiest weekend—is the busiest weekend—for students returning home to their families across the province, and definitely so in northern Ontario. ONTC trains and buses on that weekend are now always standing room only. The ONTC, we've just learned, has cancelled the contract to lease four new buses, and the Northlander will no longer be running after September 28, right before the Thanksgiving weekend. Shutting down the Northlander before Thanksgiving will certainly leave some students behind, and it's also not a smart business decision.

With less buses and no train, why does your government want to leave northerners behind?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker, I would like to inform the House what the Northlander is costing the people of Ontario. In 2008-09, the subsidy was \$14,568,000; there was a ridership of 34,389 people. In 2009-10, there was a subsidy of \$13.8 million and a ridership of 31,000. In 2010-11, there was a subsidy of \$12.8 million, with a ridership of 34,000 people. In 2011-12, there was a subsidy of \$14.6 million, with a ridership of \$39.9 million. The four-year average per rider is \$395. That's just not sustainable in the present or in the future, so we are going to be putting in a much more effective, efficient transportation system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Acting Premier: The Thanksgiving weekend is the busiest weekend for the Northlander and ONTC buses, okay? Closing the train right before Thanksgiving seems like cruel and unusual punishment. We're not talking about years; we're talking about getting students home for Thanksgiving. Lots of those students, who have never been away from northern Ontario, now are wondering how they're going to get home. As parents, I believe that the members of the government party would understand something like that.

As a show of respect and compassion, will the Acting Premier announce the postponement on the cancellation of our only passenger train until at least after Thanksgiving? Let our kids come home.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I think everyone on both sides of the House realizes that this per-passenger subsidy is just not sustainable.

But you know, Speaker, this government is all about putting students first, so I can assure those students who want to get home that there will be enhanced bus service in place so that no student will be left behind.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources today. Minister, constituents in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East keep telling me how grateful they are to MNR’s firefighters and our first responders who stood on the front lines and dealt with fires this season, working long, hard hours to keep Ontario’s families safe. This is very important to my riding as well, not just in the north, because in my riding we have the Rouge National Park. With this summer’s hot, dry weather, it’s no secret the fire season has been one of the busiest on record—

Interjection.

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

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: We owe a great thanks to all the men and women who keep our families safe during this kind of season.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please refresh for the members of this House and for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and anyone else who wants to engage in your conversation, take it outside.

1130

Ms. Tracy MacCharles:—and for all Ontarians how government ministries came together, working side by side to fight forest fires this summer?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for Pickering–Scarborough East for this really important question. Indeed, we had an extraordinarily busy fire season this year: more than 1,550 fires. To this point, I think our crews have dealt with 350 more fires than last year. The good news, if I can put it that way, is that the total hectares burned was only about one fifth of last year’s amount, and may I say I think that’s largely due to our crews’ ability to keep these fires under control.

We did see some evacuations of more than 600 residents of Sandy Lake, 300 in Kirkland Lake during the very intense spring fire season, and almost 600 in Timmins.

I want to take the time to thank the communities of Thunder Bay, Fort Frances, Kapuskasing, Timmins and Camp Gilla for opening up their homes to those affected during these evacuations. I want to thank the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services; the Red Cross; municipal, First Nations and provincial fire crews; as well as all of our partners for their strong—

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

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It’s very important to emphasize how serious this is. Firefighting is about saving lives. This is so important, and I don’t want to be heckled. It sounds like it was a very busy season, Minister, and it is a reminder of just how dangerous northern Ontario can be, despite its wonderful beauty.

I know your ministry provides regular information to Ontarians that outlines the fire risk levels across different regions, as well as the locations of the fires. This is critical information, Speaker, coordinating efforts between firefighters, ministries, Emergency Management Ontario, municipalities and First Nations to help battle these fires across the north and let Ontarians know where restricted fire zones are in effect.

Minister, can you please tell us about the current fire situation across the province?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks very much again to the member for the question. This summer, I think as most people know, we experienced very hot and very dry conditions across most of the province, which contributed to our higher-than-usual number of fires. Now that temperatures certainly have begun to cool and we have received more rain, the number of fires has been significantly reduced.

I want to also report, Speaker, that we’ve just recently downgraded the fire risk levels across Ontario, and that includes northern Ontario as well. The risk levels are certainly lower than they’ve been for almost all of the summer. As always, though, I remind Ontarians that forest fires are still always possible and prevention continues to be everyone’s responsibility, so let me still caution everyone that we should keep campfires small, never leave them unattended and make sure all fires are put out before leaving the site.

Great thanks to our great firefighters this season. They’ve done a remarkable, remarkable job.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the energy minister. Mr. Speaker, the minister’s failure to provide the documents in committee, combined with his failure to stand up to the Premier, makes him every bit as complicit as his predecessor, the Minister for Economic Development. While the energy minister has spent the weekend negotiating and trying to find a way to salvage his political career, the former Minister of Energy looks focused, well-rested and, according to his tweets, may have won a few bucks on Pro Line this weekend.

One can appreciate the energy minister’s resentment. The second the Liberals were done with their campaign bus, the energy minister was thrown right under it. Will the energy minister stop protecting the Premier’s unaccountable campaign cronies and reveal, who—I want names—made the decision to cancel the two power plants?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, what can I say? The opposition cannot take positive news. The fact of the matter is that a request was made by the committee for certain documents, and all those documents will be made available by lunchtime today.

The Minister of Energy has carried himself with a great deal of integrity. He has worked very, very hard to come to an agreement on the Oakville gas power plant. I think I speak for all members of the House when we find that the vindictive nature of what we're hearing from the Progressive Conservatives is beneath any member of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that the opposition apologize. We have complied with what has been asked for by the committee and all documents will be made available by noon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, this marks the one-year anniversary when the Liberal Party announced they were going to cancel the power plants, and the minister is still not calling the shots. He answers to the same people who cancelled the power plants, the same people who put Liberal interests ahead of the interests of the people of the province of Ontario. If this is the Titanic of all Liberal scandals, the one that finally sinks the Premier, surely the Ministers of Municipal Affairs, Economic Development, and Training, Colleges and Universities are safely in a lifeboat while the energy minister stands proudly on the plank, trying not to get his pants wet.

The energy minister has become a fall guy for the Premier's chosen few—too proud to be accountable, too weak to call out the culprits who are raiding the public purse. So I ask the minister: When will he defend himself and reciprocate his colleagues' decision to leave him out in the cold?

Hon. John Milloy: Maybe members want to play a little walk down memory lane. In Hansard, June 1, 2010, the member from Halton: "The people of Oakville have told you they don't want the proposed gas-fired power plant ... and I agree with them."

The member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant lettered a minister of the day—June 21, 2010: "The potential for future alternate generation in Nanticoke to replace that slated for the proposed and disputed Clarkson plant should receive ample consideration."

The Leader of the Opposition, in the *Globe and Mail*, September 25, 2011: "We've opposed these projects in Oakville and Mississauga."

Let's go back to the member from Halton—October 19, 2010: "I was pleased when" the Oakville plant "was cancelled."

We can go on and on and on.

CLASS SIZE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. The McGuinty government has repeatedly said that its approach to education is all about protecting class sizes. Yet parents of children at Toronto schools are reporting serious problems with overcrowding. At Roden

Public School, new full-day kindergarten classes have nearly 40 students. What does the minister say to parents whose small children actually dread going to school because of the overcrowding that they encounter?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm so proud of our government's investments over nine years in the education system. We have built new schools, we have hundreds of renovations in place and we have worked very closely and very hard. As part of the conversation that we had even this very year with teachers in the education system, we have put a priority on class sizes. We know that those class sizes—that we fund them in a way that allows our boards to keep them small.

Full-day kindergarten that the member opposite mentions—the model that we tried to reach is two adults to 26 children, a 1-to-13 ratio. We know that that allows our youngest learners to get the education, the expertise and the hands-on learning that they need.

I know the member opposite knows that in September we never know how many kids are going to show up in our schools. We find ways to work with our boards to balance that out to ensure that all of our classes are the appropriate sizes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The minister has had years to get this right. The government passed a regulation in June limiting class sizes. It justified cuts to teachers' compensation and benefits by saying they were necessary to keep class sizes small. But now, additional cuts from the last budget are hitting home in the schools, and parents are trying to deal with children who are stressed out by the chaos in the classroom.

What will the minister do about overcrowding of classrooms at Roden Public School and other schools across Ontario?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Leadership is about making decisions that continue to protect the education system. The member opposite and his party would have chosen higher class sizes for increased teacher pay. We need to make those choices and we need to ensure that in each and every situation, we put our kids first.

But as I've said, at the beginning of September every year, we have many, many children who show up for school, and we have seen full-day kindergarten be incredibly popular. But it's really important to remember where we were and where we are now. In 2003-04, 31% of JK to grade 3 classes had 20 or fewer students.

Interjections.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Listen up: Today, 91% of JK to grade 3 classes have 20 students or less. That's an incredible accomplishment.

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to inform the House formally that, pursuant to the motion passed by the estimates committee on May 16, 2012, and the Speaker's ruling on September 13, 2012, officials from the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority will be delivering all records that are re-

sponsive to the motion of May 16, 2012, to the office of the clerk of the Standing Committee on Estimates and the Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly by no later than 12 p.m. today. Over the course of four meetings between the three House leaders since the Speaker's ruling, it was ultimately agreed that the only route to satisfying the committee's request and complying with the ruling would be to table all responsive records in advance of the deadline of 6 p.m. today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The third party House leader, the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm just waiting for the mike to get turned on here.

Interjections: It's on.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, it's not. Anyway, the light—somebody should fix the light.

To the government House leader's point that he made just now, I find it rather regrettable—because it's clear that as of last Friday there was an agreement between TCPL and the government. For the government to try to delay this by six weeks and make it look as if there was no agreement tells me that, in fact, they were trying to delay the release of those documents. I think it's most regrettable that the government chose this, because it shows, at the end of the day, that what they were interested in doing was protecting their own hides and not doing what's right for the people of Ontario.

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

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I am pleased to welcome a friend of mine from Windsor, Jeff Boulton, who is here at Queen's Park today to visit and see the wonderful Legislature that we have. Jeff is the president and executive producer of Dante Media. He is also an advocate for film, television and the arts in the province. He's here in Toronto today promoting that industry, developing deep contacts within southwestern Ontario so that we might see some Canadian-made productions in this province. So I want to welcome him to Queen's Park today.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MARIPOSA DAIRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize a local success story from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Mariposa Dairy of Lindsay was founded by Bruce and Sharon Vandenberg in 1989. The dairy specializes in the production of a variety of goat cheeses which are distributed across Canada and the United States.

Recently, Mariposa Dairy won six prestigious awards at an international conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, in early August. The awards handed out by the American Cheese Society are considered the Academy Awards of the cheese industry.

National and international recognition is nothing new for Mariposa Dairy. Among its many awards and recognitions, it has won previous awards from the American Cheese Society, as well as a top prize at the British Empire Cheese Competition and a regional Ontario Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence in recognition of its outstanding contribution to farming innovation in Ontario.

Mariposa Dairy is a great example of a local company from rural Ontario which has developed high-quality products and a commitment to excellence and has been duly recognized by its national and international peers on numerous occasions.

I want to congratulate Bruce and Sharon Vandenberg and their dedicated staff for being a local success story that we can all be proud of, and encourage you to eat their product at every opportunity. It is more than delicious.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Paul Miller: Last Thursday, it was my immense honour to present 14 extremely deserving individuals from Hamilton and Stoney Creek with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. With over 200 friends and family in attendance, it was a wonderful opportunity to both show our appreciation and acknowledge the important work that each has done.

Each recipient is distinguished for their community activism and dedication to improving the world around them. The recipients are as follows: Zahid Butt, community activist; John Copland, former city councillor; Colin Heyens, youth humanitarian; Edwin Janack, former family physician; Judy Kloosterman, community organizer; Bill Mahoney, labour activist; Robert McDougall, former volunteer firefighter; Don McLean, Environment Hamilton volunteer; Susan Ramsay, school board volunteer; Susan Ramsay, Battlefield House curator; Linda Shuker, Peach Festival president; Heather Slattery, seniors outreach; Josh Tiessen, local artist; Andrew Williams, Boys and Girls Clubs volunteer.

Every one of these exemplary individuals has set the bar high for others in their community. The Diamond Jubilee Medal is a fitting way to thank them for the difference they have made in their community. Congratulations to each well-deserved medal recipient.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Bob Delaney: I, too, have recently presented the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal to some very special community builders in western Mississauga.

Ron Saito and Councillor Pat Saito are Mr. and Mrs. Meadowvale. Pat Saito has spent the last 21 years on Mississauga city council, stewarding northwest Mississauga through its growth and development. Ron Saito is president of Eden Community Food Bank. Since 2009, he has led programs and services to alleviate hunger in western Mississauga.

Audrey Chiang and Judy Yeung, both active with the Mississauga Board of Chinese Professionals and Businesses, have linked Chinese business people with projects to advance the well-being of all Mississauga residents. Through events like the annual Phoenix Ball, Audrey and Judy have raised significant capital and operating money for the Credit Valley Hospital, the Trillium Health Centre and the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care in Mississauga.

Led by Manmohan Singh, the National Association of Indo-Canadians continues to promote art and culture, arrange blood donor clinics, raise food donations and host the wonderful India pavilion at Carassauga.

Finally, Naveed Chaudhry has built and led the Peel Multicultural Council as it has assisted tens of thousands of newcomers to settle and integrate in Mississauga and in Brampton.

Congratulations to our western Mississauga winners of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Today I hand-delivered a letter to the Premier's office regarding this government's fire sale of the Ontario Northland. It offered recommendations based on consultations my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka and I held this past summer. We took the time to travel 1,600 kilometres and visit stakeholders and mayors in seven northern communities. Speaker, we did what the government should have done. We did not take a ready-fire-aim approach to the ONTC, and we didn't throw up our hands like this government did. The message we heard from the stakeholders was loud and clear: Do not sell Ontario Northland's rail freight division.

We believe rail freight is strategically critical infrastructure to economic development and private sector job creation in the north. It must remain publicly owned. How else can we guarantee that the north's minerals and lumber will ever get to market? One stakeholder told us they cancelled a \$10-million expansion this summer because they didn't know if they would have a viable way to ship their products out next year.

Ontario can prosper again, but right now we're heading in the wrong direction, and the ONTC fire sale is proof of that. Urgent action is required to prevent further damage.

TEACHERS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride to rise in the House today to share a story of some

students in my riding. In Bramalea–Gore–Malton, students across the riding organized to protest against Bill 115. They had slogans of great unity and solidarity with the teachers. In fact, one of the students quoted in the newspaper stated that the teachers are like family, and an attack against the teachers hurts all of us, particularly the students.

I was very honoured to see students understand the issues and talk about the fact that a reduction in the services provided by teachers is a result of the Liberal government's initiatives, and they stood firmly against Bill 115 and firmly in support of teachers. I was able to attend a number of protests, and I was amazed by the skill and the passion and the organization of the students.

I attended Louise Arbour Secondary School and Harold Brathwaite at Dixie and Sandalwood, as well as Lincoln Alexander and Castlebrooke Secondary School, and I met with students from Brampton secondary school and Sandalwood secondary school who wanted to know more about the issues and understand what Bill 115 was all about. They are planning to have their own rally sometime in the next week.

I'm very honoured and very proud of their work, and I wish students to continue their participation in democracy, to continue these types of peaceful and organized protests to voice their opinion, to voice their expression about what's going on in our education system.

DIALYSIS

Mr. Kim Craitor: As the provincial member of Parliament for the riding of Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake, I'm pleased to report on the significant progress of a new dialysis unit in Niagara Falls. After receiving many calls from constituents regarding the progress of this construction, I assisted in planning a tour of what will become our new Niagara Health System satellite dialysis unit.

Construction began on July 7, and work is continuing on the 18,000-square-foot facility, which will be state of the art and will include an elevator to the second floor, security-card access and cameras which will be monitored at the nurses' centre. This is really positive news for patients undergoing kidney treatment in the Niagara Health System's regional kidney care program. Currently patients undergoing dialysis have had to travel to St. Catharines or to Welland.

Once completed, the falls will accommodate 110 dialysis patients. This is long overdue. I'm extremely pleased that the government of Ontario has contributed \$4.7 million in funding to make this happen.

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I also want to thank, in particular, the Greater Niagara General Hospital Foundation; the chair, Ruth Ann Nieuwsteeg; and the executive director, Mike Somerville, for the foundation's pledge to raise \$710,000 to assist with purchasing 21 dialysis machines for the site.

This is great news, and great health news, for the communities in my riding of Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie.

CULTURE DAYS

Mr. Michael Harris: Culture Days is a collaborative, Canada-wide volunteer movement to raise the awareness, accessibility, participation and engagement of all Canadians in the cultural life and arts of their communities. Culture Days embrace a core vision that every individual, regardless of age, location or experience, has the right to access and participate actively in culture and the arts.

Launched in 2010, the annual Culture Days event takes place in more than 800 Canadian cities and towns during the last weekend of September. This year, near my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, events include Behind the Scenes of Sleuth, a rare theatre experience, presented by Drayton Entertainment at the St. Jacobs Country Playhouse; a steel pan presentation by Acoustic Steel, showing how these instruments from made, tuned and played, at the Harmonia Centre in Kitchener; and a how-to session that teaches you how to turn wool into yarn at the Joseph Schneider Haus National Historic Site.

I invite all Ontarians to check out their local events and embrace this initiative to share the talents of our communities and deepen connections in our different cultures.

For its third year, Culture Days aims to foster appreciation and support of artistic and cultural life across urban, suburban and rural areas of this province and the country. I hope you all take the chance to participate in this wonderful event.

POLARIS MUSIC PRIZE GALA

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise in the House today to talk about the Polaris Music Prize and the importance of the music industry in Ontario. For those of who have not heard about this award, let me give you a few details. The Polaris Music Prize celebrates the creativity and diversity of Canadian recorded music and is presented to the best Canadian album based on artistic merit.

Because the Polaris Music Prize is not based on record sales or musical genre, it is a chance for the Canadian music industry to recognize talented up-and-coming artists who might otherwise go unnoticed. Our government is also committed to supporting these artists.

Music and other entertainment and creative industries play an important role in our province. Not only do they enrich our quality of life; they also help to build our economy. In fact, Mr. Speaker, our entertainment and creative industries support 300,000 jobs for Ontarians and generate over \$12 billion for our economy.

Events such as the Polaris Music Prize gala allow us to celebrate Ontario's talented recording artists and can help promote up-and-coming ones. I look forward to learning who won this year's award.

On behalf of the McGuinty government, I would like to congratulate all the nominees, and I wish the finalists the best of luck at the awards ceremony tonight.

BROCKVILLE AND AREA SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Steve Clark: Leeds–Grenville has a proud tradition of sports excellence, and the remarkable athletes, coaches and volunteers with the Brockville and area Special Olympics continue to add new chapters to that rich history. More than three dozen athletes compete year-round in 10 sports, pushing each other to achieve goals and dreams that go far beyond what can be measured by wins and losses.

Recently, the great athletes took to the field for the Special Olympics regional softball qualifier in Brockville. It's the fifth year the city has played host to the tournament, which featured 11 teams and 160 athletes from across Ontario. I'm proud to say our hometown Brockville Islanders stormed to a strong second-place finish and now wait to see if they're invited to next year's provincial championships.

The Islanders clinched second place with a thrilling 19-17 win over Ottawa in the final game. Showing the spirit that's indicative of the team's never-say-die attitude, coach Stu Reid's players rallied to score nine runs in their final at bat to seal the victory.

Speaker, I was honoured to receive this ball, signed by the team, and I want them to know how much it means to me. I'm going to keep it here at Queen's Park, and whenever I feel the odds are against me, I'm going to look at it and think of that great comeback. It reminds me that anything is possible when you keep fighting.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the team and Brockville and area Special Olympics on reminding us what good sportsmanship means.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BREAST CANCER CANCER DU SEIN

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, today we've asked all members to wear pink ribbons to show solidarity with women fighting breast cancer, and we did so today because the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation's pink bus tour has arrived at Queen's Park to showcase the importance of breast cancer screening.

Starting in 2009, the big pink bus has toured across Canada, bringing women in hundreds of communities information on breast health and breast cancer screening. Between 2009 and 2011, the bus received 34,000 visitors.

Here in Ontario, the tour has been raising awareness and encouraging women to sign up for breast screening programs since its launch in May, and will be visiting our communities until October. So far, they have visited 94 communities and have received over 32,000 visitors this year alone. The success of the tour has been made possible by the generous sponsorship of Shoppers and CIBC.

Whether you're a woman yourself or have a wife, mother, sisters or daughters, you likely know someone personally who has been touched by breast cancer. Indeed, just yesterday I attended a wonderful memorial service for my dear friend Ethel LeBlanc, who lost her life to breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer and the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in Canadian women. However, we do have one solution we can work toward: earlier detection, which is exactly why the pink bus tour is so important. Women throughout the province need to get information and screening tools early on.

Over the last 20 years, our government has provided funding to Cancer Care Ontario to support the Ontario Breast Screening Program, or OBSP. Regular biannual mammograms are available to all women aged 50 to 74, and as of July 1, 2011, the OBSP was expanded to provide additional breast screening services to women aged 30 to 69 years old who are at high risk of breast cancer due to genetic factors or medical or family history.

High-risk women represent 34,000 lives. These women are two to five times more likely than the general population to develop breast cancer in their lifetime. The newly expanded OBSP now provides these high-risk women with yearly MRI and mammography screening. Research shows that having both screens is the best way to detect breast cancer in women who are at high risk.

Ontario's expanded screening program is not just an investment in our health care system; it's an investment in ourselves and our loved ones. The OBSP provides reminders when you are due for your next mammogram. It coordinates the next steps if you have an abnormal test result. In the last two decades, it has screened over 1.2 million women, a total of 4.1 million screens for women aged 50 and older across Ontario, and these screens detected over 22,000 cancers, the majority in early stages, which helps to improve survival rates. But we have the capacity to do more.

While there's no surefire way to prevent breast cancer, at least not one we've found yet, we can provide women with the tools for regular screening and early detection. That's why we continue to invest in this important program. We've made great progress in reducing wait times for cancer surgeries. Cancer surgery wait times are now 25 days shorter than they were in 2005—I can tell you that one day waiting for that surgery is a lifetime, Speaker—thanks to our investments in the wait times strategy.

As well, Ontario's regional cancer centres play a critically important role in treating those with cancer and making a tremendous difference in the lives of patients and their families. It's thanks to these great programs that the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership ranks Ontario as among the world's best when it comes to cancer survival rates. That's an amazing accomplishment, one I'm truly proud of.

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Congratulations and thank you to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and the organizers of this tour.

You're providing a very valuable public service and can take tremendous satisfaction from knowing that you are saving lives.

I encourage all of you to stop by the big pink bus today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's a privilege to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus to recognize the phenomenal work of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. Founded in 1986, the foundation has been a leader in non-profit fundraising, and the pink bus tour is just another example of the foundation's innovative work that's drawing attention to this most worthy cause.

The pink bus will be visiting over 90 communities across the province. I have had the pleasure, even before today, to visit the bus when it was in my home community of Oshawa about two weeks ago, and had the privilege of signing my name. It was difficult to find a spot, with some 30,000 signatures on it, but I was able to find one small spot to put my name.

With one in nine Canadian women diagnosed with breast cancer every year, this is a disease that touches thousands of Ontarians, but Ontarians have responded with energy, commitment and drive. In 2011, 120,000 Ontarians volunteered their time or donated to the foundation. Volunteers from Ontario raised \$20.5 million, contributing \$11.3 million to new grants for research and training fellowships. Clearly, Ontarians have answered the call.

Much has changed since the foundation was established in 1986. Limited screening technology and limited screening programs meant that women were often diagnosed with breast cancer in advanced stages. The treatment options were also limited, and unfortunately, mortality rates were high and the quality of life low for those who suffered from the disease. But since 1986, and in part due to the great work of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the mortality rate for breast cancer has dropped 35%. Between 1990 and 2007, Ontario's breast cancer mortality rate for women aged 50 to 69 declined by 35%. Today, nearly 88% of women in Ontario diagnosed with breast cancer will survive their diagnosis for at least five years. That's hugely significant, Mr. Speaker.

We've also seen great strides made in surgical techniques. For instance, the chief surgeon at Toronto's Women's College Hospital and the first chair of surgical breast cancer research in Canada, Dr. John Semple, has been a leader in the surgical improvement, performing the first Canadian auto-transplant of lymph nodes in a breast cancer patient.

Undoubtedly, the foundation is making tangible inroads to their mandate of reducing the incidence of breast cancer so that fewer people develop the disease; reducing breast cancer mortality so that more women survive the disease; and improving the quality of life for those diagnosed with breast cancer so that they can live longer and healthier lives.

Not only is the foundation the largest non-governmental funder of breast cancer research, but it funds the

next generation of researchers and clinicians to expand and improve the talent pool so more research and advancements can be achieved. In 2011, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation created 25 new grants and 28 new training fellowships, selecting through rigorous review processes over 100 experts from the medical and research community. Since 1986, the foundation's Ontario region has awarded over \$84 million to fund some 600 grants. These research grants are critical to generating new knowledge and building expertise in the field. It's this research that will allow health care practitioners to better understand and prevent risk factors, improve screening and diagnosis, and improve treatment options.

The foundation has also been a true champion for women all across the province. It wasn't too long ago that breast cancer was a taboo subject, but thanks to the amazing job the foundation has done in generating public awareness through campaigns like the pink bus tour, when we see individuals wearing pink, we often think of the worthy cause it represents. In addition, the foundation has delivered tangible results that will help women across the province and across the country battle this disease.

One example is the courageous work of Jill Anzarut, who challenged the provincial government's stance on Herceptin. Prior to 2011, women diagnosed with HER2-positive breast cancer were only eligible to have OHIP pay for the drug if the tumours were larger than one centimetre. But thanks to the work of Jill and the foundation, OHIP changed its position to cover women with tumours of any size.

There's lots that's going on in all of our communities, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation has done so much to spearhead this work, and I wish them the best of luck as the pink bus tour continues across this province. You're doing great work, really bringing essential information, I would say, to women across the province. It's hoped that, as a result of the work you do, screening and early diagnosis will be increased and more women will live longer and healthier and productive lives.

M^{me} France G elinas: It's my pleasure to add my voice to the great work that the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation is doing, especially today, with the Pink Tour. This great big bus, when it came into Nickel Belt on Saturday, August 25, sure turned a lot of heads. It was big, it was pink, and it is something that everybody had to come and see, including me. We were very well received by a lively group of volunteers who had come out to welcome us on the bus and basically helped us on. We got to visit the bus and learn tons about what breast screening for cancer was all about.

I know that I often talk about parts of our health care system that need improvement, but when it comes to the Ontario Breast Screening Program, this is a program that gets a lot of praise—praise by the women who use it and praise by the health practitioners who refer to the service. This is a program that has helped save many, many lives.

The Pink Tour—that is, the great big pink bus that has toured Ontario—has made a pit stop in 75 communities and reached out to close to 32,000 people so far.

Surprisingly enough, Mr. Speaker, there are quite a few men that come on the bus and want to know more. As was said by the minister and by my colleague, it affects our mothers, our sisters, our aunts and our daughters, and includes men also. So a lot of men wanted to learn more about this wonderful program that we have here in Ontario. I was happy, with the rest of my colleagues, to welcome them to Queen's Park today.

The tour brings information about breast health, about breast screening and how the Ontario Breast Screening Program works. In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, it works quite well. Basically what they do is they provide screening mammography to women age 50 and over and to a few that meet other criteria, and they will give the results directly to those women.

They allow women to self-refer. Where I live, close to 30,000 people don't have access to primary care, but when it comes to the Ontario Breast Screening Program, they're allowed to self-refer, so they can go even if they don't have a family physician or a nurse practitioner.

Once you have gone to the Ontario Breast Screening Program, they send you reminders so that, two years down the road, you're starting to wonder, "Was it last year?" When it comes to health care, it always seems like, "I just did that, didn't I?" Well, no. If it has been two years, you will get your notice and be reminded that, although it feels like just last month, it was actually two years, and you're due to go again.

If anything shows up at all, they will coordinate the follow-up for women. This is the part that women really, really appreciate. There is a caring that goes with this for everybody who works within the program, who really knows that you're about to tell this woman that there is something wrong with her mammogram. It may not mean anything, but we all think the same thing: If you are the one getting that phone call, you start to sweat it out. There are people at the other end of the line that are trained, that are compassionate and that try to help you through. They will call you back and do further tests. Most of the time, all is good, and you get relief and go back home. If it is not, they will continue to help you transition to whatever care, support and treatment that you need.

They also do a lot to try to reach harder-to-reach populations. They have all of their brochures available in 14 different languages, including aboriginal languages. They come to remote locations, and they really try to reach out.

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The statistics show that there's still some work to be done. Central Toronto, where we see a lot of first-generation immigrants, is one of the lowest—with 60%, on average, of women who should have participated in the Ontario Breast Screening Program actually doing so. That shows that there's still a lot of work to be done.

But here again, I want to congratulate them for the great work that they do.

Ça me fait toujours plaisir de vous parler du bon travail qui est fait par la tournée du gros autobus rose. Il

est gros, il est rose et ça vaut la peine d'aller le voir. Merci.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to thank all of the members who spoke for their comments. I would like to thank the visitors who are here, both staff and volunteers, for bringing the big pink bus.

I will leave with one editorial comment: I've been on the bus twice now, once in my riding and once here, and I thank them for the work they're doing for the people of the province of Ontario.

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to read a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It 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;

"Whereas concerns have been raised 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 an industrial facility and selected in accordance with the best planning principles."

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

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully agree, affix my signature, and give it to page Anna.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

WIND TURBINES

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

"Whereas residents of Ontario, mayors and councillors from more than 80 municipalities and Ontario's largest farm organizations and rural stakeholders, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, seek an immediate moratorium on new wind development until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health; and

"Whereas the provincial Liberal government's study back in 2011 failed to conclude anything more than that

it needed to continue to study the turbine sound impacts; and

“Whereas the federal government is launching, through Health Canada, the first comprehensive study of health impacts of wind turbines;

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

“That the Liberal government follow the federal lead, accept the objective of the federal wind study, agree and accept that until the study is finished it will not approve any new wind turbine projects in Ontario, effective immediately.”

I support this petition and will sign my name to it and send it to the clerks’ desk with Maggie.

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 agree with this. I will sign my name to it, and give it to page Zakhar.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM OFFICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: On behalf of my constituents:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario has decided to close the Ontario Disability Support Program office in St. Thomas, an office which serves over 3,245 of our most vulnerable population throughout St. Thomas and Elgin county; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made this decision without consultation;

“Whereas the majority of clients don’t have access to transportation to London to attend appointments with their caseworker, which may result in loss of benefits;

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

“That the Ministry of Community and Social Services consult with the city of St. Thomas and Elgin county to

find a solution to keep the ODSP office open in St. Thomas.”

I fully agree with this petition as it has no financial implications whatsoever, and I’ll hand it over to page Katherine.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Miss Monique Taylor: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas people who feel they have been wronged by the actions of children’s aid societies are left feeling helpless with nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate children’s aid societies.”

I agree with this petition. I’ll affix my name to it and give it to page Ethan to take to the clerks.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My petition is 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 agree with this petition and I will affix my signature.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have many more petitions in support of Bill 9, paved shoulders on provincial highways. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas pedestrians and cyclists are increasingly using secondary provincial highways to support healthy lifestyles and expand active transportation; and

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"Whereas paved shoulders on highways enhance public safety for all highway users, expand tourism opportunities and support good health; and

"Whereas paved shoulders help to reduce the maintenance cost of repairs to highway surfaces; and

"Whereas the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's private member's bill provides for a minimum one-metre paved shoulder for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

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

"That private member's Bill 9, which requires a minimum one-metre paved shoulder on designated provincially owned highways, receive swift passage through the legislative process."

Of course, I support this.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

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

"Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are settled 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, will affix my name to it and ask page Sashin to bring it to the Clerk.

WIND TURBINES

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

"Whereas the Auditor General confirmed that no comprehensive evaluation was completed by the McGuinty government on the impact of the billion-dollar commitment of renewable energy on such things as net job losses and future energy prices, which will increase" another "46% over the next five years; and

"Whereas poor decisions by the McGuinty government, such as the Green Energy Act, where Ontario pays up to 80 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity it doesn't

need and then must pay our neighbours to take it for free, and the billion-dollar cost of the seat-saving cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas power plants," have contributed to making Ontario's cost of electricity the highest in North America; and

"Whereas there has been no third party study to look at the health, physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

"Whereas Ontario's largest farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has removed all decision-making powers from the local municipal governments when it comes to the location and size of industrial wind and solar farms;

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

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

I will be passing this off to page Anna, and I agree with the petition.

DOG OWNERSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

I'm signing this on behalf of over 1,000 dogs that have been killed in this province because of the way they look and not what they've done, and I'm going to give it to Caelius—I hope I pronounced that right—to be delivered to the table.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have petitions, Mr. Speaker, 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 on to page Leo.

UTILITY TRANSPORTATION VEHICLES

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

“Whereas the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATV) is legal on schedule 2 highways in northern Ontario; and

“Whereas many residents of Ontario have switched to utility transportation vehicles (UTV); and

“Whereas the use of UTVs in schedule C of the Highway Traffic Act is allowed north of areas in far northern Ontario and unorganized territory....

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

“Therefore, be it resolved that the government of Ontario direct the Ministry of Transportation to enact legislation to allow the use of UTVs on class 2 highways throughout northern Ontario.”

I fully agree, affix my signature and give it to page Caelius.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 19, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I stand today to speak on the healthy homes renovation tax credit, a credit that, when I look at it on the surface, barely accounts for the taxes this government collects and the HST. Over the past months, I've heard from many people about their concern on the economy and the need to live within our means. This is a quality that was ingrained in rural people across the province—especially, though, when you look around the world, when you see what's happening in Greece, Italy and many other regions who only choose to ignore the warnings and continue to spend out of control.

Mr. Speaker, our Liberal government is following the same path as these financially troubled countries, with continued out-of-control spending, with the misguided belief that they are solving a problem. The Fraser Institute, who identified this government's fiscal record as the second-worst in Canada, has called for a need to be strategic in our spending and not to blindly throw money at problems, hoping that they will go away.

I come from a township that was originally settled by two significant groups of people—first, the Scottish Highlanders, who left their homeland after being forced off their lands, facing starvation, and came to Ontario looking for a better life. They were joined by the United Empire Loyalists, who had fought on the side of the crown in the American Revolution and were stripped of their lands and their possessions and forced to seek a new life as well. They took on the hardships and started from scratch in the wilderness to clear land, plant food, and build a home and the livelihoods of their families.

Once they established the basics of life, they came together as a community to put in place the elements necessary for a safe and growing community. They established schools to educate their young, developed a militia to protect their new homeland, and went on to make major contributions in this country.

My mom's and dad's families were both raised after the turn of the century, going through two major wars where many of their families and neighbours fought and lost their lives for a country they believed in. They went through the Great Depression and learned to look after themselves, not relying on government handouts. Over the past 60 years, people from war-torn Europe came to our area, settling on farms, working hard and following the rules, as they knew that Ontario was the place to make their livelihood. It was a recipe for success, and they have been successful.

Mr. Speaker, these people, who are now our seniors, are not looking for a handout; they are looking for a hand up. They need help in their everyday expenses, which are truly getting out of hand.

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My mother, who is 94, still lives at home and will not benefit from this grant. She is like most other seniors who are just trying to make do without the benefit of large pensions that she contributed to for the public service. She is just trying to cover the increasing demands on her savings: the huge increases in hydro, heating and taxes, and property taxes, with no relief in sight.

This government is making life truly unaffordable for everyone in this province, especially for the seniors. They somehow think that all they have to do is make money available to make the changes to their homes—\$10,000 to get a grant of \$1,500 is barely enough to cover the sales tax. When they can't afford to keep the house, how do you expect them to be able to afford the renovations?

It is a matter of priorities. My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry lost 3,600 manufacturing jobs before the recession hit, jobs that will never return under the current policies of this Liberal government as they drive up hydro rates to new highs never seen before by this province. The Auditor General's report confirmed what we've been saying all along: The province of Ontario can't afford luxuries such as the Green Energy Act.

I encourage the government to sit down and reflect on the abuses and numerous examples of waste that it has been responsible for. Just since the last election, we have seen many examples of that waste that were skilfully hidden from the public. The Auditor General's report clearly identifies the recklessness of this government, and, to my shock, it even points out that the Samsung contract, one of the major election issues, was awarded without economic evaluation and without cabinet approval.

It appears that decisions are being made on the fly and without regard for the people of Ontario, decisions like the cancellation of the Oakville power plant and the Mississauga power plant after billions of dollars were wasted—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Pursuant to standing order 23(b), it doesn't give the member an option. It says that the member shall speak to the topic of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I would ask that the member confine his remarks to Bill 2.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Mr. Speaker, I'm just getting back to the spending of this government as another example of spending we can't afford.

I just talked about the waste, and it took a contempt-of-privilege ruling by the Speaker to finally have documents released. But on the bright side, we are now encouraged. Some real jobs—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member to bring his remarks back to Bill 2. I fail to see how this pertains to Bill 2.

Mr. Jim McDonell: What I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, is the unaffordability of not only this act, but to the thought that we have seniors who are saying, on one hand that they can't afford—this is a handout to them, but they can't afford the basic necessities.

One of the reasons they can't afford the basic necessities is the example of the hydro bills, which have now doubled under this government's policies. They've made

them unaffordable. I guess the examples I was making through here were some of the reasons why hydro has gotten unaffordable. We've had no regard for the public purse and no regard for the bills. The people of Ontario, and especially the seniors, have limited resources and, in my parents' case, have no pension and now are forced to divvy up, make a decision: "Do I keep the lights on, do I keep the heat on or do I get food on the table?" They're not thinking about, "Do I do renovations?" I think that's the point I was trying to make.

We've made living in Ontario so unaffordable. In rural Ontario we've seen jobs disappear because you can't afford to live in rural Ontario anymore with some of the costs that we're seeing. I think what we want to do is make life affordable and make life the way it used to be in Ontario, where people actually sought out and came here because of the opportunity, because of the thought that if you worked hard, you would get somewhere and have a secure, promising life and a healthy life.

Mr. Bill Walker: Your mum must be very disappointed, Jim.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Oh, I mean—so, as they try to live in their homes these days, there are just too many roadblocks. We see now an attempt by this government to look good, to single out a small group of people that it thinks that, through the title—it will attract a lot of votes in upcoming elections. But, really, when you look at the number of people who can actually afford this legislation—seniors can't afford it, and I think truly the people of Ontario can't afford further expenditures like this. So, really, we're going after the people who probably don't need the help and we're avoiding the people who actually do need the help.

There's little doubt when the loudest voice is asking us to help out. They aren't taking on any special renovations. They aren't talking about basic expenses that everyone else is talking about. They're talking about home heating, hydro costs and property taxes, property taxes that have been driven up by this government's policies back to municipalities. Lack of funding—as mayor in South Glengarry, we are receiving less funding from the province than we did in the year 2000.

I know there has been much inflation in this province over the last 10 years, but there has been no help back. The federal Conservative government has given gas tax back to the rural areas. We haven't seen any initiatives by this government to help out anybody but the larger cities that have transit. I think we must go back to our roots. The vast majority of the municipalities of Ontario have no transit so have no access to some of these funds that they're so very proud to talk about. I think that it's time to get back and look at the people of Ontario—making life so it's affordable. If you work hard, follow the rules, you will be successful.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to talk against this bill. I encourage this government to look back and start to do the right thing.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. As I listened, there was very little substance to the actual bill itself and a lot more discussion about perhaps what the government was doing wrong.

He started off by prefacing his remarks by reminding that this government is following the same path as that which was followed in Greece and Italy. On that, I must tell him that his history and his knowledge of world affairs is not entirely accurate, because if you look at those two countries and the problems they are having, they both had right-wing governments. They both had governments that cut taxes to the point that they couldn't afford the programs. They both had governments that made it very possible for the 1% to evade taxes altogether so that the 99% couldn't possibly cover what needed to be done. Those are the problems of both Italy and Greece today and probably of Spain and Portugal as well.

I think we need to be accurate here. We need to say that if this government is at fault—and they're at fault for many things. I'm not going to be here to tell them they're perfect, because they are not. But one of them is not kowtowing to what the Conservatives are asking for, which is additional tax cuts because, if there is a recipe for disaster, if there is a recipe to take Ontario down that road, it will be what they are recommending, and it will be following what has happened, unfortunately, in Greece and Italy and some other countries.

Mr. Speaker, I also think we need to say, from our party, that this bill has many flaws, but it is a bill that is going to help a certain very small percentage of seniors to stay in their homes. New Democrats will be supporting it. This is now day nine or 10. I think it's time we got on with it.

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

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I want to acknowledge my honourable colleague from Beaches–East York because I, too, am confused about what the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry was talking about. I'm not even sure he was talking about the bill, Speaker. In terms of the tax burden, which somehow he was trying to tie to this bill, I just want to mention to my honourable colleague of the opposition that the tax burden is the lowest in the Great Lakes and Midwestern states and provinces. So if he's saying that things aren't affordable here, I would like to know where he thinks it's more affordable.

1400

Anyway, I want to get back to the bill. This is probably my last opportunity to speak to the bill. Speaker, you know what? This bill came home to me when I hosted a seniors' expo in my riding last weekend, with, I might add, a federal member of a different party than my own. We did this in a non-partisan way. I had seniors in for a seminar on tax credits, all the wonderful tax credits we offer. I've spoken before about the many wonderful tax credits in Ontario for seniors, but do you know what struck me about this bill? This bill provides for seniors to

apply every year. It will be permanent. It's not that you have to spend \$10,000 in one year and that's it. You could do handrails one year; you could do a ramp another year. I heard members from the third party talk disparagingly about the importance of ramps for seniors. I can't say more strongly than this that it is important that we help seniors have improved accessibility, independence and quality of life in their homes.

I'm very proud of this bill, Speaker, and I look forward to supporting it.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have a moment to comment on the speech from the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on Bill 2. Of course, Bill 2 is talking about a very minor tax credit they called the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I find it interesting, as I'm sitting here and reading some of my invitations. I have one from the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board, and they want to meet with me because of changes to provincial funding for housing and homelessness. Whereas the bill we're talking about is a very minor tax credit, it seems that they're passing a resolution. I'll go through it:

“Whereas the province has discontinued funding for programs that have supported individuals and families who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, which includes the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program....

“And whereas the recently announced homelessness program funding has been allocated in an amount that will allow for a funding level of approximately 35% of the previous average annual funding;

“And whereas this reduction in program funding creates hardship for our most vulnerable community members and is in contradiction to the Housing First principle of sustainable communities;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the province commit to an annual funding level for the district of Parry Sound that, at a minimum, matches the total amount of funding that was previously given to now-discontinued annual programs, and at a level that reflects the needs of our communities....”

Here we are debating this Bill 2, which is—some in our caucus have described it as being a fluff bill; it's so narrowly scoped that you have to have a lot of money to be able to spend to get a very minor benefit, yet I'm being requested for a meeting from the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board because of real changes to our most vulnerable. So I just wonder where this government's priorities are and if this bill is more about winning votes and fluff than it is about addressing real concerns in the community.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: All I can say is, this is another one of the prop-up-a-Liberal bills. That's all this is. Speaker, I don't care if it's a \$500 or \$10,000 credit. It doesn't matter, because the people in my riding—21% of them

are living below the poverty level. They can't pay their rent. They can't pay their hydro. They can't pay for food. They don't care about ramps and hand bars, because they can't even afford it. It's not even in their budget.

The last bill they had was a doozer. They were going to give them 50 bucks off their registration for sports, or 75 bucks off that. Speaker, when I played hockey—and that's years ago, and still up until a few years ago I was playing competitive hockey—that would pay for maybe five skate sharpenings in a season. What is that? That is absolutely useless. In fact, it's an insult. If you want to do something for sports, let them write off their registration fee. Take the HST off their registration fee, because some of these kids have got to pay \$800 to play hockey. I've got kids who can't even afford skates in my riding, and they're going to give them 50 bucks off. It's absolutely, absolutely useless.

And \$10,000—who's got that? Not only do you have to pay the HST on the \$10,000; you've got to pay for all the guys who do the work on top of that; the tax on top of that. You end up losing money, not saving any money. They say that you don't have to use the \$10,000. I've got people who can't use the first 100 bucks. So, really, this is just another elect-a-Liberal bill. All they do is for promotion. That's all it is: It's self-promotion. It's absolutely an insult to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We go back to the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for his reply.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank my colleagues who spoke to the bill.

I thank the member for Beaches–East York. He talks about the European countries. These are countries that are examples of where they drove up pensions and benefits so high that the economy there couldn't support them. That's what we're talking about. We're driving up public spending to a point that we can't support it.

My colleague from Pickering–Scarborough, I guess, seemed to be somewhat confused, because a report from a couple of weeks ago talked about Ontario's income taxes now being the highest in Canada. If they're the highest in Canada, I'm sure they are the highest in North America. I know our hydro rates are the highest in North America. Our property taxes are the highest in Canada, so again, I'm sure they're the highest in North America. So we're looking at not being competitive. When you take your basic inputs and you're that far out of whack, you are no longer competitive.

The 2% that this bill is giving out over what the HST is—you know, you're talking somebody getting \$200 back on a \$10,000 bill, which is not all that much when you're looking at them—because the member over here is talking about how they can't afford to put food on the table. The member from Parry Sound talked about people's homelessness and getting letters from people needing help. There's an article in the *Standard Freeholder* this week: The food bank shelves are empty. They've never had such demand. These are people who

can't afford to pay for food, and now they're not likely going to be in a situation where they can take advantage of this bill. The costs are putting them out of their homes, and they are looking—they'd find a long-term bed, but there's none of those either, so they're forced to go without help.

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, I see, is coming over to our side—so a realization of what's going on.

But I think we just have to get back to reality and look at what the spending—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate? Member for Whitby–Oshawa.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that we are nearing the end of our time for debate on Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I just have a few comments to make.

Of course, it was created to assist seniors 65 years or older on qualified home improvements to assist in access and mobility or functionality. This would allow up to 15% on expenditures over \$10,000 a year.

Well, a number of people have already commented on this. If you are wealthy, you can afford to do these renovations, whether there's a tax credit there or not. But the reality is that many people in many of our ridings don't have that kind of spare cash lying around to put into these kinds of improvements. Of course they are worthwhile, but when you talk to seniors about really what's most important to them—and I did have the opportunity to attend a seniors' forum in my riding that the federal member set up several weeks ago—that's not what you're hearing about. Doing home renovations is not what's top of their list; it's being able to stay in their own homes. It's being able to pay their property taxes, being able to pay their heating bills, being able to keep up with the cost of living, and being able to get the kind of health care that they need. I'd like to spend a few minutes just speaking about that.

The sad reality right now is that our seniors are not being treated very well. Up to 25% of all the beds in most of our hospitals across southern Ontario right now are being used by people who are unfortunately called bed blockers. Those people are mostly seniors and it's a very insulting term to use for them, but the reality is that they are there in the hospital, where they don't need to be, simply because they are waiting for an alternate-level-of-care placement, whether that's going back into their home community or whether that's going to a long-term-care facility. I know that people want to be back in their own homes. In some cases they can; in some cases they do need more assistance and support and they do need to go to a long-term-care facility. But I can say, certainly in my riding of Whitby–Oshawa, those placements are few and far between. We have a situation where people are having to go to different jurisdictions. Some people are having to go to Scarborough. Some people are going as far east as Cobourg, and north as well. It puts a tremendous strain on the family. If the spouse is around, it

means the spouse has to travel a long distance to see the spouse who is located in a different community. And as you get older, it's very destabilizing and confusing to have to go and live in a place very far away from your own home.

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The real kicker, I think, is the fact that we really have not made the investments in home care that we need in order to allow seniors to be able to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

I was taking a look at some of the statistics, reading over an excellent paper that the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario just released on Enhancing Community Care for Ontarians, their ECCO plan. It has some really interesting statistics in it about where we are in the province of Ontario and what we're spending money on.

Right now, we spend almost 35% of our health care budget on hospitals, but only 7.7% goes into long-term care. Even more shockingly, only 6% goes into home care, so we really have a lot of work to do. That is what I'm hearing from seniors in our communities.

To be able to keep someone in their own home is 67% less than a long-term-care spot and 95% less than the average stay in a hospital. We're talking about not only major savings but also major comfort of life and quality of life for people. Of course, people want to stay in surroundings that are comfortable and familiar to them, and we need to make sure that we can get out there and be able to do it.

I've heard from many people in my home community—where there's a husband and wife, both in their 90s. The husband has had some significant health care problems in the last few years, yet when home care comes in, they tell his wife that she should be able to lift him and bathe him and do all of those things. It's ridiculous to assume that a 92-year-old woman is going to be able to do that.

Similarly, it seems that once the budget runs out, there's no help to be had. If you need home care help from April 1—because we run on a fiscal year that ends as of March 31. If you end up in the first part of April and you need home care, you're probably going to get it. But if you happen to need home care at the end of February or the first part of March, I know what people in my riding are hearing very often: They're hearing that there's no money left. Whether you come home and you need assistance in bathing, in light housekeeping, you may need some physiotherapy assistance or even some nursing care, you're going to find that that's not going to be there for you. Those are the kinds of things that I hear from seniors in my riding.

We've also heard, "Can we afford this or not?" I think it's a question of priorities. We can afford the things that are really, really most important. What we see from this government is a government that consistently spends money on things that we don't really need. Sure, there are things we'd like to be able to have, but if we haven't been able to cover the bases and cover the most essential costs, then we shouldn't be spending money on some of these other things—just to attract votes, I suppose.

We need to take a look at all of this in the context of the economic situation that Ontario is in right now, where we have something that's approaching a \$300-billion debt. We have a deficit right now of \$15 billion—and as we saw from Mr. Drummond's report that was released some months ago, if we don't take some fairly drastic and significant action, we're going to have a deficit approaching \$30 billion by this time next year.

When we compare this healthy homes renovation tax credit against all of those needs and all of those priorities, you have to wonder: Why is this government moving forward with this? As other speakers have suggested, I really do think that this is an insult to the people of Ontario, particularly to our seniors, because we know that so much more needs to be done. We know that we need to get our costs under control; and we know that, right now, we're spending more on interest payments to service our deficit—and our debt—than we are on any other ministry except for health care and education. Imagine that: That's the third-largest expenditure of government.

If we don't change things, we're not going to be able to continue to spend money on things we consider important, like post-secondary education, like infrastructure, like our justice system—and I certainly hear a lot about how our courts aren't adequately resourced, how we need legal aid to be expanded. All of these are things that we want to be able to have but we can't unless we prioritize our spending.

Certainly that's something that Mr. Drummond talked a lot about. He made a number of recommendations for health care reform, too, that I read with interest since I'm our party's health care critic—very few of which have been actually put into place. In fact, some have seemingly been ignored and actually the government seems to be taking the opposite direction.

We've got scandals where we've seen money spent—like the Ornge air ambulance scandal, where we've seen potentially hundreds of millions of dollars wasted. We've got the whole energy fiasco with the power plants in both Mississauga and Oakville, where we've seen \$190 million wasted with respect to one of those plants. And who knows? We're still waiting to get the documents to tally up the amounts on the other power plant. But again, this is a government that has the seat-saver program in effect, and they're willing to spend whatever money they need to spend in order to continue to stay in power.

What I'd really like to see us focus on is the things that are most important: How do we make sure that our senior citizens are properly cared for? How do we make sure that our most vulnerable citizens are cared for? We had the honour of debating private members' resolutions last week where we talked about developing a select committee to prepare a developmental services strategy—because we have so many people in our communities who have developmental challenges or who are dually diagnosed with a developmental disability and a mental illness. We really need to focus on them. People with mental health and addictions issues: We already had

a select committee that came up with a number of quite reasonable recommendations, I believe. The government has only acted on one or two of them. There's a lot of work that has yet to be done. Again, we need to take a look at those people and what we can do to support them.

We need to focus on things like post-secondary education in order to be able to transform our economy and move from a manufacturing-based economy into a knowledge-based economy. That means it's going to be all the more important to continue to make post-secondary investments. We're really not hearing much about that. We also need to boost our productivity and innovation agenda. I know that the Premier now has a council that he's appointed. We've heard very little about the work that they're doing, but that's something that we really need to do in order to boost the output economically of this province so that we can continue to prepare and provide the supports that we need in all of our communities.

I'm not going to take any more time. I do really appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 2 and I look forward to hearing any questions and comments.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm happy to join the debate on the healthy homes tax credit. We've certainly been debating this for a long time, but I agree with my colleague from Whitby-Oshawa, who said that this bill is mostly going to support the very wealthiest citizens of Ontario—and that's problematic. I think the intention of the bill is wise in that it identifies a real issue. Seniors in Ontario are struggling. Their bills are going up; they can't pay them, whether that's property taxes and the results of downloading in this province or the fact that this government has taken the HST and placed it on the backs of seniors who are trying to pay for their heating costs. We know this government's record when it comes to cancelling the retrofits, the tax credits available to actually save energy costs for seniors here. People are spending a fortune in this cold, cold climate to heat their homes.

We desperately need to support seniors across this province and in my riding of Davenport, but the prescription is wrong—the giveaways, the huge corporate tax cuts—and then it comes back to low-income seniors, people who worked their whole lives and who have to pay more.

This bill will work very well in places like Forest Hill and Rosedale; it doesn't work so well in Davenport. It does a little bit, and for that I need to support it, but it doesn't go nearly far enough and it's not going to deliver the kind of income support that seniors need to make their lives more affordable and allow them to live their last years with the kind of respect and dignity that I believe they deserve.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

I've heard members from the opposition speak now at some length on this. I understand that what they're saying is that it's not enough. I think any bill that comes forward before the House generally goes some way towards solving a problem, and there are things that are left for another day, often. This perhaps is an example of that.

But certainly, if you're a person who is aging in their house, aging in the community, if you've got a mother or a father or a grandfather or a grandmother who needs to do something to the house that enables them to stay in their house—very simple, practical things. It could be something like putting handrails in the corridors. It could be certain grab rails in the bathroom. They're very practical things that, as we get older, we find we need to stay in our house. What this does is it allows those people to make that purchase, knowing that they'll get some of it back from the government at some point in time when they file their income tax form. That to me is very practical help, and it doesn't only apply to the persons themselves. If you're a caregiver, if it's for your mother or for your father, you can invest that money as well. You can make those changes to the house as well.

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So it strikes me as maybe not being enough for everybody in the House. I think that's true of just about any bill we have before us. But I think, on balance, if you look at it, this will be of assistance to people in the province of Ontario. To hold it up simply because you feel it's not enough, to deprive those seniors who could avail themselves and could have availed themselves of this earlier in the year, just out of what appears to be spite or what appears to be just outright opposition for the sake of opposition, seems to be something that's very mean-spirited and something that these guys might want to think about a little bit in the future. There are people who could use this today. Pass this bill so they can start using it. We'll move on in the future.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I thought that the member from Whitby-Oshawa talked with great insight into this bill and the reasons behind it. She talked about some of the bed-blockers that are there. Because of the shortages in health care, there's no place for our seniors to go, and they're holding up expensive beds in the hospital.

I'll tell you a story. A couple of weeks ago, a resident came into my office. She had a mother who was finally sent home, and she was unable to be at home. There was not enough home care to keep her there. Her daughter was up from California, on the verge of losing her job—she couldn't leave because there were no facilities, no beds for her. This was truly a case where she would be unemployed if she had to stay. She had no alternatives anymore, and I think that's what we're running into. We're running into a group of people who are left with no alternatives. The government can't afford to pay for services to keep them at home, even though there's a huge savings in doing that. But now they're concentra-

ting on something that benefits 1% of the population. I think we've got to look back at the basics, back at getting our services or priorities that we need. As we drive up our debt rates, the interest is getting out of hand.

I think, as the member from Oakville says, we're not getting our priorities right. I think you have to look at what really is needed here and not just some window dressing that looks like they're attending to the seniors of Ontario. They're not, because they don't even realize what their needs are. They're not very dissimilar from the rest of the province; it's just trying to get a good job and being able to pay their bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate today. I thank the member for Whitby–Oshawa for her commentary.

I listened intently to the member from Oakville, who gave quite a good assessment of this bill. He acknowledged quite clearly that it only goes so far in terms of addressing the problem of keeping seniors in their homes and that the government is limited to so much to be able to facilitate that. Ultimately, this bill offers \$1,500 to keep a person in their house, where the Liberal Party and the Liberal government spent millions of dollars to keep that member in this House—unbelievable. It pales in comparison. If you look at the amount that was spent on the Mississauga—

Interjection: Hundreds of millions.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Hundreds of millions of dollars—we're going to find out later on, probably tomorrow—to keep one member in this House. Yet when it comes to the seniors in our province, those who built the country, those who worked day in and day out, those who have modest means, who have seen their pensions vaporize, who have seen their jobs being outsourced, offshored, downgraded, off to the lowest-wage jurisdictions on the planet because of free trade agreements that both Liberals and Conservatives, federally and provincially, have promoted—I'm bringing you guys into this as well. You aren't building a sustainable economy—you haven't for decades in this province. But when the money is needed to keep a member in their seat, in this House, the funds are unlimited.

Interjection: One per cent.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The funds are unlimited for the 1% here.

Mr. Speaker, I know the challenges that seniors face and I know the challenges that those who have physical disabilities face to have their homes be accessible, and the costs that are associated with those retrofits. I also know that this bill doesn't go far enough.

There are other jurisdictions like Quebec that will offer up to \$5,000 as matching funds for those types of upgrades. We have areas that show us how it can be done, but this is certainly not going far enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Whitby–Oshawa has two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would like to thank the members from Davenport, Oakville, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Essex for their comments.

I did listen quite intently to all of the comments, and I did note the comments from the member from Oakville that it didn't go far enough, that there's always more that we can do and that sometimes you have to do things incrementally. I would agree, if that's of significant benefit. But in the present case, I would suggest that there is very little benefit to be gained by this because when you talk to people in your community, I can tell you, I have never had anybody come and tell me, "Boy, I wish I could get some of these home renovations done so I could stay in my house." Sure, some of them, they'd like to be able to do, but they know they can't afford it. What's more important to them is to be able to get the health care services that they need in order to be able to stay in their own home. I did speak earlier about the lack of long-term-care facilities in many of our communities and the lack of home care programs.

I think the other thing that we need to turn our sights to is looking at how we can keep people in their own homes and not go through this revolving door of hospitalizations where they get stabilized, they go back into their own homes, they don't have the services that they need in their own home to be able to stay well and they end up being readmitted to hospital. Unfortunately, this plays out time and time again in our community, and I think we really need to take a look at some of the really innovative approaches that are happening.

I know that there is a program that's being developed from Women's College Hospital—they are coordinating it—where they have a matrix that if somebody meets certain criteria: they're frail, elderly or whatever when they're discharged from hospital, they get followed in the community for a period of six weeks to make sure that they stay well, that they get the rehab, nursing and other home care services that they need. They found that to be remarkably successful. This is what we really need to do in order to properly support seniors in their own homes, and this I would suggest would be a more proper use of public funds.

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

Mr. Bradley has moved third reading of Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit. 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 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the members of the House that I have received a deferral note signed by the chief government whip, and that means, of course, that this vote will take place tomorrow at the time of deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT
(AIR AMBULANCES), 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES
(SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 20, 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): Further debate on Bill 50? The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure—I prepared for days to speak on this motion; I'm well prepared. Just to make sure that I'm very clear, I think this whole thing about the air ambulance—we've talked at—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I've recognized the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, but I have been reminded by the table that you have already spoken to second reading of this bill. As a result, we've already heard your comments and thoughts.

I will once again ask: Further debate on Bill 50? The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

1430

Mr. Jim McDonell: I just received a pass from my member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Once again, I apologize. I've been advised that the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has already spoken to Bill 50 at second reading.

Further debate? The member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Have I spoken on it, too? Okay. I don't remember, honestly. It was such a memorable bill, I don't remember.

But anyway, Bill 50—why the government has called Bill 50. I think it was the ambulance act, if I remember right, the ambulance chasers' act. We think there's going to be a need for this because of Ornge, the scandal that's arisen because of Ornge. We need to do something in this province because of Ornge. With the money that's been wasted on Ornge, there's a scandal. We've called for an all-party select committee on Ornge, which would alleviate some of this kind of criteria for the scandal that led to the money that was wasted on Ornge.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill being called at the last moment is—okay, another copy? We're still on second reading, it says here.

Anyway, this bill was called, and we've called for an all-party select committee on Ornge. It's been proven in the finance committee—led by our chairperson very ably, and of course the member from Newmarket–Aurora, who has made the case that there would be a need for an all-party committee because of the spending and the scandals and the witnesses who were called. Anyone who's had the opportunity to watch that committee in the House

will know that this committee should be struck because this Ornge whistle-blower contract—the people who come in to testify before committee, then given suspensions, terminated from their jobs. So, obviously, we need something that would prevent this from happening in the future.

The all-party select committee that we have called for continually—the government has tried to say that we've been delaying the debate on this side of the House, but what we've called for, as members of the press have also called for—and members in the third party as well have called for the all-party committee so we could move this forward and try and prevent this type of waste.

It's about the 26 deaths, too. I think, as the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—I heard you speak about it one time. I think you talked to it a number of times, where you talked about the 26 deaths that the coroner's office has been asked to look into, Mr. Speaker. So I think it's important that, as we move forward, we try and prevent this type of incident from happening again.

Members on this side of the House—I know there's been a number of speakers who have risen at different times to speak to this. I think it's incumbent upon us as we move forward on this that we have opportunities in this House to debate this issue, to move forward and look at opportunities that we could prevent this type of thing from happening again, because it's a terrible waste of resources in the province. We know the former chief executive who was being paid, I think the number was—I'm going all from memory here, Mr. Speaker—approximately \$1.4 million, and this was not money well spent, as the board was forced to terminate him. A number of other executives have also exited the Ornge corporation because it was shown that money was ill spent. A number of poor decisions were made at that time, and as we go forward, we need to prevent these types of things from happening again. There was no oversight. We've called for the Minister of Health also to resign. She's resisted that.

I think this is the next big scandal that's facing this government. We're moving forward right now on the OPG, with the Oakville power plant and also the opportunity to look into the Mississauga gas plant. Those papers, I understand, have been released today—thousands of pages of paper and documents. We'll see if there was a number of redactions done. I haven't had an opportunity to see those documents myself yet, but I know that members of our staff and also colleagues from the energy critic's role will be looking at those papers at this time, right now. I think it's going to be an unheard-of debate going tomorrow with the contempt motion that's going to be moved, it's my understanding tomorrow, in this House. Mr. Speaker, it's certainly unheard of in our time here in the House.

We've called for, in this House, whistle-blower protection every week, Mr. Speaker, and that's because of the treatment that a number of witnesses that appeared before that committee received, or a number of witnesses

that have also, in confidence, talked to us and said that they were conscious about coming forward, had concerns about stepping forward to testify to incidences they know have taken place at Ornge because of the opportunities that they may face as well—the incidents that could be also detrimental to their careers.

We talked about the costs of Ornge, millions and millions of dollars that were wasted that could have gone into front-line health care. We just had a debate that finished a few minutes ago about keeping seniors in their homes. How far would those millions of dollars have gone to keeping their seniors in their homes? How much would it have done for front-line health care as well to hire more nurses, more specialists to treat people, pharmacists? How much would this money have done to help pharmacists in supplying—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, they've cut the pharmacare; that's right. We could have put this money into pharmacare and helped the people. There's also millions and millions of dollars wasted on this thing. As my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound will say, billions of dollars wasted by this government.

We call Bill 50, at the end of the day—it's too little too late. If this government was doing its job, if this Minister of Health and her department, the bureaucrats, were doing their job and doing the proper oversight, we wouldn't have been in this position. We wouldn't have to call for an all-party select committee to study the incidences of waste at Ornge. We want to get to the bottom of what took place at Ornge, and the only way we're going to do that is if we have an all-party select committee where we can take a look at whistle-blower protection, we can take a look at the cost of the waste in that department, and we can also try and prevent these types of incidences from happening in the future.

It's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that this will be finished being debated today and further assist—the Minister of Health herself, in this House—I was here that day—said she would appear, if it was the will of the House, and she would not restrict us from calling a select committee.

Well, the Premier refused to appear at the committee. That's another thing that happened in this House. The Premier was offered the opportunity to come and appear before the committee. He refused to do that. I don't know why. I think he was doing a photo op that day in some school.

He doesn't go to schools now. I don't know why. At the time, he was going to empty schools all summer. Now that schools are back, he's chosen not to go to any more schools. I don't know. Maybe he doesn't think he'll get a warm welcome there. But anyway, he appeared in a number of schools over the summer, and then after the by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan, he's chosen to go to other places now for his photo ops.

There's nothing in this bill, Mr. Speaker, to ensure accountability. That's another issue that we've got big concerns about: accountability. This government is

famous for a lack of accountability. It's not the first time. They've been in power for almost nine years now. I've been watching this government—

Mr. Bill Walker: Too long.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Too long. As my colleague from Bruce says, too long, nine years too long. I remember I was a candidate in the 2007 election and we were talking—

Mr. Bill Walker: A fine candidate.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound says, “A fine candidate.” I'll leave that to others to decide.

I see we're joined by the member from Thornhill. Thank you for joining us today.

Interjection: The esteemed member of Thornhill.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The esteemed member from Thornhill has joined us as well in the House. He's going to comment on this bill, I'm sure, in a few minutes.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we're concerned about the issues of accountability. We're concerned about the appearances of waste and costs. We say the bill is too little too late. We're agreed on this side of the House.

I know the House leader always likes to say that the committee or some part of the House is seized. I think it's their thinking that's seized. He always says they're seized, the committee is seized.

They haven't got any committees appointed. That's another issue we've got, that we need to get these committees stricken—stricken, if that's a word?

Interjection: Stroked.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Anyway, we need to get these committees in place so that we can do the business of the House, move the issues forward as far as accountability, deal with a bill like Bill 50 and not be caught at the last moment with no notice of what's going to be debated in the House, as it's very difficult to rise and speak, as you might witness in this place.

1440

I can hardly wait to get another chance to get up and speak on this. I look forward to the rest of the debate and the rest of the afternoon.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I first would like to compliment the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his ability to jump in when he wasn't even scheduled to speak. He adapted quite well very quickly to this horrendous situation with this Ornge situation.

Speaker, the bottom line here is that we all in this House are aware of what happened. We're aware of the money that was wasted by individuals who were in control of the purse strings at Ornge. We're also aware of the lack of accountability and governance by the Liberal Party. The minister was well aware, according to Mr. Mazza, of what was going on and did nothing about it until it hit the papers. That's unfortunate.

Accountability is important here. There was a lack of accountability on all sides, from the people who are being paid by the government to do the job and from the

government that oversees that job. Nobody stepped up to the plate until it hit the papers and became an unfortunate situation. Now the government is jumping up and saying, "We want accountability, and everyone's going to play by the new set of rules." I certainly hope that happens, because we cannot afford to have any more hundreds of millions of dollars of bungles that have gone on.

Some of the stuff that went on—how could anyone not trace the fact that this individual had bought a condo in Florida and a speedboat? This reminds me of the Hydro One days, when the woman had a yacht named after herself under a certain government at the time. She has probably changed occupations since then. I don't know if she has found a new way to raise funds, but that was quite interesting.

All I can say is, it's about time we had some accountability. But like I've said ever since I've been here, it's called enforcement. If you don't enforce the rules, if you don't show the public that you're serious about watching their dollars, then nothing is going to happen. You've got to follow through.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the comments from the member from Sarnia–Lambton, who I do agree scurried around and did manage to actually speak about the bill at hand.

One of the things that the member mentioned was the desire of the opposition to have a select committee struck on the subject of Ornge air ambulance. Of course, as those who have been following this will know, what has happened is, there have been extensive hearings on this issue at public accounts. I must note that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has actually appeared at public accounts three times. In addition, former Ministers of Health who were Liberal ministers—Minister Caplan, Minister Smitherman—have appeared before the committee. Of course, the one who didn't appear was Minister Clement.

Some interesting documents have been tabled; for example, the minutes of a meeting which happened on September 4, 2003, which, for those of you who might have lost track, was right at the beginning of the election campaign. This was a meeting that was chaired by the then-Assistant Deputy Minister of Health on behalf of Minister Clement and his associate minister, Mr. Newman. The direction that was given at this meeting—not by Liberal ministers; by Tory ministers—was that, "Chris Mazza is charged by the deputy minister and the ADM to produce an assessment of how"—that is, creating Ornge—is accomplished. It goes on to say, "Dr. Mazza will lead this project and is to have the co-operation and assistance of the emergency health services branch." The direction, in fact, came from the Conservative government.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I think the member from Sarnia–Lambton did a terrific job of indicating our con-

cerns with respect to Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act, which of course was hastily written following the Ornge air ambulance scandal.

We've heard numerous references that have been made by the House leader, by the Minister of Health and even by the Premier to the number of witnesses that have already been heard from in public accounts and the length of time that we've spent on it and so on. But the fact remains that we still don't really know what happened at Ornge. There are still many more questions than answers. And so I would say to the government members: How can you possibly expect to come up with a piece of legislation that's going to correct a problem when you don't even know yet what the problem is? And that's what Bill 50 is purporting to do.

We still have a lot of issues that we need to deal with in public accounts, situations where the evidence that has been given by the Minister of Health is certainly at odds with the evidence given by some of the other witnesses. We've also asked for the Premier to come and give evidence before public accounts.

We've had situations where witnesses have come forward, and I would raise the issue with respect to Mr. Bruce Wade, who was a helicopter pilot from Thunder Bay who came and gave evidence before public accounts. Shortly after he did that, he was suspended. And this is by the new regime; this isn't by the old board. This isn't anything that happened before December. This is the new group of people. He was suspended. We still don't really know why. He was reinstated in early September, I believe, and he has subsequently been suspended again. So there's something very funny going on there that we really need to get to the bottom of.

We won't be able to do that until we get the committee structures up and running again. We need to get public accounts as well as all of the other committees up and running so that we can get to the bottom of this and understand what we should be doing with Bill 50, how we should strengthen it to make sure this never happens again.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to stand and speak to this issue on behalf of my constituents. Speaker, what this province needs and what this government actually needs is to restore public faith to our institutions, and Bill 50 does not do enough to do that. Bill 50 comes too little, too late. We've seen the kind of corruption, the crookedness in this government, and we know that the air ambulance service in this province will never go without scrutiny again, because people know the degree of corruption that's happened there before. But it still does not go far enough. This bill does not bring in whistleblower protection. It doesn't bring in Ombudsman oversight. We need this government to stand up and do the right thing. They actually had the tools. They could have done this. The NDP was blowing the whistle two years ago on this, and still the government refused to look at it.

How do we restore voter confidence? When we see billions of dollars wasted on eHealth, when we see millions of dollars given away to insiders, when the Premier won't come before committee and testify, when documents aren't produced when they are requested, it's easy to lose faith in this process. We had to call the OPP in to investigate this.

What we also see is that this government has not learned from its past experience. They continue to give away their power to their own friends, their own interests. They continue to privatize, just as they did in this case, to put profit before people when it comes to our health care. Now they're doing it in our transportation systems, where our northern friends won't be able to get home because they've given away their public transit service to private operators, and they are about to do it for transit in this city as well.

On every file that comes forward, we continue to hear scathing reviews of this government and the fact that there's not proper oversight. There's no accountability here.

It's time to go. It's time to get a new government here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have for questions and comments. I now return to the member for Sarnia–Lambton for his reply.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank, at the outset, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and my colleagues from Guelph, Davenport, and, of course, Whitby–Oshawa for their remarks, mostly in a positive and kind vein, to those remarks that I made about Bill 50, which I call the ambulance chasers act.

We went through this. A number of the members on our side, with the third party as well, also talked about the waste, the inefficiencies, the whistle-blower confidence where people who have come forward have been intimidated, in their words, at work. Other witnesses would like to come forward but feel they don't have the protection to do that.

So we need this all-party select committee that the member from Newmarket–Aurora and others in this House have called for—members of the third party, members on our side of the House as well—so we can see what actually happened here to bring the OPP in. That probably is going to be necessary as well. We need to make sure this type of injustice, this type of waste of money, resources, that could be put into front-line health care doesn't happen again. It's unfortunate that it did, and as another member said, it looks like it's time for a change of government. As they say, governments are like babies: They need to be changed often, and we see why. And you know the reason why they need to be changed.

1450

As this debate winds down, from my aspect, I look forward to the rest of the afternoon, to hear both members of the government try to defend their point of view—which I think is indefensible, but they'll do an admirable job, I know—and the members on this side from

the third party and our side as well. We're going to hold them to account and try and make them show why we shouldn't have that all-party committee. We're going to keep pushing for that, Mr. Speaker. We're not done on this side of the House, and I look forward to—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, the seat-savers in Mississauga and Oakville. We look forward to getting more information on that.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that the Liberals are renowned at creating a disaster where one didn't exist. If you take a look at our air ambulance service in this province, prior to the government coming to power we had a pretty good hybrid system. We had a public system of land ambulance and a partial public system of the air ambulance system, where the government had a contract with various aviation companies to provide, essentially, different levels of care when it came to air ambulance, and provided also the staffing in a lot of those particular ambulances.

The idea was that the province would keep running, themselves, a service that essentially dealt with critical care, so that if somebody was involved in a motor vehicle accident or needed a quick transfer because of some severe illness that meant that the person had to be transferred from point A to point B, we operated, essentially, a critical care service. That was stationed in places like Timmins, Thunder Bay, I believe London, Toronto and a few other places, in order to be able to make sure that we could move people around effectively.

But what we did as well is that we had people on standby in various companies like Voyageur Airways, Commercial Aviation, various air companies across the province who essentially were themselves charter aircraft companies that had on staff paramedics in order to do transfers in those cases where they were not able to deal with it in the regular system itself. It was a good way of making sure that we didn't overstaff and we didn't over-extend ourselves when it came to the amount of aircraft and personnel that we needed. You took care of the basic service by way of what the government offered, and then, when you had an amassing of service that was needed because of whatever was going on on a particular day, you brought people in. It was a pretty good balance.

Along comes George Smitherman—do you remember that guy? Hmm—former Minister of Education; I think he ran for mayor of Toronto. Anyway, along comes Mr. Smitherman, and he says, “We are going to fix the system,” where maybe the system didn't need a heck of a lot of fixing. And did he ever fix it. He decided to create this sort of stand-alone organization that supposedly is an arm's-length thing from the government, which we find out is not very arm's-length, called Ornge. Ornge goes out and they hire themselves, as a result of putting this together, a number of individuals who have now become infamous, such as Mr. Mazza and others, to essentially set up their own little fiefdom. That little fiefdom—I use

the word “fiefdom” lightly—essentially did a heck of a job for some of them but not a very good job for the rest of us.

Yes, the basic level of service provided by Ornge is a good one. The paramedics that work there and the pilots that work there work hard at providing the service that the people of Ontario need, but what was happening with Mr. Mazza and others is, they were really helping themselves at the plate. They were saying, “How can we benefit out of the particular arrangement that is air Ornge?” in a way that benefitted a few people on the inside. And so, along came this really unfortunate part of history in the province of Ontario, where air Ornge became very tarnished as a result of the actions that were taken by the management at Ornge itself.

The interesting part in all of this is, the government tries to say, “Well, we didn’t know.” Remember that sergeant on Hogan’s Heroes? There was that guy by the name of Sergeant Klink—

Mr. Michael Prue: Schultz. Schultz.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Sergeant Schultz, who said “I know nothing. I see nothing.” Well, that’s what the Minister of Health has been trying to say through this whole thing. She’s a little bit like Sergeant Schultz. Sergeant Schultz would walk in and find Hogan and the guys in the hut with two-way radios and all kinds of stuff they weren’t supposed to do. He’d always walk away saying, “I know nothing. I see nothing. I do nothing.” That’s kind of what the minister did, even though there were all kinds of alarm bells ringing, in everything from ministerial briefings, notes being passed back to the minister, meetings with the minister and, we understand, even with the Premier’s office. There was a fairly good indication that there was something going wrong at Ornge. Instead the government sort of went, “Ah, let’s do a Sergeant Schultz. If we pretend nothing happened, I guess then nothing happened.”

I’ll tell you why I think that happened. It’s because the government really wanted to believe that this particular model was going to work, and when it started to fall apart, it was the embarrassment. How do you admit that what you set up is not working? I think that’s the trouble they got themselves into.

The sad part in all of this is, if the government had dealt with it in the beginning, when they started to get the signs as we did—Howard Hampton, myself, Michael Prue and Andrea Horwath sat on a committee three years ago while all of this was going on. We were saying to the government, “Here’s what we’re hearing from the outside. Here’s what we’re hearing from people who know something about Ornge, who tell us there’s something not right in that particular organization.”

You’d think that the Minister of Health at that point would have said, “Let’s take a look at what’s going on,” and, if there were wrongdoings, to have dealt with them then. If the government had done it back then, sure, I imagine there would have been some criticism from the opposition and from the media because of the model that was created that allowed this to happen, but at least the

government could have protected itself by saying, “We created this thing, yes, but when there was a problem, we tried to fix it.”

Instead, what the government did is, they decided to do a rerun of Hogan’s Heroes and they burrowed down into those tunnel and they watched Sergeant Schultz walk around on the top saying—

Mr. Paul Miller: Colonel Klink.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Don’t get me going with Klink—Sergeant Schultz saying, “I know nothing. I see nothing.”

Here we are, some two or three years later. We’ve now heard from a number of people who have testified at the public accounts committee who are certainly indicating that there was a real problem in the way that organization was run. The government’s defence is, “Well, now we’re going to fix it. This is what Bill 50 is all about.”

I just say it’s a little bit late, in the sense of—you should always try to fix what’s broken; I wouldn’t argue that they shouldn’t try. But the issue is, it’s a little bit late in the game for the government, all of a sudden, to start pretending that they care and that they want to fix this thing, three years into the broken problem. The government essentially should have, in my view, done something about this three years ago. Instead, they’re being taken, kicking and screaming and scratching, all the way to trying to find a way to fix this.

The real test is, will this particular bill actually fix the problem? My reading of it is, it takes a step in that direction, but I don’t think it’s actually going to fix the problem. When you take a look at what this actual bill does, it doesn’t deal with some of the basic problems that are ones that are the foundation of what Ornge is built on. Unless the government is prepared to deal with what the systemic problems were that created the problems at Ornge, the government is going to be right back into the same problems down the way. We will have maybe passed Bill 50 at that point, and the government will say, “Oh, now we fixed it. Don’t worry about it.” But the very model itself lends itself to believe that these kinds of things are possible again.

It’s going to be interesting for this bill, should it get to committee, to see, first of all, what the public has to say about the fix that the government is proposing, and number two, will the government actually be prepared to take amendments that try to indeed do what the government says it wants, which is to prevent another Ornge from happening? That’s going to be the real test. At this point, I don’t know what the government is going to do.

Will this bill pass at second reading, number one? Number two, will this particular bill, in committee, get the kind of airing at that it needs? Number three, will the government actually accept any amendments that come from the committee to try to fix this thing in the future?

Now that we’re where we’re at now, we find ourselves trying to essentially close the barn doors once the horse has bolted out of the barn. I would have hoped that the government would have learned something out of this, and it’s yet to be seen if, in fact, they did.

I look forward to the rest of this debate to see what others have to say. If it goes into committee, I'm sure there's going to be lots of interest.

1500

A little side note to say, in all of this—and it's the unfortunate part: As a result of the government going the way that it did some years ago when they created Ornge—I guess starting about seven, eight years ago—they've managed to put out of business a whole bunch of charter aircraft companies in northern Ontario, which I don't think served anybody's interest.

You take a look at what's happened to a lot of those companies that used to rely on 30%, 40%, 50%, 60% of their business transferring patients around the province. They have since closed their doors or stopped doing that, and there's a lesser presence when it comes to air charter companies in northern Ontario.

I just think that the government had a really interesting model. It was akin to the old MTO model that said—50% to 60% of the plows were owned and operated by the province. When the government needed extra plows because of large snowstorms or whatever it might be, they would contract a private plow to come in and supplement what the public sector was doing. It seemed to me that was an interesting hybrid model about how you could deliver services in Ontario by providing core service with public sector workers and public sector equipment, and providing the surplus when needed on a contractual basis.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thanks for the time.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Speaker. I think we do agree with the member from Timmins—James Bay that there need to be some serious fixes in Ontario's air ambulance system, and Bill 50, in concert with a new performance agreement—which has already been put in place and which has much stronger controls than the old performance agreement—in fact does that.

It does a number of things: It gives the minister the power to appoint a supervisor if, God help us, we should ever have air ambulance go off the rails the way in which it has done, again—to appoint a supervisor to take over the program. But before you get to that point, it also gives the minister the authority to issue directives on how the air ambulance service is to be operated, which she did not have previously. It gives her the authority to unilaterally add pieces to the performance agreement as new circumstances arrive, as she did not have previously. So there are a number of things in this legislation which strengthen the control of the ministry over the air ambulance service.

But I must quibble with the member's timelines. When we look at the documentation tabled by Malcolm Bates, the director of the Ministry of Health's emergency health services—I mentioned previously a meeting on September 4, 2003, right at the beginning of the election campaign, where the assistant deputy minister said, "Dr. Mazza's in charge." By September 8, Dr. Mazza's

already calling meetings, so this is again in the middle of the election campaign, where he is directing that the team at the Ministry of Health is to have implementation ready for the beginning of November.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Well, at the beginning of November, I don't think—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 50, and I'm looking forward to speaking at length later on this afternoon.

This, of course, is a very important piece of legislation, but it should have been tabled long before, or at least it should have been applied previously. Now I'll speak at greater length on legislation that we previously put forward, and I can tell you one piece of legislation that far outweighs this before us, and that was the Truth in Government Act that I put forward last year. That act would have prevented such indiscretions by Ornge. It would have encouraged all—actually, it wouldn't have encouraged, it would have made it law for every single government agency, board and commission to protect taxpayer dollars. I put forward that legislation and unfortunately before the last election, the Liberals voted that down.

I understand that the member from Guelph is the Liberals' designated hitter on this issue and I can understand why most members in that party will not want to speak to this legislation, because the reality sets in when you discuss this legislation and what actually occurred at Ornge under Chris Mazza and Deb Matthews's watch.

That is why we have been calling for a select committee to investigate this, and that is why we want to see the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, brought before the public accounts committee, to answer for what he did and his role in that scandal.

So Speaker, I find it passing strange that Bill 50 has not yet become law, and, in fact, that it even needed to be in the first place, because you cannot legislate ethics. It's time for this legislation to pass but also for that government to go.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's important to remember—you know, not that long ago I was watching from outside. When the public at large has an issue of confidence in the government and how they deal with the medical situation and health of the people of this province, we all have a problem. And the bigger issue of confidence and of competency has not been addressed in this bill. I think that actually, if you look at what's not in this bill, we have some serious issues. When it goes to committee, as my fellow member mentioned, I hope that the government is amenable to receiving amendments and to receiving recommendations, as they should.

One of the big issues that certainly has not been addressed is that Ornge will not be subject to an FOI re-

quest, and the Ontario Ombudsman will not have oversight over the agency, so those big questions of confidence still remain.

The public at large saw this government actually make—the Minister of Health introduced this bill on the same day that the Auditor General released his damning report on Ornge. So there clearly is a disconnect between what is happening in this House and what the public sees. More importantly, that confidence issue has not been addressed in this bill.

I'm certainly hopeful that when this goes to committee—and I know that the NDP will fight hard for it—we'll put forward recommendations which create greater accountability, which create those safeguards that clearly were not in place at the beginning, to ensure that the people of this province actually get quality care when they need it.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I guess this is the main reason why the bill is for debate here today. I was listening to the comments from Timmins–James Bay and from the Conservative side as well, and I'm very pleased to see that there is support to move this bill forward and see where we're going to take it from there. We look forward to improvements to the bill as well, to ideas coming at the committee level so that we can indeed make it even better.

The reason why the bill is here is because the Minister of Health has been listening—the Premier as well—and we also have been listening to the recommendations from the Auditor General wanting to see some changes to improve the system of delivery of service to our people of Ontario.

I have to say that I'm pleased to see that the bill indeed will go on and will receive some consultation with new ideas on how this will be better. But there are some points that I want to mention briefly in the short time, Speaker.

It is to:

- appoint a supervisor or a special investigator when the air ambulance service is not being operated in the public interest;

- allow the minister to give direction to an air ambulance service provider like a hospital;

- prescribe performance measures and standards;

- allow the ministry to establish terms to be deemed to be included in the performance agreement between the ministry and the ambulance service provider;

- appoint a provincial representative as well to the air ambulance board; and

- provide whistle-blower protection, as we have seen in the past, for those who disclose information to an inspector, investigator or the ministry—the government itself.

So there are good initiatives that I think are worthwhile mentioning, and we look forward to making it even better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank all the members who commented, and I just want to start with the last one, saying that the reason we have this bill is because the minister's listening. My God. Where have they been for the last three years? It's not as if these alarm bells were not ringing way before last spring or even way before last fall.

I sat in committee, along with Mr. Prue, with Howard Hampton, who raised these issues back three years ago. We started hearing three or three and a half years ago that there were problems at Ornge. We raised those issues in committee. We raised those issues in the House. The issues were raised directly with the minister, and she chose to do nothing, or he chose to do nothing, at the time. So to say that the minister is listening and that's why we got legislation is a bit of a stretch.

1510

Then they talk about giving the minister powers. My God, the minister already had the powers. If I was the Minister of Health and somebody came to me and said that something like Ornge was going on, I think I'd be mildly interested and I'd try to do something about it. Instead, the government, which had created Ornge, decided not to use the authority they had under their own powers to stop this from happening.

I go to the point that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo made—which I thought was a good one—which is that the very powers we need to give people the ability to be protected as whistle-blowers, the very powers we need to be able to FOI information, the very powers we need to give the Ombudsman oversight are not contained in this bill. So how serious is the government about closing the circle around trying to make this happen and stopping it from happening again? It seems to me that this is a bit of an exercise in public relations; less so a legitimate legislative exercise to stop this kind of thing from happening again. Only time will tell, as the member said. If this thing goes to committee, let's see if the government is prepared to take the kind of amendments that are needed to really close the circle on this thing.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's rather disturbing that we're still having to debate this bill. We're in over 13 hours of debate. The reason for that is, speaker after speaker—on the opposition side, anyway—keeps reminding the government members that this is a completely useless piece of legislation and you're wasting our time. The member for Timmins–James Bay, as other members—Whitby–Oshawa today, Nepean–Carleton and Kitchener–Waterloo—all make the point that when we got into the Ornge scandal, it was pretty clear that both under the Independent Health Facilities Act and under the original Ornge performance agreement, the Minister of Health had the ability to send in inspectors and had the ability to take over the board. This whole Bill 50, and the reason

it's been going on for so long in here, is really a cover for the Minister of Health's inability to deal with the Ornge ambulance scandal, the billion-dollar scandal at Ornge.

There's nothing substantive in this legislation. We'd like to be debating jobs for the people of Ontario, proper taxation and an economic plan, but they have this—we're not allowed to use that word, so I won't—sham of a bill out there to try to fool the public that they're doing something and bringing in strong measures.

I'm a former Minister of Health. I used the Independent Health Facilities Act on at least four occasions that I can think of to rein in potential problems at agencies. This agency is no different than most others. The government has a lot of powers, including cabinet itself, to override just about any agreement in the province if they wished. It's a sign of failed leadership.

The single weakest part of this bill, which I know my honourable colleague from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees, often points out, is the whistle-blower protection section. We wanted special whistle-blower protection as part of the terms of reference for a select committee on Ornge—which we're still calling for. As long as we can hold you up on this bill, we will, because, first of all, we haven't got to all of the problems at Ornge yet, and yet you see this bill as the panacea to cover up—excuse me, to correct—all of the things that have gone wrong at Ornge so they won't go wrong in the future. But you won't let us have a committee. In fact, none of the committees are sitting. After the election, you stalled us for five months in having committees sit. Now you don't want committees to sit to look into your newest scandal, which we'll be talking about more today to do with the power plants—by the way, we've just found papers upstairs that we're probably in the \$400-million mark, not the \$190-million-plus-\$40-million mark that the government claimed. We'll talk more about that some other day, perhaps tomorrow morning, when we start off with a motion of contempt against Minister Bentley and the Liberal government.

Anyway, Bill 50 does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers. It imposes limits on which individuals are protected and who they can approach with information, so it's rather restrictive. The legislation ought to provide for a formal process through the Ombudsman that will ensure proper protection and follow-up.

Again, the bill is an attempt to divert attention away from the fact that the minister has had the power to appoint a supervisor and/or inspect the Ornge agency from the very beginning of the Ornge saga.

Mr. Speaker, I want to—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: How do you figure that out? You're a former Minister of Health—

Mr. Jim Wilson: Yes, I say to the member from Guelph, I am a former minister. I've used the powers under—

Interjections.

Mr. Jim Wilson: —the Independent Health Facilities Act. I laughed today. Your minister got up—and, you

know, maybe it wasn't the Minister of Health's fault. Maybe some political operative put it in into her head that, "Minister, you don't have the powers." But I know that if she had gone to her senior legal team at the Ministry of Health, they would have pointed out all the powers she had. She has overwhelming powers to run the health care system, as does the cabinet of the day. You guys were asleep at the wheel, and being part of asleep at the wheel—my honourable colleague Frank Klees, the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who has led the charge on Ornge on behalf of my party, wrote a column back on March 27, so in the spring, when we were still trying to get you to set up a committee on Ornge. He talks about, "In addition to the more than \$700 million that the Ministry of Health gave to Ornge since 2006 to provide air ambulance service, taxpayers are on the hook for another \$300 million that was borrowed through companies owned by the president," Dr. Mazza, "members of" Ornge's "senior management" team "and the board of directors of Ornge." He summarizes the real scandal. He talks in a column that he publishes in his local area, in his riding, about his warnings in committee. The NDP were doing the same warnings back in the spring and leading up to the Auditor General's special report on Ornge at that time, which vindicated and validated everything that our caucus was saying.

So here's the real scandal. He says, "In a letter addressed to the Minister of Health and copied to deputy ministers in three ministries and senior advisers to the Premier"—also received copies—"and the Minister of Finance, Ornge's outrageous scheme was described in great detail. And yet, not one among them triggered to the fact that the public interest may be at risk...."

"Or did they?" He poses the question, and then there's a quote: "'To the nose of this watchdog, this just didn't pass the smell test.'" Mr. Speaker, we know where that quote is from. "These were the exact words used by the Auditor General when he tabled his report in the Legislature on March 21. He was referring to the scheme of non-profit and for-profit spinoff companies that was disclosed in such detail to those senior government officials, including the Minister of Health." Yet they've denied that, Mr. Speaker, up to this day.

"There has not been one person with whom I've discussed this issue," Mr. Klees goes on to say, "who believes that the alarm bells didn't go off—at least in the minds of those civil servants who were fully aware of their responsibilities to protect the public interest. So why the silence? Who and what was behind the silencing?"

Of course, we know from the public accounts committee, Mr. Speaker, now that a number of senior bureaucrats did try to blow the whistle, did try to inform their political bosses that things weren't just right. Cost alone: I can't remember the exact figures, but you'd think when you were getting invoices from Ornge for, I think it was close to—and don't quote me—about \$1,800 for an ambulance transfer within the city, and municipalities and other transfer ambulance services were charging about \$400, you would just think that something would

trigger that there's something wrong and the minister would be told of that in the regular briefings. But anyway, they were asleep at the switch.

We suspect it's because there was a bunch of senior Liberal Party people involved in this whole scheme, too, but once we get our select committee on Ornge—which, as I said, we're not giving up on—we could maybe get to the bottom of that. But of course the government now doesn't want any committees because of the power plant scandal. But you're going to have another scandal of contempt. So, for the second time in the history of this Legislature, a minister of the crown may very well be brought up in contempt of the House. I know my colleague Mr. Harris, from the riding of Kitchener—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Kitchener—Conestoga—thank you, Mr. Speaker—has on a number of occasions raised, and particularly most recently, the fact that he has asked, the committee has asked, for all the documents on Ornge, and the minister says she's working on it. Well, the clock's ticking on that one, but it's at least a better answer than we got with the stonewalling from the government House leader, from the Minister of Energy and all kinds of members of the Liberal government over the power plants issue. They just said, flat out, no, and then they started to make up excuses like solicitor-client privilege, that Parliament wasn't supreme, that they knew better, that the Legislative Assembly Act didn't apply to them—the list went on and on—that we were going to cost the taxpayers more money. It's just unbelievable.

1520

The fact that we were going to cost taxpayers more money: The minister said today, “Well, actually, I think the opposition might have helped us. It made us focus our efforts to come to a contractual agreement with Trans-Canada.” Of course, the longer these things go on, the more expensive they are. That particular negotiation had gone on for two years, so I think we kind of inadvertently—but on behalf of the taxpayers, thank God we did—forced the government to, as the minister said, focus on the issue and come to a settlement.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, the bill doesn't do anything. We don't think it's a huge priority. We're not in favour of it. It's simply trying to divert attention from the fact that the government did not handle the Ornge situation very well and is not handling the Ornge situation very well. There are other stories to be told, and things are going to come to a standstill again around here, folks, unless you set up those select committees.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the member from Simcoe—Grey, who raised a whole host of issues that I think have been brought up and clearly articulated in this House. Maybe today I'll use my opportunity to talk about the human aspect that I don't think we've touched on today.

One story comes directly from my riding, from Windsor, where a young girl, six years old, Jamie Lynn

Ingham, had developed spinal meningitis and was awaiting transportation from the Ornge air ambulance services. She waited and waited for a helicopter that never came, for a service that was not delivered. Ultimately, that's what we're talking about: the failure of the service as a whole. From design to concept to implementation, the Ornge air ambulance service never responded the way that the government obviously thought it should and was going to, and still didn't respond to the needs of communities like Windsor-Essex.

Unfortunately, Jamie Lynn Ingham passed away. She was a twin sister; she has an identical six-year-old twin. I went to Jamie Lynn's funeral, and it was one of the most tragic incidents of this entire scandal, that a young girl—and her family—who should have been able to rely on this government to provide that service had now tragically passed away. Those safeguards should have been in place.

Who's at fault? Well, I know that you could never trace it back. You never think, in the backrooms of the Liberal Party when the plan is devised, that there will be a human element to this, that the failures will add a human element, but indeed they did and we all know those stories. There are countless others where the system failed them.

Will this bill go the distance in terms of safeguarding others? I don't think so, but certainly members on this side of the House will do every effort to make sure that it does.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: As I mentioned before, by the time we got to September 2003—that is, during the election campaign of 2003—Chris Mazza was firmly in charge, and in fact he had been given the authority to tell people at the emergency health services branch what to do. He directed that the implementation plan was to be all set to go to cabinet at the beginning of November 2003. That would be before the new cabinet, the Liberal cabinet, was even appointed.

But what was interesting was that he kept responsibility for the legal work for drafting the performance agreement. A lot of other responsibilities got farmed out, but he kept that one for himself. What we know from the documentation that has been tabled at the committee—and there have been thousands of pages—is that in fact the legal work to draft the performance agreement began way back in the spring of 2003 at Fasken Martineau, and the person who was the lead lawyer in the health files at Fasken Martineau was, of course, Lynne Golding, who is married to the Minister of Health, Tony Clement, and the group that worked with her was in fact drafting the performance agreement.

Now, it is true that Ms. Golding appeared before the committee and said that the performance agreement which her group drafted was a wonderful performance agreement. But of course she said that; her people wrote it. We differ; we have a new performance agreement.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to join the debate started by our former Minister of Health and our current House leader, the member from Simcoe–Grey. He has been here over the course of three decades—22 years. I'm not quite sure how many elections that is, but I know it's been since 1990. He has been a very strong member, a very capable member, in opposition and in government. I can tell you something: When he says that a minister of the crown has extraordinary powers and that cabinet has the ability to run the health care system, he knows of what he speaks. I know that during the heckles it was a member who had never served any time in cabinet suggesting that.

I just want, at this point in time, to speak to the integrity of the member from Simcoe–Grey and his knowledge of the health care file and his ability to address complex matters in this assembly. He knows, as we all do in the opposition, how painful this experience with Ornge has been across the province with the public, particularly with patients.

My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, my seatmate, knows full well the tragedies that can befall a community as a result of mismanagement at Ornge. In fact, in our community in eastern Ontario, we have seen first-hand what Ornge has been unable to do as a result of its mandate because the management there has been wrong. That is why we've called for a select committee to review this troubled agency, and that is why we want the minister to resign. That is also why we want the Premier to be held accountable for his actions and brought before the public accounts committee.

I congratulate the member from Simcoe–Grey for his stealth leadership on the health care file throughout these years.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member from Simcoe–Grey because, as was said, he was at one time the Minister of Health. He certainly understands the file, and he certainly understands the peculiarities of what has happened here in the last number of years.

He pointed out something during his speech, and I think it bears saying again and again and again—many times, until people understand: It is not necessarily this minister who was at fault, although she is part of that chain. I mean, it all started with Minister Smitherman; it went on to Minister Caplan; it went on to her. As that chain of command was passed from person to person to person, nothing really happened. Succeeding ministers turned a blind eye. As my friend from Timmins–James Bay so eloquently said, it was sort of a Sergeant Schultz moment. It wasn't just one person; it was three ministers in a row, and they were nonresponsive.

The current minister has promised the estimates committee, of which I'm a member and the Chair, that she will be forthcoming with documentation. We await that documentation, because I think it is essential that the estimates committee, and indeed this whole House, sees the trail of what has happened here over a great length of time.

We look at this particular bill, Bill 50, and it is a very minor bill. It is a bill that should have been part and parcel of the entire Ornge experience from the time it was set up all those many years ago until today. To come at it eight or 10 years late has allowed a whole bunch of things to transpire which have not been good for the people of Ontario.

I am looking forward to this going to second reading and into committee, because it is only in committee that we can explore what needs to be done and make the amendments that will actually make this bill effective.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Simcoe–Grey for his two-minute response.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thank you, colleagues, and I particularly want to thank my colleague from Nepean–Carleton for the kind comments she made, the thoughtful comments—maybe not all true, but I enjoyed them anyway—in terms of my competency as a minister. I know that the Minister of Northern Development and Mines was chirping up that I was just bloody awful as Minister of Health.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I didn't say that at all.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I thought that's what you were saying over there, and I was thinking, "That's not very nice of you, Rick."

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: But I didn't say that.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Well, then I correct his record.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Nepean–Carleton is absolutely right in her remarks. They don't want to set up a select committee on Ornge to truly get to the bottom of this. We've asked, really as a last resort, the Premier to come forward rather than hide behind his cabinet ministers and Liberal Party officials like Alf Apps. The former president of the federal Liberal Party actively engaged the Ornge file on behalf of Dr. Mazza.

It's interesting. We'd really like Lynne Golding and Guy Giorno to come, prominent Conservatives—Lynne is married to a prominent Conservative; Guy Giorno is a former chief of staff—because they worked at Fasken Martineau, the great law firm, the same as Alf Apps, but they were the Conservatives. Apparently, when they gave Dr. Mazza some legal opinions that he shouldn't be siphoning money off the taxpayer-paid not-for-profit Ornge ambulance services and putting them into his newly established private company—when they gave a couple of opinions that, "No, you shouldn't do that," they dropped Lynne Golding and Guy Giorno and picked up the former president of the federal Liberal Party, Alf Apps, so they'd get a more favourable opinion about whether what Dr. Mazza was up to was indeed legal. That's the story that would be told if you'd establish the committees.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to speak for the next 10 minutes on this piece of legislation, Bill 50.

Speaker, it is no secret, if you've listened to my colleagues in the official opposition under the leadership of Tim Hudak, that we believe that this legislation doesn't have the substance that is required to deal with some of the scandals that we have seen not only at Ornge—I might also suggest that we have seen massive scandals at the OLG; we have seen scandals at eHealth, all of which the government promised would never occur again because they tabled legislation in the last Parliament that would have eradicated further scandals and mismanagement of public spending. In the case of eHealth, they promised it would never happen again with public health care dollars. That was false, because we know, from what has been proven through a series of studies and committee hearings at public accounts, that that money has been mismanaged at Ornge. That has put patients at risk in every region of the province, particularly in the north but also in my community of eastern Ontario, which I spoke about earlier with the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Our concern, of course, is this bill lacks substance. As I stated earlier today, you can't legislate ethics. This is a government that has promised that they would bring in more ethics and more accountability and more transparency, yet on every score they have failed. We continue to see that this issue, whether it's Ornge, OLG, eHealth or Cancer Care Ontario, continues to crop up. It has become an attitude of arrogance in this Liberal government and a sense of entitlement across government lines.

Again, when I speak to this legislation, I say to all of you: It lacks substance. If they were to bring forward something more substantive, i.e., the Truth in Government Act, which our party put forward and would have increased public accountability where taxpayer dollars were spent, understanding that they and we are the stewards of public taxpayers, that would be one thing.

They also look at this as a potential whistle-blower piece of legislation. That could be nothing further from the truth. This piece of legislation does not go near as far as the federal Accountability Act, where they dealt with the responsibilities of the public service as it pertains to those who are whistle-blowing in their communities. I know a little bit about that, Speaker, because I did spend some time on Parliament Hill drafting private members' legislation with respect to whistle-blower protection.

As you'll recall, Speaker, the biggest political scandal in Canadian history was the sponsorship scandal, with the federal cousins of this Liberal government being actively engaged in that scandal. Many Canadians know that \$100 million had been wasted as a result of the connections between various members of the federal Liberal Party.

That ushered in a new era of accountability which—my colleague and my dear friend from Whitby–Oshawa has her partner in that government, a very strong Conservative government, that rooted out some of these problems with ethics. They brought in stealth legislation prohibiting these ethical challenges that are now mirroring this new Liberal government that has been—sorry, Speaker—here for nine years.

It's rather astonishing when they get up on the other side of the House and they mention names like Tony Clement or Lynne Golding or Guy Giorno. Well, Speaker, I hate to break it to them, but this ain't 2003 anymore; it's 2012. You have been in charge for nine long years. That's why I call it the decade of darkness, because they did exactly what their federal Liberal counterparts did. They allowed their friends to pad their pockets under the guise of building public services, and you could never question them. But now the rot has finally come home to roost, and you see after nine years scandals like this being publicized, and you look at legislation with relatively little substance, all in the name of public relations rather than public policy. I speak specifically to this.

At the time, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, Elizabeth Witmer, was actually our health critic. She of course would have been the first person to speak to this legislation as our then health critic. She went so far as to say that the single biggest weakness is the so-called whistle-blower protection section. She said that the bill does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers. It imposes limits on which individuals are protected and who they can approach with the information. The legislation ought to provide a formal process, through the Ombudsman, that will ensure proper protection and follow-up.

Speaker, that is a key flaw with this legislation—a key flaw within this legislation. If one is to protect whistle-blowers, one must protect all whistle-blowers, and one must ensure that there is a fair, open, equitable process for them to tell the truth about the impending look of wrongdoing within that government agency, commission, department or board. That is not what this legislation will do.

I remember back in the days of eHealth when this government promised that they would never, ever once again be caught creating a scandal and that never, ever once again would they lack the determination or the diligence to follow up with some of these types of challenges ethically within their own government. We, of course, remember groups like Courtyard, who made a lot of money off of eHealth. We remember the OLG, by the way, Speaker, which, after losing \$46 million in casinos in Niagara and Windsor, now wants to expand right across the province and kill the horse racing industry, all for the love of money. Who in the heck would give them more power without them doing their due diligence and having the auditor review what they're doing?

It speaks to the lack of a plan from this government. There is not enough oversight. We have been proposing, since as long as I have been here, greater oversight of government.

The accountability challenge of the last decade has hit our sister and brother provinces across this nation as well as the federal House of Parliament. It seems that the era of accountability has not yet knocked on the door of this Liberal government. If it has knocked on the door of this Liberal government, they've ignored it. They've chosen instead, Speaker, only to act and provide legislation or

directives or other protocols once they have been caught. This has been a constant theme of frustration on the part of the official opposition given that this government has, from time to time, promised to do something and has utterly and miserably failed.

The bill, as I have said previously and as I know my colleagues have said, is an attempt to divert attention away from the fact that the minister has had the power to appoint a supervisor and/or an inspector from the beginning of the Ornge saga. My colleague from Simcoe–Grey, a former Minister of Health, our current House leader, has stood before this chamber on many occasions to point out the obvious flaw in this government's thinking, to say that it wasn't the Minister of Health's fault. It was the Minister of Health's fault. It was the previous Minister of Health's fault, and the minister before that. Three Liberal ministers had the opportunity to do something and chose not to. Now they want to create a process because they're too guilty. They want to say, "Sorry; we're not going to do it again. Please vote for this legislation." Well, this legislation doesn't go far enough.

1540

The minister had the power to intervene at Ornge under the original Ornge performance agreement as well as the Independent Health Facilities Act. Article 15 of the original performance agreement gave her the powers of intervention. She chose not to intervene, and that is why we are calling for that minister's resignation. We have been calling for Deb Matthews to resign as a result of her inability to deal with the scandal at Ornge, the mismanagement of taxpayer dollars and the fact that that company, under the guise of the public service here in Ontario, has put public safety at risk. That's terrible, Speaker, and that's why she should resign.

In addition, we have called for a select committee to review all of the information so that those whistleblowers would have protection so we can get to the bottom of how rotten this scandal actually is. I credit the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Frank Klees, for the great work that he has done.

Finally, Speaker, with the last few seconds I have remaining I must say this: The fact that the Premier of Ontario, when invited to public accounts, chose not to show up in this minority Parliament speaks to the need that we need to strike committees again in this assembly and that we need to ensure that there is a select committee on Ornge.

The Liberals want to tell you that enough Liberals have appeared before public accounts. The fact is, they have shut down public accounts. They have shut down a select committee and they want to shut down this assembly from having anything to say. Speaker, we'll have no more of that.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I think the two issues for me are the issue that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo raised today, the issue of competency, but the second, I

think, is the issue of confidence. I think that patients in this province, families in this province and certainly the opposition parties have lost confidence in the oversight of the Ornge ambulance.

This is a very important issue. We're not talking about widgets here; we're not talking about something on a factory floor; we're talking about real human beings here. We've heard, over the last couple of months, about the long delays in patient transfers—if the patients were transferred at all. We heard about some untimely deaths of patients because of the issues around Ornge. These are people's lives; these are people's loved ones. This is why there's so much passion to get up and discuss the issue of Ornge.

From our perspective, this bill needs to get into committee. It needs to have some amendments made to it to ensure that, at the end of the day, we don't have something similar happen. But the bill itself doesn't go far enough. In fact, some of the things that the bill is purporting to do—in fact, the Minister of Health already had the ability to enact some of those processes, but she chose not to.

From our perspective, from the NDP perspective, we look forward to some debate on this issue when it gets to committee over the coming weeks. We think it's a very important issue not only for the patients and clients in this province but for the taxpayers in this province so that their hard-earned dollars go to services that they can rely on.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to comment again, this time on the remarks of the member from Nepean–Carleton. I must say that I do agree with the comments from the member for Welland that what we need to do is get this bill into committee and see if there are improvements. Certainly, we can discuss whether there are suggestions around improving Bill 50.

I must say that I really have to wonder about the member from Nepean–Carleton's definition of "shut down." We have done many days of hearings, including throughout the summer—hours and hours and hours of witnesses, including three visits from the Minister of Health. We got thousands and thousands of pages of documents.

One of the interesting documents that was tabled was from this meeting back on September 4, 2003, when responsibility for Ornge was assigned to Dr. Mazza—so this is prior to the 2003 election campaign. One of the interesting things in the documentation at that time is that there actually was a direction that this new air ambulance program should engage in fundraising. This seems to be the idea that got Mazza thinking that it was okay that he could set up for-profit companies. I must say, Speaker, I believe that that was not the intent of the assistant deputy minister at the time. I think he meant "engage in fundraising" in the way in which a hospital board engages in fundraising, which is for additional equipment and capacity to operate the hospital and to operate, in this

case, the base. But that seems to be the direction which gave Mazza the opinion he could do what he did.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to speak to this. My colleague from Nepean–Carleton is very knowledgeable in these types of matters and always puts her best foot forward on behalf of this Legislature to protect the taxpayers of Ontario. Similarly, she paid homage to Jim Wilson, a former Minister of Health, who obviously knows this file front and back. It's a shame they didn't actually ask Mr. Wilson for some of his expertise; maybe they wouldn't have gotten themselves into this absolutely dismal situation that they're in.

This bill does nothing but shine a light on the incompetence of the Liberal government. It is very similar, if I can draw you a comparison, Mr. Speaker, to the situation of the gas plant in Mississauga, where a former minister set up a boondoggle and then another gets thrown under the bus and has to take the heat and, in this case, probably the fall. We're still waiting to see what's going to fall out of this Mississauga gas plant and Oakville gas plant boondoggle.

But I'll go back to this one. This current Minister of Health has tabled a bill; however, it is too little, too late. The corruption has happened with no oversight, really nothing that they're actually asking to bring backwards and no accountability for those people that they know had misdeeds. The waste has already happened, and we, the people of Ontario, the taxpayers of Ontario, are feeling that and will continue to feel it. We're not even scratching the surface. We asked for a select committee so that we could get to the bottom of this. We wanted to make sure that the Alfred Appses and the Chris Mazzas of the world could never do this type of thing again under anyone's watch, and yet we keep getting stifled. The Premier still refuses to come and actually tell us how many meetings he had with Dr. Mazza or Mr. Appis.

This is a bill that even misses the boat on whistle-blower protection. We have people who are stepping up, jeopardizing potentially their own career aspirations because they know it's the right thing, but all this minister continues to do is to say, "We will do better in the future." Well, you know what? That's not enough. We need to hold people accountable. We need to ensure that our health care system is there when the people of Ontario need it.

Ornge is nothing but a fiasco. This bill is not going to fix it. We need to continue to get to the bottom of it on behalf of the taxpayers of Ontario.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to be here today and speak on Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

One thing this bill does allow for is amendments to the accountability agreement at any point through regulation and without consultation. This is the first time that this has been done. Our concern is that if the minister can

make amendments or regulations to this bill at any point without consultation, perhaps that's something we should be looking at a little closer. Without consultation, there could be situations where we could end up in a problematic amendment that could actually backfire.

So having transparency is great, but there should be accountability as to when amendments are made and regulations are put through; there needs to be consultation every step of the way. We know that Ornge has already exploded, and we don't want this happening again. So let's be cautious. When we get to committee, let's talk about this and the pros and the cons before we agree to that amendment in this bill.

1550

It also provides whistle-blower protection to those air ambulance workers who disclose information to the ministry, the inspector, the investigator or special investigator who are going to be part of this bill. I'm glad to see that in the bill. I would think that any kind of whistle-blower protection in a medical type of area is very important. People shouldn't feel they're going to be reprimanded or lose their job when there is health, safety or even lives at stake—when it comes to health. I'm glad to see that that's in there. We definitely need to have more transparency from the ministers themselves with regards to accountability and certainly that workers have that whistle-blower protection if there is something that goes awry and they can actually be listened to and actions can be taken upon their concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That includes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's my pleasure to close off the last few moments. I want to say thank you very much to the members from Welland and London–Fanshawe for their contribution in the debate as well as to my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who is our deputy health critic—I thank you very much for your debate—and of course, the member from Guelph.

It's entertaining to listen to the members opposite, because they always tell us it's 2003. So, much like in a hostage-taking situation, if I could have one of the pages come forward, I'd like to send over a clipping to the member from the newspaper that actually states that the date today is Monday, September 24, 2012, not 2003. So, there have been nine years that have elapsed since they first took office. In that time they have presided over two of the largest health care spending scandals in Canadian history. First it was eHealth; now it is Ornge. They're responsible for both of them, whether they want to acknowledge that or not.

They've also been responsible for a mismanagement scandal at Cancer Care Ontario, also with health care dollars in this province. They have been also responsible for a scandal at OLG.

So, for the members opposite, I say: The decade of darkness is firmly in your hands. We'll be seeking to remove us and the rest of the province out of that decade

in the next election. I will say this: The bill before us, Bill 50, is nothing more than trying to legislate ethics with no substance. This will not change the next scandal. We have to change this government. That's what we intend to do. That's why we will be here, continuing each and every day to call for Premier McGuinty to be held accountable for this by showing up at committee, having Deb Matthews resign—we're going to continue to stand up and do that, and we're going to continue to call for a select committee.

Above all, we can't get any work done in this House until they actually strike committees so we can go forward with democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today and speak to Bill 50. I haven't had an opportunity to prepare much today. I didn't realize this bill was being called. But it's Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

I think what summarizes this whole air ambulance fiasco are the teacher ads—and they're running even currently, right now—where they show, it looks like it's the Premier in the background and he's playing with this little Ornge air—

Interjection: Helicopter.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: A little helicopter, yes. The first thing I was wondering when I had seen that ad is, "I wonder what happened to the little Ornge motorcycles?" I understand out at the crystal palace that there were actually a couple of those, at least a couple of them, worth over \$100,000 each. They haven't really come up in the debate here very much, I don't think. But apparently they are sold now. But those are the little stories, those ads put on by the OSSTF that actually, I think, brought a lot of attention to this air ambulance fiasco even as we speak.

Here we are today, and we're debating Bill 50, and I guess we're going to vote on the previous bill. But, you know, we have no committee to send it to. It's my understanding right now that all committees are in limbo around here because the current government wants to renegotiate how committee structures are set up. The reality is, they want to have basically a majority status on the committees in a minority situation.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Can you believe that?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: That's difficult to believe.

Here we're going to work on Bill 50. We're going to speak to this as long as we can and bring attention to this fiasco. But the reality is that, even if we get through second reading, and first reading was actually made on March 21 of this year, we have no committee to go to. My first question to the government members is: When are we going to re-establish our committees? Basically, without a committee structure, you're almost in contempt of Parliament if you've got nothing to send it to.

As someone who sat on a legislative assembly committee—we looked at changes to the standing orders—

speaker after speaker came in and told us in our deputations and teleconferencing on that committee that the committee structure is the backbone of the British parliamentary system. Right now, as occurred last fall and as is happening right now, we really do not have a committee structure here. We're debating this, hoping that something will happen and the government will come to the table and re-establish the committees. That, right off the bat, is very important, in my opinion, that that happen. Bill 50—I'm not sure if it'll go to public accounts or not after second reading debate, but we don't have a public accounts committee to send it to.

That takes us to what the public accounts committee has done. I think they've done a remarkable job. I applaud the work of our lead on that committee, Frank Klees. I think he's done a remarkable job. Then, of course, on top of it all, somebody is trying to demonize him on the side with false information. It's just sad that that has happened.

But above all, I thought we in this House, the majority of the House, agreed to go to a select committee. I thought we agreed to do that, and they said—

Mr. Bill Walker: The will of the people, I think is what they said.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: They said, "The will of the people." But you know what? We fought it all the way. The government obviously doesn't want to go to the select committee. I think a lot of things could be established at that committee. In fact, I think at that committee, we could bring in so many special representatives, people who have a knowledge going way back on this—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Whistle-blower protection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: —whistle-blower protection, you name it. But particularly, Mr. Speaker, I guess, since around January of this year, December of last, right after the election, I've had some whistle-blowers come to me. They're very concerned about what they tell me. They certainly don't want their names—some of them are employees of Ornge. They're very concerned and have been concerned for some time.

I've also had families of people severely injured in accidents, in one case a major accident in Sudbury, where the air ambulance, Ornge, didn't want to fly the young man back to Toronto. Before that actually occurred, his family said, "If he's not flown to Toronto, there will be a lawsuit." Eventually Ornge agreed to send this young lad back. He is now a healthy young man and doing very well, but it took a lawsuit—to threaten them—to actually do that.

The Green Energy Act—wow—Bill 50: These are the stamps of our previous health minister. Over and over again, I see one blunder after another. It looks like we've had some major, major mistakes, not only with the wind and solar and how that's all done and taking support away from the municipalities. You just wonder how we got this far.

That takes me to a third point I wanted to add today, and that's the whole purpose of the OPP investigation into what's happening at Ornge. Obviously, this is a huge

investigation. I've never talked to anyone who is actually part of the investigation yet, but I can tell you this has got to be international, as well. With all the companies that were set up and the monies that were transferred, this actually would probably take in Scotland Yard, the FBI, Interpol—I'm assuming they would all be part of that. Maybe I'm wrong on that; I don't know. Maybe some of the government members can clarify whether or not. But when you see that mishmash of corporations that were set up under Ornge, obviously, money had to change hands throughout international boundaries. I'm not sure the OPP have the ability to investigate beyond Ontario without the advice and the help of other police jurisdictions.

1600

That takes me to something that came up to me from a retired OPP officer a few weeks ago, and I would love to hear some feedback from anyone who has the knowledge on this. This is what happened. I was talking to a retired OPP officer who is currently working in another job. He told me that under the Mike Harris government, with the size of the provincial health care budget, Premier Harris, under that jurisdiction, had set up basically a detachment of the OPP within the Ministry of Health—I've made this comment to a few people now—and that was eventually taken away. There's basically no oversight now with the OPP in the Ministry of Health, and they did it for a reason.

Of course, this officer that I've have talked to—and he's willing to talk in the future—he's saying that we might have avoided the eHealth scandal and we might have avoided this whole thing with the Ornge air ambulance if in fact we had had the OPP oversight keeping a close eye on this huge budget. Of course, that budget has grown from something like \$19 billion, when I came here in 1999, to over \$50 billion. There are all kinds of opportunities for mismanagement of that money, and maybe we do need tighter oversight on it. Whether this bill does it or not, I don't know. I'm not so sure of that.

Bill 50, I guess, is supposed to be more oversight, but we certainly weren't going to have a Bill 50 until the scandal broke in this Legislature. There was no plan last fall, when they were campaigning and promising the whole world to everybody, that we were going to have a Bill 50 to oversee Chris Mazza and the air ambulance service. The only reason it happened, of course, is because it was exposed and they had to bring out something.

What got me was that, throughout the spring session and into the fall session, they kept saying, "Why are you not bringing forth Bill 50? You're blocking Bill 50." Who ever tried to block Bill 50? Does anyone know who tried to block it? I don't. I think they just didn't want to bring it forward. Now we've got nothing else to debate and no committees to send it to, on top of that.

Mr. Speaker, that's kind of where we're going with this thing. I guess we'll get through this and we'll get second reading debate complete. But do you know what? We have no committee to send it to. They don't want to form committees. So it's sort of a dysfunctional Parlia-

ment down here. We're debating Bill 50 today. Maybe there will be something else to debate tomorrow.

The reality is, this has been one huge mistake, and someone has to be accountable. I hope that between possibly public accounts getting up again in the future; maybe the select committee, if we're really, really lucky, and they finally agree to do it; and finally, maybe if the OPP come through with a good, clean investigation into what happened here, although that could take two or three years—we may finally get to the bottom of what happened in the air ambulance scandal.

Thank you very much for the opportunity today, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to give my input a little bit more about the ministry oversight, because, unfortunately, that's why we're here today: the lack of oversight. The one amendment I mentioned before allows the amendment of accountability at any point through regulation without consultation, and this is one of the first times that this has been done.

I go back to the original oversight that was through Ornge. Apart from the matter of the sunshine list, there are many unanswered questions that came about with Ornge. One of the things that was put in the Auditor General's report was that in February 2006, the Minister of Health "committed to set standards and monitor performance against those standards to ensure that the 'end result will be improved care, improved access to service, increasing effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of service, and the assurance of greater fiscal and medical accountability.'" That's on page 12 of the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General said there was never really any follow-through on that.

Quoting from the Auditor General again, on page 7: "However, the ministry has not been obtaining the information it needs to meet these oversight commitments."

Where I'm concerned is, when we give the accountability amendment for her to make agreements at any point through regulation without consultation—I think that needs to be tweaked. We need to have consultation. We can't let one person make those amendments and regulations without consulting with their ministries, stakeholders or people whom it's going to affect. I think we have already proven the accountability piece isn't working. It said right in the report that she failed to do that. Giving a minister any kind of power not to have consultation, I think, is the wrong way to go.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm very pleased to stand up today to speak about Bill 50. I was listening very carefully to the member for Simcoe North, and he was right: There were a lot of questions that he asked that were not answered, he's told us, at committee. But you know, Mr. Speaker, there was one person missing: the author of this mess. The author of this mess was the Minister of Health who was there when this company

was formed: It's Minister Clement. They asked Minister Clement to come answer questions from the committee, but he refused to come. Who hired this person who was the CEO of Ornge? Who hired him?

Mr. Bill Walker: Chris Mazza.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, Chris Mazza was hired also by the former Minister of Health, Minister Clement. I'm sure Minister Clement would have a lot to say if he appeared before the committee and answered the questions from the member for Simcoe North.

Also, he had a question about the health fraud and the OPP. I'm going to reassure him and tell him that there is still OPP looking after health fraud. It's reassuring that they're still there, looking after all these frauds.

I was impressed by the comment from the MPP from Welland. She's a former nurse and she knows that when we need to transport these patients by air ambulance, they are in a very precarious health situation. We need to redress that. I hope that Bill 50 will help.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to stand up and comment on the comments from our colleague on this side.

It's interesting that we talk about them closing the book. They would like to close the book on this saga. I would like to remind the Minister of Community Safety that Ornge was not put together under the Harris government; it was put together under the McGuinty government. There's no trail that goes back to the former government. I often wonder—I've sat here a year—if Bill Davis sat back and blamed the government that was there 60 years before them. When does the statute of limitations stop on blaming the party before? Even when they're not involved, they're still involved.

We look at some of the issues—as my colleague talked about, the Ornge helicopters, the Ornge motorcycle and those advertisements, but there's no talk about a ministry that set up something where they go out and they overbuy the most expensive assets. They bought four extra planes and helicopters—ones that they didn't need—and then tried to retrofit them.

It goes to talk about the oversight. This is the first time I've ever heard of a ministry saying that they didn't have oversight over their own ministry. If you're going to say that, tell the public that. My colleague from Nepean-Carleton is getting tired of addressing the radio station to tell them, "No, we don't have the ability to bring the government down. It takes a confidence vote." It just goes to say the people of Ontario are getting upset with what's going on here and the lack of oversight. I think it's time for members opposite to listen to that and start looking back and putting oversight, putting real issues on the table.

They talk about delaying this bill, and as the member said, there's no committee to go to, anyway. This bill was first brought up almost nine months ago and it's still going to go nowhere when debate collapses because there's no committee structure in place. This government's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think we just go back to one of the original concerns as the bill is presented, and that's around the lack of oversight with regard to an FOI—that Ornge would be exempt and not subject to an FOI, nor will the Ontario Ombudsman have oversight over the agency. This speaks to a general confidence issue that we all face. We all know that organizations behave differently when they know they are under an FOI. There is that level of accountability; there's that level of knowing that what is happening within that organization is subject to the public's approval.

1610

Just look at all the hospitals that came under an FOI just in January. The first thing they did was that they posted their CEO contracts and salaries on their websites, displaying to the public at large how the public money is being spent.

In this instance it's not just about money; it was about competency and it was about trust ultimately. The Ontario public takes their health care issues seriously. That's why this situation, as it was described earlier, did blow up.

The FOI access also brings transparency, but without this bill, Ornge will continue to be exempt. This is something that we certainly will have to address at committee when it gets there. It's something that we have heard from the general public: that they want greater oversight into how Ornge is operating. You can't blame the public for having a lack of confidence, on the whole, in how this agency has been operating.

Air ambulances deal with life-and-death situations, and sometimes things do go wrong. For those families to know they can rely on a service to ensure their children and their family members will be dealt with safely and expediently is a matter of trust. This needs to go to committee. These issues need to be addressed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We now return to the member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I would like to thank the member from London-Fanshawe, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and the new member from Kitchener-Waterloo—and I want to congratulate her on her election here. Thank you very much, and I appreciate their comments.

I did want to just go back to the minister for one second on the oversight. What the officers have told me—when it was set up previously in the late 1990s with the OPP, they almost had like a detachment in the ministry of around 30 employees. That's what I was told. He has told me, and he's now retired, that it has been severely diminished over that period of time. They do not have the power they had at one time, and it was done under previous Minister Smitherman at that time. I did want to point that out, because he did feel that there was an opportunity that they might have found out more things about the Ornge fiasco before that particular point.

But the reality is, Mr. Speaker, we've got a problem here. We've got the debate happening here today. As I said earlier, it came in as a result of the pressure from the media's breaking news here in this Parliament.

Even if we get Bill 50 through second reading and a vote on it, we still have no place to send it at this point. I think that's pretty bad. Here we are almost at Thanksgiving in the year. We need to move forward. There's a lot of legislation that should be brought in, there are some great private members' bills out there that should be debated, and yet we have no place to send this bill.

I encourage the government members and the House leaders to make this happen very quickly because this sort of thing should go to committee. We also need that select committee established immediately.

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

M. Peter Shurman: Je veux adresser quelques mots en français, premièrement pour ajouter mes mots, mes opinions, au débat, et pour répondre à ma collègue la ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Affaires francophones, qui a dit que, dans un sens, les problèmes d'Ornge ont été créés, il était une fois, par un gouvernement avant l'année 2003, le gouvernement Harris. Je ne peux pas comprendre pourquoi elle ne veut pas prendre ses propres responsabilités.

I don't understand why after nine years, Speaker, it seems impossible for that minister or this government to take responsibility for what is theirs. If the responsibility for something that happens in the here and now relates somehow to an action that was taken by somebody who was once upon a time in place, then suffice it to say that we might as well blame the debt and deficit on John A. Macdonald or Isaac Brock and not the McGuinty government. You've been in place for nine years. Do you take responsibility for the operations of government in Ontario at this place or not? It seems to be, Speaker, that the answer is not.

The fact of the matter is, we're debating a bill, Bill 50, and I've got to say that the first thing about Bill 50 that surprises me is that it doesn't have a fancy title. If we're talking about the budget these days, we have to deal with legislation called "strong measures." If we're talking about taking care of what's going on in our schools, it might be called "putting students first," but this, for Liberals, has a very simplistic title. It's called An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services—pretty plain and simple. I personally would have preferred the "cover your posterior act" because that's exactly and only what this bill does.

Speaker, if you take a look at the explanatory note—and I'm going to read it into the record because it's very short. It says, "The Ambulance Act is amended to allow providers of air ambulance services to be designated as 'designated air ambulance service providers.'" How about that?

"The Lieutenant Governor in Council is given the power to appoint provincial representatives to sit on the board of a designated air ambulance service provider, and

the minister is given the power to issue directives to designated air ambulance service providers."

Up to that point—and that's two of about six paragraphs—that's what the minister had as her powers to begin with. She didn't take them seriously, obviously.

"The regulations may deem certain provisions to be included in an agreement between Ontario and a designated air ambulance service provider.

"The Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint special investigators to investigate and report on the activities of a designated air ambulance service provider, and may appoint a supervisor to exercise"—I'm going to stop at this point. This is gobbledygook. This is what we call "boiler plate." It really doesn't do anything, and if you delve into the three pages that constitute this bill and just get by the definitions, what you find is a band-aid. How appropriate for something that deals with something as important as our ambulance service, which is a key feature for people who are in dire need at any particular given time, car accidents being the first thing that comes to mind.

This bill is there for one reason: It is to cover the backside collectively of the government on something where it dropped the ball, and dropped it significantly. I'm going to quote from David Oraziotti, MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, and I'll tell you when he said this. He said, "It'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 manner. There is a performance review process within that contract, and perhaps it needs to be reviewed to ensure they're living up to obligations." Mr. Oraziotti said that in October 2009. So we're talking about three years ago, and that particular member, a member then and a member now of this government, recognized that there was something wrong. Are we to infer from this that in discussions at the caucus level of the Liberal Party, he didn't raise this? Nobody else raised it? There wasn't some discussion internally about the operations of Ornge? The ministry never exercised oversight?

I'm going to tell you something, Speaker: I spent the bulk of my career as a CEO. As a CEO, I had hundreds of people who, in various ways, reported through other people to me. I could not possibly know what they were all doing, and I could not possibly micromanage what they were doing. That is not dissimilar from the job of a minister of the crown in this or any other government. You're like a CEO. You run a ministry; it has hundreds, sometimes, as it is in health, thousands of people. You cannot possibly know what every single one of them is doing, so you have reporting structures that bring information to you.

My directive, when I was a CEO, was: I don't ever want to catch anybody in a lie, and I don't ever want to catch anybody hiding information from me. If you bring me the information and you tell me what's wrong, we'll sit down and figure out how to address it and fix it together. The only way you're in trouble with me is if you

lie to me or if you hide information from me. I would expect that to be the watchword or the rule of thumb, the first one, for anybody at the head of an organization, and I would certainly apply that rule of thumb to ministers. I would say that in the case of Minister Matthews, this was not the order of the day. I don't know if it was then—obviously not, I would have to say—and I don't know if it is now. I think this bill is her idea of what will help her achieve that, but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about doing what you have to do when you have to do it.

1620

I recall a day last December when I went from media office to media office up on the third floor of this building because I was the spokesperson for the party that day, and what we wanted to highlight were the transgressions that we were recording from whistle-blowers who came forward on the Ornge file. And interestingly, on that very same day, I kept crossing paths with who? Minister Deb Matthews, who was also going from media office to media office to put out the fire that was Ornge for her. That was in December.

I quoted Mr. Oraziotti, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, who made his comments back in 2009. I could just as easily have quoted our critic, who has done such a stellar job on this file, Frank Klees, the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who was asking questions of that minister in this House in April of that year. So when I talk about having done the media circuit and watching the minister do the media circuit in December, that's fully eight months after the questions in this House were answered by Minister Matthews in such a way as to give my colleague hope there would be some kind of an investigation. Clearly, there was not. The ball was dropped on Ornge, and the trail is absolutely clear. That's some of the experience that I had.

The nub of this bill, the one I could underscore as being of some relevance, is protection for whistle-blowers, which, I have to say, is not strong enough. My first experience with Ornge, which I've never really talked about in this House because that's not part of my file on a day-to-day basis, was to meet a fellow by the name of Jacob Blum, who turned out to be one of the prime witnesses before the public accounts committee here. And if there were actually to be a select committee, which we still think there should be, he would obviously be a prime person there as well because he helped author the performance agreement, because he essentially recruited Dr. Mazza, because he helped run Ornge for many years until he got to a point in his life where, by his own admission, he could no longer go on with what he was experiencing.

How did I know him? I met him with my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora because Mr. Blum lives in Thornhill, my riding, and wanted to know who to come to as a whistle-blower and, at that time, had not been identified and asked for secrecy because he was concerned about the aspects of whistle-blowing and what might happen in the event that he revealed information—

information in his case which turned out to be extremely valuable and useful in going forward.

The current government's handling of the Ornge air ambulance services is simply another example of the Liberals' inability to properly oversee large and complex files, resulting in inadequate public service and improper use of taxpayer funds. We've seen it time and again. We saw it in eHealth. We saw the about-face of Premier McGuinty literally weeks after being elected, with the health premium. We're seeing it now with the handling of the Mississauga and Oakville power plants, which obviously will have more discussion in this chamber in the days and weeks to come, for sure.

The bottom line is, if you give it to this government, somehow or other it either doesn't get done, there are delays in getting it done, and in the end you wind up with something that I can only describe as a cover-up. At the end of the day, what else can you use by way of terms to describe what we're hearing and what we're seeing here today? So, Bill 50: too little, too late and a band-aid.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My colleague, the new member from Kitchener–Waterloo, was correct in her earlier comments. Where the public is not allowed in, not allowed to actually access documents through freedom of information, we run into difficulties. Organizations feel themselves above scrutiny. Mr. Speaker, you are well aware and everyone in this Legislature is well aware what that has meant for the people of Ontario and our air ambulance service. The new member was quite correct. When hospitals came under freedom-of-information scrutiny, they opened documents to the public. It has been much too long, Speaker. People who were willing to come forward risked their careers and risked their jobs by telling the people of Ontario, the legislators of Ontario, what was really going on. They deserve protection. They're going to get protection in this bill. But frankly, Speaker, they should have had protection all along.

In our party, we're worried that this government is not learning from history, that a failure to learn from a practice of covering things up is going to result in further damage to the well-being of the people of this province. If we look at what's happening in Toronto with the privatization of the Eglinton light rail transit, why is that being privatized? Why is that not made a public entity, subject to scrutiny, subject to openness and subject to freedom of information?

Speaker, it is as if everything we learned in our experience with Ornge has been forgotten. This bill has been brought forward to, in some limited way, address those problems. Things need to be far farther ranging.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci, monsieur le Président. Ça me fait plaisir de m'adresser à la Chambre encore une fois pour parler d'Ornge.

I'm pretty perturbed to see that the Ontarians who need the help right now were put in such a situation by

creating an organization that did not live up to the very demanding job they had to do. This structure was put together between 2002 and 2003. In the structure, they made sure that this organization was very independent, independent from any government that will come into place.

I'm very surprised to see that my friend my critic from Thornhill doesn't want to have any organization or to give the power to the minister to oversee this organization, or to give whistle-blowers all the protection that a whistle-blower needs.

I commend the new member from Kitchener-Waterloo for her comment. Yes, that's true. I always think that the best test is to put yourself in the situation. If you were that person that needed to be transported to a hospital—and sometimes not the hospital in the area because the health is so critical that you need to be transported by air ambulance. Like I said, when you are transported by air ambulance, your situation is pretty bad.

The best thing to correct, if the bill is not completely perfect, is to go before the committee, and everybody will have their input to make sure that the bill is solid and that we don't see these situations coming forward anymore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Elgin-Middlesex-London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Merci, monsieur le Président. Je remercie mon confrère le député de Thornhill. I think he has been right on the ball saying this is a band-aid solution. Basically, the Minister of Health had all the powers in the world to look after this fiasco at Ornge and failed to do so. She was negligent in her duties. He related to his business as a CEO; I'm going to relate to mine as an owner of a business. If I had an employee who was as negligent in her duties as much as the Minister of Health was with Ornge, she would have been fired long, long ago and it would be without further debate.

Premier McGuinty has failed in his duties. He's letting his cabinet ministers run amok with incompetencies. In fact, even if you're obeying Mr. McGuinty, he'll throw you under the bus in an instant, as we've seen with the gas power plants. Minister Bentley has very much been under the bus for a while now. I don't understand why the backbenchers are supporting this cabinet decision to ignore issues like Ornge and like eHealth, when in fact at the next moment Mr. McGuinty would pretty much throw them under the bus in order to retain his power.

But what we've really got to look at here is, as he said, a band-aid solution. This is nothing more than the government trying to scramble and divert attention away from the real issue: that we need a select committee on Ornge, which this House motioned and which we should have in motion right now, and it has been totally ignored by the government of this day.

1630

To make further insult, the fact that they've shut down committees, that we can't even have further discussion on Ornge—I just don't understand what this government

is hiding and why they want to continue to block this discovery on this Ornge issue and why they continue to support their Premier, who has been negligent in his duties, and a health minister, who should resign.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: When I saw the Liberals come forward with this bill I was, for a moment, hopeful. I thought that there would be some serious consideration that the government would take a close look at the problem and offer a real solution. So I was hopeful, but what I saw was a bill that missed the mark absolutely.

It's easy to correct a specific mistake. Ornge had some specific problems; to correct that, anyone could do that. What I wanted to see was a long-term solution, a sustainable solution, so that future Ornges would not occur. We don't want to just correct this one problem, this one example of something completely avoidable, something that was easy to detect very early, something with many red flags and warning signs that were provided to the government by members of the public and employees, that this could have been avoided.

I was hoping that the government would put in place a policy or laws and regulations that this government would guarantee its role as providing oversight and providing real accountability as a government that should hold each and every precious dollar, each precious resource for our health care system, and treat it as such—treat it precious and seriously, and ensure that any dollar spent on any transfer agency should be held accountable and should ensure that the agency is providing effective and efficient care.

That's not what we're seeing. We don't see anything in this bill that will help prevent future Ornges from happening in the future. That's what we needed to see, and it has been sorely missing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I want to get a couple more things on the record because we only spoke for 10 minutes. The Liberals would like people to believe that they didn't know, that they found out when we found out about what was going on at Ornge.

A couple of things that need note:

—April 14, 2008: Keith Walmsley, former senior business analyst at Ornge, alerted Margaret Best, former Minister of Health Promotion, of deceitful business practices, including two accounting books to hide a \$5-million surplus from the ministry;

—November 14, 2008: Best forwarded Walmsley's letters to a senior official at health, who then forwarded the letter to the Ministry of Finance. Two investigators visited Ornge. Walmsley received a reply. It stopped there;

—January 2011: Ornge board chair Rainer Beltzner sent a letter to Health Minister Matthews and senior officials in the Premier's office that laid out in great detail plans to use public funds for Ornge's for-profit business ventures.

I could go on. There are several more. The point I'm trying to make here is a continuation of points that I and other members have raised in this debate and that have to be raised because this bill purports to address problems and deficiencies that resulted in the difficulties at Ornge that were illuminated there, when it doesn't—it doesn't even begin to address them, much less find a way to fix them.

These incidents that are outlined and that I've just read into the record occurred years before the Ornge scandal, in its robustness, was ever out in the public sphere, was ever debated in this chamber or was ever the subject of question period.

This is about a minister who didn't take responsibility. In fact, it's about successive health ministers who didn't take responsibility. That's why we have this bill. It purports to be the patch that is going to fix all. It doesn't do that. It's like everything else that we get from them; it just doesn't work.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to just apologize: I have a cold today, so I might drag a little bit. Sorry about that.

I'm pleased to debate Bill 50—

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I don't self-medicate—An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

It's been a while since this bill—I guess it first came out March 21, and I remember sitting here when the member from Newmarket–Aurora spoke. He gave a great speech; I refer you all to Hansard to reread it when you get the chance because he hit on some pretty good notes. But one thing that rings my bell is that this bill is nothing but a red herring, as he put it. If you go back to what was going on in March, we were struggling to get this government to form the select committee on Ornge. Every day in the news it was about how they weren't forming this select committee, and every day in question period was about, "Where is the select committee?" The majority of this House, the will of the House, voted in support of it, and the government has ignored it. So the red herring is, "Well, let's throw a bill on the table to say we're going to deal with the whole Ornge scandal and prevent it from occurring any further," and get rid of this public display that they're not really following the will of this House.

To the government's credit, it worked until Frank Klees spoke about it and put out on the table the fact that this is a red herring, and this bill is actually doing nothing because the Minister of Health has all the powers already that this bill states. As noted here, the minister has the power to intervene at Ornge under the original Ornge performance agreement. It's already in the agreement that they have. The minister, if she was feeling that she wanted to do her job, would have intervened and taken care of the scandal instead of blaming previous health ministers from the Liberal government that started the scandal. It doesn't matter who started it. If you're in

charge, it's up to you to find the scandal and deal with it, especially when a year and a half earlier Frank Klees had given her notice that something was wrong at Ornge and it was purely ignored until the Toronto Star decided to run something. I don't know; maybe the Toronto Star should be the official opposition, because the government tends to listen to unelected media as opposed to the elected opposition of this House. Maybe they should start listening to it.

The other thing is, the Independent Health Facilities Act gave her the ability to actually look into Ornge and deal with the board and deal with the illegal activities that were occurring, under that legislation.

But back to the select committee on Ornge. The fact that the government refused to form it is one thing, but, to go further, the government has not re-formed committees so that we can continue the investigation into Ornge. The public accounts committee is no longer in existence at this point because the government is having difficulties realizing this is a minority government, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that they shouldn't have a majority on all the committees. In fact, I don't think they should have a majority on any committee. It should be as it is in this Legislature.

We should have that committee up and running. I think what they're trying to do is prolong it so this issue dies, but the official opposition will not let this Ornge issue die because it's horrific, the amount of money that has been wasted by this government on this scandal. We're not going to let it die. We're going to keep on it until we come down to the final answers of who knew what and when and who is responsible. Obviously, the government is not taking any responsibility from this Ornge scandal. Otherwise, the Minister of Health would have resigned or been fired.

The other fact is that if, in fact, this committee was intact, this Premier would not even sit in front of the committee to answer questions of what he knew about this scandal. I think that says a lot about the Premier: the fact that his backbench is there rooting for him and saying whatever he wants to say and the fact that he's not going to support them at the same time and come forward and be truthful to the people of Ontario about what occurred in Ornge under his tutelage.

The other problem I have with this bill is the whistleblower protection that has been brought up. Sylvia Jones here—we passed a motion in the House before we had the select committee that would have given full whistleblower protection for anybody that came in front of the select committee on Ornge, to protect them. We've heard stories—and even Mr. Klees has been attacked in the public, trying to ruin his integrity out there—that if you're coming out with the truth on an issue of billions of dollars that have been wasted due to this Ornge scandal, they're going to come after you and try to destroy you as a person. So we needed whistle-blower protection. This bill does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers, as it should. It imposes limits on which individuals are protected and who they can approach with

information. As stated earlier, perhaps a system should be set up where the Ombudsman is involved and able to intervene in and investigate the issues of Ornge, which again this bill fails to add into it.

1640

“The Ambulance Act is amended to allow providers of air ambulance services to be designated as ‘designated air ambulance service providers.’” In reading the summary of the bill, it’s not saying too much, other than that the Minister of Health is hoping that you turn the page on what we’re discussing. We no longer want to talk about select committees on Ornge, and apparently we’ve got to debate again, even though this should have been debated and voted on before we rested for the summer. But the fact is they’re now trying to get away from that there have been no committees formed.

Just to bring that up with the House leader, who should have been working to get the committee formed—the House leader has failed to do so. It’s the same House leader who is the Minister of Community and Social Services, who closed down our ODSP office in St. Thomas without any consultation, without any financial savings to doing so. It’s the same minister—he doesn’t seem to want to work with people. He doesn’t seem to want to try to find solutions. We’re in a minority situation here, and the official government has got to start working with and listening to the opposition parties, because when you add it up together, we do have the majority on this side of the House. If you don’t want to work with us, let alone set up a committee—which was passed in this House, to form a select committee. Instead, your answer is to throw up Bill 50, an act to amend the Ambulance Act. It’s not worth much more than the paper it’s written on, as I’ve said earlier.

The Minister of Health, at the start of this issue, when Frank Klees brought it up in April 2010, I believe—so it’s almost two years ago. He said, “You have a problem with Ornge. I’ve got people coming to talk to me. They’re afraid to talk to the ministry because there’s no whistle-blowing protection”—and Mr. Klees isn’t going to throw anybody under the bus. “You’ve got to do something about this issue that’s come up.” It’s been totally ignored. Their solution to the Ornge scandal is Bill 50, to officially regulate what is already in the agreement with Ornge.

That’s why I’m getting confused with this topic. I don’t know why we’re spending so much time on Bill 50; I don’t know why the Minister of Health has not pushed the government to get a select committee on Ornge; I don’t know why the Premier won’t talk to the committee on public accounts; and I don’t know why the government House leader will not form committees. It’s blowing my mind away.

I was voted here last October. It’s almost been a year. I swear, if my business ran like this government is running, we would be out of business in six months easily. I’m surprised they’ve lasted nine years. Obviously, we have a \$15-billion deficit heading towards a \$30-billion deficit, and our debt is \$200 billion, which they think is

good. Somehow, they can work out the statistics so that it comes out on top at the end of the day, but it’s \$15 billion that we don’t have that is pretty much being wasted. The eHealth figures: I think we’re almost at \$2 billion; with Ornge, probably \$1 billion. The gas plants are adding up. We can get rid of your deficit for you pretty quick if you stop the scandals and start listening and working with the PC Party.

As the member from Thornhill said earlier, it’s a band-aid solution. I don’t even call it a band-aid solution; I think it’s putting a band-aid on somebody else when the first person is bleeding, because it’s not really going to deal with the issues. We could have dealt with it earlier; we didn’t. The minister won’t resign; she should. The Premier should take some responsibility and speak out about this; he hasn’t.

This Bill 50 is really not going to be accomplishing too much other than going to committee—and if it makes it there, we’re going to have to rework it. As I said before, we need to work on whistle-blowing protection. Sylvia Jones here worked really hard to get her motion passed. I wish the government would start listening to us because we can accomplish so much working together instead of them trying to hide their scandals.

I look forward to everyone else’s comments.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The one thing that I keep bringing up with my questions and comments is about oversight and transparency. One thing this bill doesn’t have is Ombudsman oversight. The Ombudsman that we have, Mr. Marin—I’ve talked to many MPPs and fellow colleagues. He is very well respected. The work that he’s done in other areas that he has oversight in has certainly brought to light many recommendations, suggestions and solutions that actually make a ministry work better. I think this is part of what we should be looking at in committee seriously: having Ombudsman oversight. Mr. Marin has given us a lot of input on many occasions that helped improve the way a system is operated, and part of that transparency—if someone has an issue with that organization, there should be that investigation further so that the public feels that there is transparency that the government will be held accountable for.

So far, the government hasn’t been accountable for the Ornge scandal. Even with the hearings, there have been many questions that haven’t really been fully answered and that people are still wondering about. The fact that the Premier won’t make an appearance is a little disturbing. We need to get to the bottom of Ornge and we need the actual full picture, and he’s a piece of that puzzle that will give us the full picture of how this Ornge scandal got to this point and happened so long and cost the taxpayers dollars, but worst of all, cost lives. That’s what we need to make sure, and I think that one of the important key pieces is having Ombudsman oversight in this bill. I hope that when it goes to committee we will have a serious consideration to make that happen. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the comments by the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London. I must take exception to him calling this act a red herring and implying that it does nothing substantive.

One of the things that the member from London–Fanshawe mentioned in her previous comments is section 7.3 of the act, whereby the minister can make unilateral changes to the performance agreement that we would hold with Ornge, and she was very concerned about this. I would suggest that she might want to talk to her colleague the member from Nickel Belt, because in fact at the Ornge committee hearings, that member raised the issue that the old performance agreement was very unusual in the health sector; that it, in fact, didn't give the ministry the authority to put new provisions into the act. This was one of the things that Lynne Golding's branch at Fasken put into the act or didn't put into the act—what is usually in a performance agreement, which is the ability for the ministry to impose new requirements as circumstances change.

The other thing, which is very substantive here, is the introduction of the ability to have a special investigator and then a supervisor. It's interesting; when you go back into the Fasken billings, you can see this conversation about, "Should Ornge be constituted under the Ambulance Act in which there is currently no provision for supervision—for investigation and supervision—or under the Independent Health Facilities Act, where there is?", as the previous minister mentioned. But their advice was—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to stand and talk, and comment on the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London. He brought some good points up.

It seems like a long time ago, but in March in this House—after being promised almost a year ago, before Christmas, that if the House voted for a select committee, this government would indeed put one in place—we did vote in March and they have done all they could to avoid that. We tried to put pressure on them to make them follow through on their promises, and as somebody who's been involved in politics for 18 years, I should have known that one thing this government does do is not follow its promises. And that's again what happened.

We see that there's quite a history here. The member from Thornhill talked about how they actually knew starting back in 2008 when they first started to hear of these issues, but they chose to ignore them. I'm sure you can connect the dots. And when the member from Aurora–Newmarket brought it up last April, then it became damage control and they didn't want information out before the election.

Now we see that all types of things are falling apart. With a minority government, there's just too great a chance or opportunity for the opposition parties to find out, and we see no shortage of scandals. Whether it be

Ornge, eHealth, the power plants, the Green Energy Act, they just keep escalating.

1650

It's sad, because this all comes down to oversight. I sat in on a couple of those committees where they were very clear, the management at Ornge, that this government did have oversight and they actually were kept very much abreast of what was going on and the changes. So, either they weren't listening, which I guess maybe that's the obvious answer, or they chose not to take the advice that they were given.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, just building on my earlier points, what I would like to see us, as legislators, do is, instead of always looking to fix a problem, I'd like to see us move towards preventing problems. How do we prevent expenses that are incurred? How do we prevent waste of precious resources? How do we prevent that waste?

There are a number of transfer agencies to whom we provide financing. There are a number of agencies that we are the sole provider of funding. Now, throughout this province, it is incumbent on the government to ensure that every dollar that is spent is spent efficiently and effectively.

What are we going to do now, moving forward, if someone complains about what goes on at a transfer agency? What are we going to do if an employee complains about some concerns regarding remuneration or complains about issues regarding patient care or complains about concerns around the expenditure of money? What are we going to do regarding questions asked by opposition members?

We know very well that the heart of the Ornge scandal was compensation regarding executives. That issue was raised in committee years ago by the opposition, by the leader of the NDP, Howard Hampton. He asked a number of questions, but there were no answers provided.

What will this government do, moving forward, to ensure that if questions are asked by opposition members, if questions are asked in committees, that those answers are provided, particularly when it comes to compensation, particularly when it's in regard to transfer payment agencies?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for questions and comments, and we go back to the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London for his reply.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members for London–Fanshawe, Guelph, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Bramalea–Gore–Malton for their comments. It's always appreciative to hear addition to the debate.

As I said, I've called this bill a red herring—not in agreement. I can call it a distractor, a ploy, a gimmick, a manoeuvre, whatever you want to call it. What it was was to get our minds off the select committee on Ornge. It didn't work. It didn't work on this side. We're still

going to push for it. The Legislature spoke to that. We passed that we want this select committee on Ornge. No matter how hard they're going to push against us from forming it, we're going to keep at them.

But I think, foremost, we need to have committees formed so we can get the public accounts committee going again and get that committee working on finding the true details at Ornge and getting the Premier down there himself to let us know what he knew, when he knew, and why he didn't do anything to prevent this from occurring.

As I said before, this bill is lacking protection for whistle-blowers. We need to protect those who can come forward and bring out the truth that is being hidden through the various scandals. If we don't protect those who want to come forward, they're not going to come forward. They're going to be penalized for their actions, and we don't want that to happen. It's not fair; it's not right. We need to have that in place so that when they do come forward, they are protected.

Bill 50, we need to change the fact that—the power's already there. Why duplicate service? Why add an extra layer into the big book of law out there, of regulation? The Minister of Health has the power to do what she should have done and didn't do, and shame on her for doing that. Let's move on. Let's get this select committee on Ornge going. Let's find out what went wrong and take care of those who were in charge of this when it happened. They shouldn't still be there. It needs a change.

As Lisa MacLeod said, this government needs a change. They're old. Their ideas are done, and they're scandal-plagued.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: It's my pleasure to provide more input on Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

I think today we've heard a common theme from this side, the official opposition, in referencing back to the member for Newmarket–Aurora and his proper name for the bill, that it's to be called the red herring bill, which I would agree with because truly what we have here is really nothing more than the McGuinty government's attempt to divert attention away from its failure to take action against Ornge despite the repeated warnings. There are clearly several layers of this, but they talk about the financial irregularities of it, the not-for-profit spinoffs.

I'll tell you, when I'm back in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, people ask me time and time again, “How did this even happen?” How do you have an institution like Ornge that is to provide front-line patient care when we need it the most—every time you see the Ornge ambulance in the air you kind of get a bit of a funny knot in your stomach because you know that that air ambulance was dispatched to a scene where Ontarians need it the most, whether it be a car accident or a heart attack. Time and time again you see them and you just kind of shudder.

People say, “How did money that should have been going to the front lines to help save lives, or precious seconds off lives when in need, get funneled to other areas, these spinoff companies that would really, truly profit or have members of the executive team profit?” It just is unbelievable.

That goes into the second point, the bloated executive salaries. I mean, \$1.5 million or \$1.4 million, whatever Dr. Chris Mazza was making—unbelievable. To think that the gentleman who runs some of our power plants—\$1.4 million. But a doctor who came from the civil service to the hospitals, into Ornge, making several hundreds of thousands of dollars a year—to have his salary increase tenfold is just unbelievable. When we heard from front-line workers at Ornge how there were cuts happening to save money, it just didn't make sense.

I, for one, listened and heard, through the good work of the committee, an interview with the director of HR who was on a contract, who was making a ridiculous sum of money while still working for other people—even employed her daughter, I believe. Or you've got Dr. Mazza, who hired his girlfriend to come in and have some sort of director's job, and she was a ski instructor. I mean, it's just unbelievable. These things don't happen in the real world.

I'll tell you, I came from the private sector because I felt there was a need for private sector type experience that measured our results each and every day. We went to work and were measured by our results, not statements of good intentions. I'll tell you, I worked for a big company—tens of thousands of employees. This type of nonsense would never survive in the real world out there. People look at this and they're like, “What the heck is going on? Who is driving the ship here? Is there actually anybody on board in the driver's seat? Who is driving this thing?” It's just ridiculous.

Then I go into the operational deficiencies, and that's truly the story that people are often hearing about that makes us most upset. Actually, there was an incident back in November in my neck of the woods at the Waterloo region airport. I'll read you just a synopsis of a report that actually went to cabinet: “Claims of a delay in air ambulance response to a private helicopter crash. This call generated significant local media attention. One person deceased.”

However, the coroner notified—in his comments:

“(1) The evidence obtained identified that due to the launch policy that was in effect at the Ornge communications centre at the time of this incident, there was a delay in the provision of emergency air ambulance response.

“(2) Flight paramedic did not promptly assess the male patient as per the BLS standards.

“(3) Flight paramedic did not promptly assess the male patient as per the BLS standards.

“(4) There was an eight-minute and 25 second delay contacting the BHP to receive a trauma TOR for the female patient.”

That's one troubling example.

1700

But I'll tell you, when I read the report, I was almost in tears; I probably was when I was at home reading this. An incident back on July 15: "While en route to an on-scene rotary-wing request, the CCP notified Sudbury CACC he was unable to perform CPR on the AW139 and would have to accompany the patient in the land ambulance. The patient subsequently was declared dead."

One other instance, province-wide, July 22: "The OCC created new policy delaying the launch of a rotary-wing air ambulance to scene calls if a land ambulance can be on scene within 10 minutes and if at that time a land paramedic determined there was a need for air ambulance only then would the OCC launch...."

It's just simply troubling when taxpayers have footed the bill to an extent of \$750 million, and you read of instances like this with state-of-the-art equipment—or what should have been state-of-the-art equipment, but actually, at the end of the day, didn't allow for paramedics to perform proper CPR in brand new aircraft. It's like buying a car without seat belts or buying a Mini that you couldn't get into. It's unbelievable to think that when you need the service the most, whether it be an accident or what have you, to know that perhaps you're seconds closer to getting to the hospital—or minutes—that life matters so much, to be told the air ambulance couldn't take you because you couldn't perform CPR in it? Could you imagine if your son or daughter—I'm the father of a new seven-month-old and I guess I have a bit of a different perspective on life now because I watch him, and others need to fend for him right now. I can't even imagine, as a parent, being told, "We can't take your son or daughter because we can't perform CPR in these brand new helicopters." It's just truly unbelievable.

So that goes back to the operational deficiencies, which all lead to worst-case scenarios at Ornge, and that's the compromising of patient care. That's truly what happened. To that extent, it's truly the failure of the Minister of Health, in my opinion and I believe the official opposition's opinion, to step in and ensure that there was proper oversight to the Ontario air ambulance service.

We've in fact pointed questions at the Minister of Finance to provide proper oversight in terms of the finances being doled out year after year. We repeatedly attempted to get the Premier's attention on this file because we know that the Premier was properly briefed on the issue and has done nothing. We've called for the Premier to come to committee to explain what he has known on this issue, and he has refused to come to committee, which is a shame for democracy.

As my colleagues have stated earlier, it seems like the only time this government pays attention is when they get the morning paper the next day. The total disregard for the official opposition, when we bring these concerns forward, to ignore, ignore, ignore, only to see the paper the next morning—to finally do something or pretend to do something about it. I'll tell you, folks, tomorrow morning I think they'll get tuned into the role of the official

opposition, yes they will. This Speaker already had a bit of a say to that just recently when, in committee, a cabinet minister, the Minister of Energy, refused to provide the proper documents that members of this House expected and are in need of. So I think we'll have more to say on that tomorrow and the fact that hopefully the government will take notice to the official opposition before they go down that slippery slope of, shall I say, contempt, in the near future.

I know we just have a few short moments left, but I do believe that the Minister of Health has shown a great deal of discredit to her office by defending her role and by insisting she had no authority. Where does the buck stop? People say to me, "Who is in charge around here?" If the health minister has the ability to say she has no oversight or control or authority over Ornge, who does? Is it the finance minister? Is it the Premier? All the more reason for the Premier to show up to committee and explain himself on this. It's just unbelievable—\$750 million. There is a pattern emerging here. I'll hopefully be able to continue to talk about it in my two-minute hit, but I thank you, Speaker, for that opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just to build on some of my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga's comments around the accountability piece, those are real questions that the public has about where the money went, how the salaries increased and who was actually making the decisions. We saw over 60 witnesses. At the end of that process we had more questions than answers, which was disturbing. It did not build confidence from a public perspective.

If the question is, "How are we going to solve this issue?"—as one of my fellow colleagues said, this is a systemic issue—there's no silver bullet, there's no one-off. And yet there are still things missing from this proposed bill, namely the FOI and the Ontario Ombudsman not having that oversight with regard to Ornge. Ornge will continue to be an organization that cannot be called to government agencies. That's our responsibility as a House: to oversee and to ensure that money is being spent properly, to ensure that the mandate of that organization is actually being met. I think we see that there are gaps in this proposed bill. Finally, this bill cannot obscure the fact that the Ministry of Health has refused to look at their own role in this entire experience.

Those are very real questions that the public has around who was making decisions at the end of the day, where the responsibility is, where the accountability is. This needs to go to committee.

I've been asking my colleagues, "When is this going to go to committee?" because I'm new. There are no committees set up. How are we going to do our jobs? How are we going to work with the government to actually make this bill truly accountable, truly actionable? Yet no committees have been set up. So I think there is a disconnect between the goals and the objectives of this proposed bill and the work that we need to get accomplished on behalf of the people of this province.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I was listening to the comments made by the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, and I have to say that if we are here with this bill, it is because we realized some changes are needed. When I hear from the opposition that they are happy the bill is here but they would like some changes or improvements, I do hope so. I think we all look for some improvements.

There is never a bill introduced to the House that is 100% perfect or anyone who has ever brought or will ever bring a bill that doesn't require some oversight, some changes. So I'm pleased to see that the bill will go on and receive the attention it deserves, because at the end we all want the same thing. The bill is here for one major reason: We all want the best health care provision for our people, all the people in Ontario. There is no question with respect to that. I don't believe there is any member who doesn't want to see this done in such a way that in the end the best will be provided and delivered to the people of Ontario.

As I said before, the minister is in agreement; the speakers are in agreement. We have acted upon the recommendation of the Auditor General's report, and that is why we are here debating this particular bill today. While I'm pleased to see that the members are making a contribution to the content of the bill as it is, we would love to see it, yes, with some improvements. After all, even the bill as it is makes a number of good recommendations, and I think we have to take that into consideration and say, "Okay, it may not be exactly what we would like to see in the bill, but it gives us a beginning, where to start, and we hope to improve it as we move on."

I thank you, Speaker, for your time again.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Just to follow up on the comments from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, if there is any value in this debate, it's making it increasingly clear that we're not there yet. Really, confusion continues to reign with respect to who is at fault. We heard mention that 55 or 60 people have testified. Many come forward and defend the corporation; others, insiders, come forward and criticize the corporation. Some indicate that the government knew exactly what was going on. Government members come forward and seem to suggest that they did not know what was going on, that there was not the apparent oversight that you would expect in an entity that had been created—especially such a convoluted myriad of, essentially, divisions and people reporting to other people. We're not there yet, Speaker.

1710

One presentation—this would be Mr. Apps, the former Liberal Party of Canada president, a lawyer; he was there to defend the organization—made it very clear to our committee, the public accounts committee, that the government did know what was going on. Just digging into my notes, I'll quote Mr. Apps and his insistence:

"The government was thoroughly, painstakingly and, in all cases, truthfully briefed in advance of Ornge taking any of these actions." Now, we hear the opposite from government members. We have to get to the bottom of this. We have at least one elected member who should come before that committee. If he doesn't, I consider that contempt.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I'm going to go back to the point that was raised by the new member from Kitchener–Waterloo. I note a number of people are here in the Legislature today watching the debate, and I want to point out to them and those who are watching on television that this debate is going on in a situation where, even if we voted in the next 15 minutes or the next 10 minutes to proceed with this bill in committee, there are no committees to receive it. The business of this Legislature cannot go forward.

Here in this chamber, we talk to this point and that; we try to make things clear to the audience and clear to you, Speaker. But in the end, our wheels are simply spinning because there is no mechanism beyond this chamber to actually take the bill, have public hearings and amend the bill so that it responds to the needs that have been identified. This government needs to sit down with the opposition and with the third party, strike the committees and get on with the business of the House. It's as simple as that, Speaker—simple as that.

My colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has made an important point—and it needs to be made in committee—that it is not enough just to correct the problems in the air ambulance service. If we don't deal with the structural issues that bedevil this government, then the sorts of scandal, waste and risk to human life that we saw with Ornge, we will see throughout the public service. That is the greatest weakness of this bill and the greatest weakness of this Legislature right now: It's not set up to actually do business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, and we return to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to, first off, thank the newest member of the Legislature and my colleague from the region of Waterloo, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, Ms. Catherine Fife. Thank you for your comments on that—and of course, York West for chiming in, as well as my colleagues from Haldimand–Norfolk and Toronto–Danforth.

Quickly, just to build off what the member for Haldimand–Norfolk was saying in terms of the committee work that he did and the testimony of Alfred Apps, the former Liberal Party president, that the government did know—truly disturbing. That also goes to the point that the members for both Kitchener–Waterloo and Toronto–Danforth spoke about, and that's the structural issues.

I would say to you, we actually have those structural issues already today running rampant throughout government. The trend has already emerged. Whether it's the

Ministry of Health with regard to eHealth, \$2.4 billion wasted with five million Ontarians still without an electronic health record today; the recent announcement of the chopping of the diabetes registry that would affect and help 1.2 million Ontarians with diabetes, or the recent announcement of the cancellation of the Mississauga and Oakville power plants, those structural issues are running rampant through government today. It's just truly unfortunate. That's why we call this bill the "red herring bill," because that is simply what it is, along with a lot of the other items that our caucus colleagues here in the official opposition mentioned.

It's unfortunate that we're having to talk about this again and again, but like I said, those trends are emerging, and we hope that there will be changes in the near future. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to rise on second reading debate for Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

We've spent a lot of time in this Legislature talking about the Ornge scandal, which I think is a tremendous black mark on the McGuinty government. Before I provide comments on this bill or on why we're here today, I want to—and I know that a number of my colleagues have done this—express my condolences to the families who lost loved ones because of the ineffectiveness of this Legislature and of Ornge to handle themselves. We had countless stories where family members lost their loved ones because of this government's inability to deal with Ornge.

A lot of people have criticized our party for ringing bells in the Legislature and stopping legislation. I remember, like it was yesterday, the Minister of Health standing up in question period and professing on the Ornge situation that she would abide by the will of the Legislature. I felt that, in a minority Parliament, I would take her at her word, that if we could have some consensus on how to move forward, she, more than any other person, would agree to that. I felt very proud when the opposition parties got together and passed the motion regarding the creation of a select committee to deal with and investigate this horrific scandal in the province of Ontario regarding Ornge. To many Ontarians' shock, the government totally backed away from that acceptance of a select committee.

I know that constituents in my riding and ridings all across the province look to us, the 107 members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Their expectation is that we will act in an accountable and transparent manner to get to the bottom of this scandal. We owe it to those people who have lost family members because of Ornge's inability to have a product in the air that would look after our loved ones.

For this government to continually block, at every possible step, to have a select committee to get to the bottom of it is shameful. It's absolutely shameful that this government would not accept the will of the Legislature

in a minority Parliament—the fact that we here in the opposition have more seats than you do so that you could take that and move forward on that recommendation. It's a sad day that you allowed us to get here today.

This bill was presented in March. Many members on the government side would stand up and say, "This is what we need. We need Bill 50." Every time they wanted to divert attention to the story on why we hadn't created a select committee or why the bells were ringing, they pointed to Bill 50. They didn't necessarily call Bill 50 to be debated. They called a lot of other bills. This item, if you really look at it, if you really read the pages of this piece of legislation, you'll realize that there's nothing here that is substantive enough to answer those questions for families.

1720

Interjection: They won't even debate it.

Mr. Steve Clark: Their own members aren't standing up to defend this piece of legislation and why it's so important.

The Premier himself, time after time after time, thumbed his nose at appearing at the committee. Why is he held at a different standard than any other person who came to the public accounts committee? When he was asked to clear the air as Premier of the province of Ontario, to let people know what his involvement was in this Ornge operation, with his fuzzy recollection of when he met Chris Mazza, or when he didn't meet Mr. Mazza, or of the hundreds of millions of dollars—taxpayers' dollars—that were wasted at Ornge, I would think the Premier of the province would want to appear, that he would want himself to be held to the same standard of Chris Mazza, who appeared, Alfred Apps, who appeared. The list goes on and on. But the Premier would not appear. Day after day in this Legislature—I asked the question when we came back, Speaker. I think it was early September. There was no mention of why or the reasons. In fact, he would always defer. It was like a Ping-Pong match between the Premier, the Minister of Health and the government House leader.

I have to tell you, the government House leader should not be so quick to get to his feet to defend the government. He has single-handedly ground this Legislature to a halt with his inability to get committees appointed and his inability to even get the most simple piece of legislation that has all-party support through committee. He is a failure in that role.

This government and the opposition cannot function without those committees to deal with this legislation. If we collapsed debate, which we've done on other bills, and allowed it to go to committee—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Where does it go?

Mr. Steve Clark: It goes into the black hole. My friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke asked the question.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: Others call it the red-herring bill. This bill goes nowhere without a committee system. The

government's inability to manage the minority is yet another disgrace among so many.

I spoke a couple of weeks ago and went through, item by item, what pieces of legislation—I was actually lucky that, in the early session of Parliament, I had an early private member's business ballot spot so that I could have consensus on Major-General Sir Isaac Brock Day. I'm certainly glad locally that I was able to get that bill passed. But if that's the only type of legislation we can manage in a minority, how in the heck are we ever going to clean up the Ornge scandal? We certainly aren't going to do it with Bill 50. We need the government to come clean. We need them to work with the opposition parties and get to the real story. Bill 50 does not do it.

The last thing we need is to abdicate responsibility as members of the Legislative Assembly, to abdicate our responsibility through this bill to give more powers to the minister, to cabinet, and also to have very weak whistleblower protection. I think if we learned anything from this Ornge scandal, we want to make sure that we stand up and protect those people who come forward.

I'll tell you, anyone who watched this debate and watched some of the testimony at the public accounts committee really wants that work to continue. They want to make sure that Ontarians can look at Premier McGuinty, the front bench of the McGuinty cabinet and certainly the government House leader and feel that they have—for those people who have passed away under the care of Ornge, I think they all need to have those questions answered.

I really think, in addition to Bill 50, if the government really wanted to show some confidence in dealing with this minority Parliament, then they would put this bill aside, resurrect that recommendation that had support from the majority of people in the Legislative Assembly and move forward with an all-party select committee to get to the bottom of this and to also have the Premier come clean.

I think people want to know why hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted under Premier McGuinty's watch. I think they really want to know why he has such a fuzzy memory of how many times he met Chris Mazza. What did they discuss? What were some of the conversations that took place? But I think we all have to, again, try to make sure we have as much transparency and accountability as possible.

Bill 50 is just a shell of a bill. It simply is cover for the Minister of Health and for this government on what they haven't done.

Even if we went to committee and tried to amend it to provide more whistle-blowing protection, there's no place for it to go. It's that black hole that shows the failings of this government, the failings of Dalton McGuinty, of John Milloy, of Deb Matthews and of every single one of those members across the way. They've let down those Ontarians and let—

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

It does seem appropriate to remind members that we refer to our colleagues by their riding name as opposed to their surname.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I went down to my office, and I dug out the Auditor General's report because some of the facts in here are so interesting and intriguing: how an operation like Ornge could have continued so long without the triggers and flags coming a lot closer and a lot faster to this Legislature until recently.

One of the things that was interesting is, in 2010, Ornge logged 60 public complaints and 500 staff concerns, which included operational issues of varying degrees and importance; here we are in 2010. I understand, that a previous member from the NDP asked the question in 2010, along with the member opposite recently in 2011, I believe. If I'm wrong on those dates, I apologize. So the flags were there as well as the numerous complaints from 500 staff.

Part of the issue was that the ministry investigated 15 complaints a year. Since Ornge became responsible for providing air ambulance services in Ontario in 2006, they investigated 15 of those complaints. However, in October 2010, it stopped recommending ways for Ornge to address issues, stating that such decisions were Ornge's responsibility. Also, another issue that came to light was that when Ornge investigated problems, serious complaints, it did not share their results with the ministry unless the ministry was investigating the same complaint.

So I hope that when we take this to committee, some of these suggestions or concerns from the Auditor General—he did make a recommendation that there basically be an audit done by the ministry periodically of Ornge to ensure that these complaints are being dealt with correctly and proficiently so that there is accountability to the public and so that these things can improve on service in life and death situations.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am quite happy to be able to comment on a number of speakers.

I think the member from London–Fanshawe quite rightly brings up the Auditor General's report, because we seem to keep getting farther and farther away from that. That is, after all, what public accounts is supposed to be dealing with, the Auditor General's report. She quite properly mentions the concern that the Auditor General had about the reporting by Ornge of various incidents to the Ministry of Health. That's a problem; she's absolutely correct.

In the new performance agreement, which has now been signed by the ministry, that has been corrected so that Ornge is now required within the new performance agreement to report all such instances to the Ministry of Health so that the Ministry of Health can have full information. That was not the case with the old performance agreement, which was originally written back in 2003.

1730

In terms of some of the incidents which the members from Kitchener–Conestoga and Leeds–Grenville have spoken of, the initial reaction of the coroner was that they did not result in Ornge-related deaths. The coroner has said that with some of the new information that is coming forward, he will review all the Ornge-related incidents, and I think it would behoove us to wait for that report. But I do know that in the specific one that the member from Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned, in fact the finding of the coroner was that there was a far longer delay than—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Mr. Michael Harris: I want to commend my colleague from Leeds–Grenville for bringing up some very valid points with us. I don't get how the folks on the other side—how the member from Guelph continues to defend that government, her government, with this mess at Ornge.

I'll tell you, he talked about getting to the real story of things. You know what? They talked a lot about the ringing of the bells back some time ago, and that's because in this Legislature we had a vote on calling for a select committee. Guess who voted against that? You guys did; you did. How do you tell the folks in your constituencies that you don't want to get to the bottom of examples like this? I'll read it—because we're speaking for those folks up in Sudbury. I'll give you an example of this.

“It was found that due to the interior of the AW139, which was designed by Ornge staff, continuous quality CPR could not be performed in accordance with BLS” strategy. “It was also found that patients in respiratory distress could not be provided with appropriate patient care....”

I'll tell you again and again, that is why the official opposition have called for a select committee, as the member from Leeds–Grenville said, to get to the bottom of this. Folks on that side want this to go away. I don't blame them. But we speak for the families who have experienced the structural deficiencies of Ornge, and if we don't get to the bottom of it, it will continue to happen again and lives will be lost because of it.

You know what? You can stand up and defend all you want, and that's again why the Premier should be dragged into committee and do his responsibility and tell Ontarians the truth, which he refuses to do—to come to committee, that is.

Getting back again to my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, getting to the real story is what this is about. This bill does nothing to address those real concerns, especially those structural concerns, and we will continue to speak for those families like the ones in Sudbury who have experienced those—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Throughout this debate, I want to make one thing clear on behalf of the New Democratic

Party of Ontario: We stand very firmly behind the front-line workers of Ornge and the excellent work that they do. Our concern has always been in the management and in the oversight that this government did not provide.

When we look at Ornge, this problem doesn't lie squarely at the feet of someone like Dr. Mazza. Dr. Mazza is not required to be responsible to this province. He has no obligation or duty to care for the precious dollars of our taxpayers. It's the government that is responsible. It's the government that has the responsibility to oversee money spent. There could be hundreds of Dr. Mazzas across this province. Those individuals will come and go, but the government will stay, and that's why it's important that the government provide the oversight, that the government be accountable for every cent, every dollar that's spent.

I ask: Why were some key elements that my colleagues have brought up left out when we're talking about accountability? Why was it that freedom-of-information issues were left out? Why was it that the Ombudsman oversight accountability piece was left out? Why were these essential elements of oversight left out when it's the government's responsibility to provide this oversight? Why were they purposely left out? It begs the question: If this government is serious about being accountable, is serious about being transparent, then why were these key elements left out? These questions are left on our minds.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. We return to the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member for London–Fanshawe, the member for Guelph, the member for Kitchener–Conestoga and also the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

To the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton, who asked the question, “When is the government going to get serious about accountability and transparency?”, they're not going to get serious. I think that was a good question, but clearly, by putting up this bill—and all you have to do is, if you've been following the Ornge scandal, read the explanatory note and you'll realize that the bill has got nothing to do with accountability. It's got nothing to do with transparency. All it is is political cover for the government opposite and the Minister of Health. It was pretty clear during the debates, when we asked for a select committee, when we asked for Premier Dalton McGuinty to appear so we could get to the bottom of it, that this government opposite has no intention of coming clean to the people of Ontario. They should be ashamed of themselves.

I'm glad that the member for Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned that poor family in Sudbury. I know the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke had a lady pass away from the Round Lake area—tragic cases that I believe could have been prevented with the necessary oversight that we're talking about in the Progressive Conservative caucus.

I hope that as the debate continues this afternoon—and we won't be finished this afternoon—the government

will make some serious changes to their approach when it comes to this situation and also take the time to establish committees so that if we did pass this legislation we'd have something to bring it forward to, so that we could actually have some meaningful debate, so that we could have some public input. But again, the problem with the government opposite is, they can't manage the minority. They're out of touch and they're out of gas. I wouldn't be surprised if the Premier resigned—

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to add a few comments to this debate with respect to Bill 50. Many speakers have spoken this afternoon about a number of areas, about some of the outstanding problems at Ornge—millions of dollars unaccounted for, millions of dollars spent on helicopters, particularly, that weren't properly designed, and where even basic medical care like CPR could not be performed. It's hard to imagine how that could have happened. And then again, there were millions of dollars spent on questionable things like speedboats and motorcycles and giving jobs to people who were way over their heads. And then of course there was Dr. Mazza's compensation of over a million dollars—\$1.4 million, I believe—to be the chief of the air ambulance service.

But what I'm going to choose to speak about just briefly here is the real lack of whistle-blower protection in Bill 50. That was one of the primary concerns that we identified very early on, and one of the things that the minister, I know, when she introduced this bill into the Legislature, was very clear about: how she wanted to protect people who came forward.

I'd just like to quote, actually, from the Hansard of April 25, I believe it is, at the beginning of second reading debate, where the Minister of Health said this: "Allow me now to address the amendments to the Ambulance Act being proposed today. These amendments will further entrench stronger oversight and prevent abuses of power at Ontario's air ambulance service. It is vitally important that employees do not feel intimidated when raising concerns. That's why our proposed legislation will protect whistle-blowers at Ornge who disclose information to an inspector, an investigator or the government."

Well, far from creating the kind of protection that we need to see, Bill 50 is entirely inadequate with respect to whistle-blower protection. It's section 7.7 that deals with the so-called protection, and it basically says that no one should intimidate someone. But it doesn't say anything about penalties; it doesn't say anything about what the ramifications are going to be of that. It just says you shouldn't do it.

That is clearly inadequate to deal with the kinds of problems that we've seen at Ornge, where we saw a real culture of fear and intimidation that was built up over a couple of years, to the point where people with very legitimate concerns felt that they could not come forward.

And it's not only that. I did have the ability to sit in on some of the public accounts hearings, and we heard about one of the helicopter pilots based out of Thunder Bay, Mr. Bruce Wade, who appeared before public accounts, I believe, on July 31. He ended up writing a letter to public accounts shortly after that and basically said—this is from Bruce Wade, Ornge rotor pilot, Thunder Bay:

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"Dear Sir:

"I regret I must inform the committee that after testifying at public accounts on July 31, Ornge suspended me with pay effective August 2.

"Ornge has convened an investigation into allegations filed by the author of the fixed-wing letter read to the committee. The Office and Professional Employees International Union ... is representing me for this investigation.

"I will update the committee of any additional actions from Ornge."

How coincidental was that, Mr. Speaker, that within only a few days of giving negative evidence before the public accounts committee, Mr. Wade was suspended?

Subsequently, the committee did hear from Mr. Wade again. This is the note that he wrote this time:

"Attached below dated August 10 is my notice to the committee chair about being suspended by Ornge after my testimony at public accounts. As of August 21, I was informed my suspension has been extended to September 9. Ornge claimed in two separate news articles that my suspension had nothing to do with my testimony. Proof of a premeditated plan to deter me from testifying in the form of an email from the author of the fixed-wing letter read to the committee was presented to a third party investigator on August 10. That email was sent to many fixed-wing pilots, it outlined his actions, reasons for his actions being me called to testify and encouragement to other fixed-wing pilots to follow his lead.

"I refer you to the second-last paragraph of the 'notice for witnesses appearing before Standing Committee on Public Accounts', which for your convenience, I have copied here:

"'Tampering with a witness or in any way attempting to deter a witness from giving evidence at a committee meeting may constitute a breach of privilege. Similarly, any interference with or threats against witnesses who have already testified may be treated as a breach of privilege by the assembly.'

"To whom should the email evidence of the plan of action against me be presented? Would the committee consider such premeditated deterrence actions a matter of serious nature? Could this be considered a criminal investigation? I would hope all those found to be involved in this action against me to be held to account; I have reason to believe this goes past the author of the fixed-wing letter. In my opinion, given the plan to deter me from testifying and the actions which have ensued, anything from the author of the fixed-wing letter to the committee as well as any discussion or credence to that letter should be stricken from the Hansard record.

“I gave truthful testimony to the committee from start to finish and not one single word of my testimony has been refuted because they cannot”—again, from Mr. Wade.

Subsequently we heard Mr. Wade was reinstated, that his suspension was ended, but recently, as of September 13, the committee received yet another email from Mr. Wade, and this is what he said:

“I returned to work at Ornge in my capacity of rotor pilot on Tuesday, September 11 after many weeks of suspension. The investigation conducted by Ornge’s third party investigator showed all questions into me being ‘unsubstantiated.’ I was exonerated. I spent most of the day Tuesday and Wednesday flying patients around northern Ontario.

“Today”—being September 13—“at 1 p.m., I received a phone call at work re-suspending me until further notice because they claim the ‘reintegration’ hasn’t gone well and they feel I cannot exercise the privileges of my aviation document. The actions against me by Ornge continue. This time they insist on having a medical examiner of ‘their choice’ examine me. This is a way for Ornge to receive a finding of their liking so they can terminate me.”

Mr. Speaker, this is completely outrageous. This is calling into question the ability of somebody to practise the profession they have been practising for a number of years. This is a serious, serious allegation, and to suggest that Bill 50 is going to solve all of these problems is outrageous. Remember, this is a new board. This is a new administration. This isn’t Dr. Mazza; this isn’t the people who were in power up until December of last year; this is a whole new crew, yet this practice continues. Any suggestion that section 7.7 in Bill 50 is going to make everything better—is completely not going to happen.

And lest anybody think that Mr. Wade is just a sole voice out in the wilderness, there have been many, many emails that have been sent in by his colleagues supporting him and indicating that they feel very strongly that it’s because he gave negative evidence before Ornge that he was suspended and not for any other reason. Now it’s going from not just a suspension but to termination.

I would just like to take a minute to indicate the extent of the support that there is out there in the aviation community for Mr. Wade and what he said and how people feel he is really being a hero under these circumstances for having the ability to stand up to what seems like a very concerted effort to keep people from stating the truth about what’s been happening in our air ambulance service.

I should say, before I read any of these, I really want to stress how proud we are of the people that are flying both fixed-wing and helicopters for the air ambulance service, how this in no way is meant to denigrate the fine work that they’re doing under very trying circumstances. All we want to do with our investigation into this—our request for a select committee and all of the questions that we’re asking in public accounts—is really to get

things to the situation where they are able to do their jobs properly. That’s all we want.

Here’s what was said from some of the others:

“Just read in the Toronto Star about you being suspended following your testimony last week. Sounds like they are trying to spin it as something else but as far as I’m aware, having known and worked with you for over 10 years the reasons are baseless.

“Way too coincidental to come to any conclusion other than this is an attempt to silence those who question Ornge’s competency. I’m sure the intent is to silence any critics. Hopefully that will not be the case.

“Hang in there. I trust this will be resolved quickly and Ornge’s bullying tactics will inform the public of how they continue to run this once-proud service.”

Here’s another one:

“My opinion, to suspend someone because they speak their mind seems unjust. We all speak our mind at every base, and we don’t get suspended! If someone did something dangerous or interfered with the task at hand in the cockpit of an aircraft—should be suspended, rightly so! But otherwise, there are steps to be followed before a suspension, were they followed? If no, I do not support this.

“It seems quite a coincidence to suspend Bruce Wade—”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Thank you again.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have been listening very attentively to the deliberation by the member from Whitby–Oshawa, and rightly so. She has given a well-thought presentation on some of the issues surrounding the delivery of service at Ornge, and rightly so. I think she read from the excerpts the content of a particular staff member. But I have to say, Speaker, that we are here specifically for that particular reason. If everything was hunky-dory, we wouldn’t be discussing Bill 50 here today.

I have to say, Speaker, that after some time—I’m sure that within the organization of Ornge there are plenty of good, responsible, down-to-earth people delivering good health care service to the people of Ontario. The fact is, Speaker, we are debating this bill here. The fact that we are debating this bill here today—

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: If the member would like to pay attention, Speaker—it is because the government has listened to the people outside and the people on the opposition side saying something is wrong and needs to be made right, and we are here. The government listened, the Premier, the minister. We have been listening to the report by the Auditor General.

I have to say, Speaker, maybe we’d like to see something better in the bill, and we’ll look to the opposition for some input on the bill as well. I feel a bit taken aback when they make good comments and then they say, “We will not support the bill.” Well, excuse me. Their job in here is to exactly assist the government in

whatever way possible to make the bill right, and I hope that this will be indeed the thing to do.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the address by my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa.

I'd like to assist this government right out the door. It's a damned disgrace. Bill 50 should have been called "Bill shifty," because the whole point of this legislation is to shift the blame away from the mess they've created at Ornge. They've been trying to do it for months. Six months ago the other day, March 21, they tabled this piece of legislation. "Oh, they're in a big hurry to get it passed"—we never saw it in the House for weeks and weeks. It comes down to this: Who can you trust? You think the people out here trust Dalton McGuinty these days? I don't think so.

We know that Chris Mazza says he met with the Premier on multiple occasions. We know that Alfred Apps and Chris Mazza had a conversation with him and he said, "The meeting with the Premier went really, really well. Everything we had hoped to accomplish, we accomplished." Interestingly enough, after those conversations, the taps of money open up and buckets and barrels of money flowed to Ornge—\$750 million to Ornge after these meetings that the Premier has with Chris Mazza, and Alfred Apps thinks they're just great meetings.

You know, folks, we tried to get a committee established. We tried to get the Premier to come before the public accounts committee. He has rebuffed every attempt to get him out there to testify. Folks, we know that Chris Mazza can't be trusted. We know that he's a liar. We also know that in the last two campaigns, Dalton McGuinty has had to admit that in the first two campaigns, he lied. So are we going to trust him or are we going to trust Chris Mazza—or neither one of them? Let's get to the bottom of this and get a select committee on Ornge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I ask the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Do we get a vote on this?

I withdraw.

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

I'll now return to the member for Whitby–Oshawa, who has two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did listen with interest to the comments made by the members from York West and from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

With respect to the member from York West's comment, our goal is of course to assist in situations where we agree with the legislation, we think it makes sense and we think it's going to be actually effective, but in the present situation, I have to agree with the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that this is a completely toothless piece of legislation that was really just designed to deflect the blame away from this government's massive lack of oversight and accountability.

We had years of this going on. We have millions and millions of dollars that have gone unaccounted for. We know that there's a criminal investigation that's ongoing and we await the results of the OPP investigation, but we still have many, many questions that remain unanswered, conflicting testimony that's been given in committee by the various witnesses, including evidence that was given by Chris Mazza that is directly at odds with the evidence that was given by the Minister of Health. We have asked for the Premier to come before the committee on several occasions to let us know his knowledge of the situation. He consistently refuses to come. We've asked for a staff member who was very senior in his department and who was very involved with the whole Ornge file; she has also refused to come.

We were being stonewalled in committee on this. We really want to have a select committee to be able to examine these things in their entirety, but at the end of the day, we really can't vote in favour of Bill 50 because we really don't even know what the problem is. How can you try to fix a problem when you don't even know the extent of it yet?

That's why we need to carry on. We need to carry on in public accounts. We need to get those committees constituted and get going to get to the bottom of this to make sure we can actually fix it.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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	
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