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of Debates
(Hansard)**

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Thursday 4 October 2012

Jeudi 4 octobre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Thursday 4 October 2012

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Jeudi 4 octobre 2012

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

**NON-PROFIT HOUSING
CO-OPERATIVES
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT
SANS BUT LUCRATIF**

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 3, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les coopératives de logement sans but lucratif et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.*

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: On April 16, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing moved first reading of Bill 65, the Non-profit Housing Co-operatives Statute Law Amendment Act, 2012. I'm pleased to be here today to speak on behalf of the New Democrats and our leader, Andrea Horwath, and I want to acknowledge that Harvey Cooper and Dale Reagan, our colleagues from the co-op federation, are in the gallery for the third hour of debate.

I'm going to spend some time talking about the bill, but I'm also going to spend some time talking about people in our community, people who live in co-ops, problem areas in affordable housing and the other, kind of, pitfalls around the whole housing strategy.

The purpose of the bill is pretty narrow: Its purpose is actually to deal with tenant disputes—evictions—in a way that is more cost-effective and quicker, that actually saves co-ops money, that saves tenants money and that moves the process through the system. Every other sector of housing in this province, with the exception of the co-op housing sector, actually uses the tribunal process through the Landlord and Tenant Board. So the bill will actually move them into this process as well.

This bill is a long time coming. It's been since 2004 that the co-ops have been lobbying to have this bill introduced. There may be some amendments that are needed, but certainly we will have consultation with the stakeholders around those areas.

The benefits of the bill are that the tribunal system would be fairer and less costly for the co-ops. The fee is very modest compared to the lawyers' fees and court costs they currently incur, and it would reduce losses when members are not actually paying their rent as they're going through the rent arrears process. Co-op members, of course, wouldn't have to hire a lawyer. Many times they don't qualify for legal aid, and so they would actually be able to have a faster, less costly process as well. And there are also benefits for the wider public. The public cost of administering co-op evictions will be reduced, and the hearings that were really unnecessary in the courts will reduce the backlogs in the court system, so then we'll actually be able to get real issues back into the courts and the wait-lists there will decrease.

As I said, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada's Ontario region submitted a substantial brief to the province back in 2004. That's why we're finally here today, many years—eight years—later.

In my area in Niagara, I had an opportunity to speak to Betty Ann Baker. Betty Ann is actually the CEO of Niagara Peninsula Homes. It is a non-profit agency that manages co-ops and other not-for-profit agencies—it consults for rental agencies. In my discussions with Betty Ann, she told me that she had a case out of one of the co-ops in my area where the court costs at the end of the day were actually \$49,000, an outrageous amount of money. I'm told there has even been one case in the system that cost \$100,000. So the average cost is between \$4,000 and \$6,000, but \$49,000 is really a useless expense just to evict someone from a housing unit. I think the public interest will really be served by using the tribunal system.

The United Nations actually declared 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, and nothing could be more fitting for the 125,000 Ontarians who make co-operative housing their homes than for Queen's Park—all parties—to resolve this long-standing issue; there are about 500,000 people across Canada who actually live in co-ops. I'm sure there will be all-party support for this bill to provide members and co-ops with the same access to this dispute resolution process at the tribunal that others have enjoyed for at least 15 years.

I want to talk a bit now about the overburdened court system in Welland, which probably is mimicked across

the province. I often hear in my constituency office about how the court system is struggling. If anyone knows about the struggles, it's the judges and the lawyers and our constituents who actually try to get access to the courts. I often hear from families, around the Family Responsibility Office, that can't even get to work on a file because it hasn't left the courts here in the province because of the backlogs, or how civil cases are delayed and payments are on hold because of burden costs.

I hear from lawyers, as well, who are handling child protection matters. The court is so backlogged that they can't resolve these important family matters because the courts are overburdened with issues that don't need to be there any longer. The lawyers, of course, are as frustrated as their clients. There are many reasons for this breakdown. In fact, the Auditor General, in his report in 2010, made a number of recommendations. One of them is court resources. He said, "To be comparable with other provinces, Ontario would have to hire significantly more judges and justices of the peace, as well as providing additional court facilities and support staff."

While we're removing co-ops from the backlog and moving them to the Landlord and Tenant Board, neither system is going to function if we don't resource them properly. So although we're going to remove this from the courts, we also need to resource the Landlord and Tenant Board to ensure that those processes have enough staff and enough funding to actually move them along quickly.

Now there are some limitations to the bill. Currently, under the bill, tenants actually have the right to an appeal system from eviction. In fact, this bill will remove that appeal process. We believe that members of co-operatives need an impartial process to ensure that the co-operatives meet their responsibility to provide safe and quality housing. The bill will continue to allow some convictions to go to court, but we don't believe there is a reason to give the courts open-ended eviction power, in view of the problems we're currently experiencing with that process.

0910

The Landlord and Tenant Board needs the power to determine the subsidy question; these are questions around rent issues. There are limitations in the bill about resolving those as well. One of the limitations will leave co-op members and tenants of non-profit landlords without an effective way to challenge incorrect rents, and we don't believe that is fair.

We also have seniors living in co-ops. In fact, some of the co-ops have a large population of seniors. I think seniors would have easier access to safe and secure housing if we turned our minds to today's issues of pensions. In this House, we often hear about the kind of rich defined benefit plans that public sector workers have. We don't want seniors actually living in poverty, so we believe that we should be protecting these defined benefit plans so that seniors also can live a quality life in our co-ops and in other housing markets when they retire.

Ensure access to better and safe, stable, accessible housing: We need to be doing more for tenants. You

know, the government talks about having a housing strategy, but there are no funding targets attached to that strategy. Recently, the government actually failed to stand up against the sale of public housing stock here in the city of Toronto. At one point, the Minister of Housing was opposed to, or not moving forward on, selling that stock—I think the number was 65 units. But the Premier overruled the minister to allow the sale of 65 units of affordable housing stock here in the city of Toronto. This is at a time when we have 170,000 households on a wait-list across the province.

We also need to examine the merits of a housing benefit. In the platform in the last election campaign, in 2011, the Liberals actually talked about the merits of perhaps investigating a housing benefit, but we haven't seen any of that to date, a year later. New Democrats also talked about having a housing benefit for individuals and families who pay more than 30% of their income on rent. This will be really important to people who live in this province, because one in five persons in this province actually pays more than 50% of their income in rent, and a large majority of them pay more than 30%. I think it's very important that we go back and have a look at the housing benefit as part of a way to provide more affordable housing in this province.

There are other ways to improve our housing stock as well, and one of those ways is with vacancy decontrol. I know the member from Parkdale—High Park introduced a bill in the last sitting of the Legislature, but it didn't pass. We will, at some point, be introducing another bill on that issue. I want to talk about how that actually affects people who live in our communities. Just for information and for the record, all units after 1991 are exempt, so there are 50,000 or 60,000 units across the province that are exempt. But then there are also these loopholes in the legislation. So when a unit becomes vacant, the landlord can actually jack up the rent.

I want to tell you a little story that just came to my attention in my riding. There is this couple—and they've allowed me to use their names because this is a very important issue to them—Ross and Joanne Battle. Joanne worked at the hospital; she was a housekeeper. She has a small pension, not one of those large, rich, public sector pensions that everyone talks about—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Private sector pensions.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Sometimes public—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Private sector, yes. Eleanor Clitheroe, yes—that's a private sector pension.

Anyway, her husband Ross is disabled. He worked as a security guard for many years. He's in a wheelchair. They live in an apartment building in Welland, in my riding; they live on the third floor. Their elevator breaks down. So he has to have some of the other tenants actually bring him down to the ground floor. They go and they live in a hotel for two or three days while the elevator's being fixed because he needs to go for dialysis three times a week and he is afraid that he's not going to be able to get out of his building.

After all this happens and he goes back to the building, they make application to move to a ground-floor

apartment in their building. I'm now calling this the "double loophole" in the vacancy control legislation, or decontrol, whichever you want to call it. What's happening now is Ross and Joanne have applied to move to a ground-floor apartment so that they can always have access to get to the hospital, which he needs to go to on a regular basis. They're on the wait-list; they're now being told that they're going to have to pay \$60 more per month—\$720 a year—to move to a ground-floor apartment in a building where they have lived for more than 10 years. So the landlord's going to get the rent increase on their unit and he's going to increase the rent on the unit they're moving to. Now we have two units that actually don't have rent control on them.

That's a story about people in my riding, and I'm sure that it is happening in your ridings as well.

We also need to introduce some legislation that actually deals with work orders, and there are many people—I met with ACTO over the last year here in Toronto at one of their meetings. I've been around to a number of apartments in my riding and other ridings across the province—there are many outstanding work orders. In fact, in Toronto, one tenant reported an elevator that was out of order for a year in a large multi-floor building. There needs to be legislation that will prevent landlords from increasing rent until those work orders are actually complied with.

There are, as I said, 170,000 households waiting for affordable housing in this province, and that is more than a 26% increase in a five-year period. The government, in 2003, committed to building 20,000 units of affordable housing, but in nine years, they've actually built only 16,000 units—far less than they promised to do and over a very much longer period of time. Many households in this province are waiting, on average, two to four years, but in the city of Toronto, some people wait as many as 12 to 14 years. It is really a shame that that happens.

Although co-op housing enjoys a strong, successful history, we need to have more co-op housing in this province. The co-op housing sector is really at a disadvantage when it comes to new development because they don't necessarily have the resources, financial or otherwise, like municipalities and private developers, and so they often are kind of shut out of the development process because of that. And I think that we need to find ways to actually allow them to come in and develop more co-op units across this province.

0920

The Canadian Labour Congress often spends a lot of time talking about poverty and the lack of housing here in the province of Ontario. Women, unfortunately, form the vast majority of people who are living in poverty in this province. About one in three children are living in poverty, and more than half of single parents—mothers—are living in poverty as well. First Nations and the unemployment rate certainly all affect the levels of poverty here in the province of Ontario. The poverty rate is 29% for racialized women and 23% for immigrant women. Lone senior women are also affected at about a 46% rate.

Poverty in Canada costs about \$72 million to \$84 million to the health care system alone.

Women living on low incomes face serious barriers to finding safe and affordable housing. In many communities, the wait-lists for subsidized housing are long and the housing is poorly maintained. In places like Ottawa and Toronto, of course, the waiting lists, as I said, are much longer. Canada needs to have a national housing strategy and to address the growing poverty inequality.

You know, there's a myth about poverty among Canadian seniors, that poverty in seniors has almost been eradicated. But based on a Stats Canada assertion that only 6.1% of seniors are actually living with low income, even if the statistic were accurate, it would still represent over 268,000 seniors. But we believe that, in reality, 36% of seniors, so 1.6 million who are receiving the guaranteed income supplement, are also living in poverty. Many of our seniors are living with an income of \$1,400 or \$1,500 a month on guaranteed income. So there really is a need to create more affordable housing in the senior sector as well as across all sectors of our society. Many of our seniors can only afford the basic essentials of life, which is, you know, rent for their apartment—for which they're probably paying 50% of their income—some food and their utilities. Many of them don't even have enough money left at the end of the day for any social activities. So all levels of government have recognized the need to address the specific challenges faced by seniors.

There's no comprehensive anti-poverty strategy; there are inadequate levels of support; there are clawbacks; there's insufficient awareness of the supports that are available; and there's a lack of affordable housing. The problem of seniors living in poverty will increase as Canada's population ages. Today there are 11 million Canadians who are over 50 years old, 34% of the population. CARP advocates for us to look at poverty, to consider the income-versus-expenditure equation and to create a national anti-poverty strategy for all ages. They recommend that health care services must be available and accessible to all seniors as well.

At one point, the government committed to meeting modest and limited poverty reduction targets. They failed to meet those targets, and that's no surprise. I think at the federal level, if I remember correctly, the Liberal government promised to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. It's now 2012, and it's actually increased—it's increased.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: A Liberal government?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, the Liberal government. That's right.

So we're not going to meet any targets without doing some real work. In 2009, the province of Ontario only spent \$64 per capita on affordable housing, and that is only half of what any other province, on average, spends on affordable housing across this country.

The New Democrats, in our platforms—our last platform and the platforms before that—have presented solid, costed plans for increasing affordable housing units

over a four-year period to make life more affordable for the lowest-income Ontarians, and other countries have done it. Sweden, for example, did the “million-dollar plan,” I think it was called.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Million-home plan.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Million-home plan. They actually built 100,000 units a year for 10 years, and they have no homelessness problems any longer. They have enough affordable housing for everyone who lives there. So if Sweden can do it—it’s a very small country—certainly Canada can do it. But the plan needs more financial investment and it needs targets, and it won’t happen unless we do that.

One of the other ways to increase affordable housing is through inclusionary zoning. Our member from Parkdale–High Park yesterday introduced that again; she tabled a bill yesterday. She had tabled that bill as well in the last Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Three times.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Three times. So she’s hoping that this time she’ll be successful. This is a really easy, cost-effective way for municipalities to actually increase affordable housing. It would require a little planning amendment, and then municipalities, on a voluntary basis—they wouldn’t have to. If you don’t want to, you don’t have to. But on a voluntary basis, they could require developers to put a certain percentage of affordable housing into their development. It might mean that the developer gets another floor—they get 24 floors instead of 23—and we get 10 affordable housing units, but it really is a cost-effective way to try to achieve some of those goals.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Zero tax dollars.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes, zero tax dollars. So the taxpayers of this province don’t spend a penny. We could build thousands of new affordable units. When I was getting ready to come here—the United States has done a lot of this, and they’ve been able to create all kinds of affordable housing units in many states on a voluntary basis to try to decrease that gap for people.

Ontario has the highest housing costs of any province. Many Canadians are facing housing affordability challenges and are trapped in the cycle of poverty. The reality is that poverty creates social exclusion and inequality by denying access to affordable, adequate and safe housing. Health is also impacted by poverty, and our health costs are soaring because of the need for affordable housing. Because people are paying more of their income on housing, they don’t have the money to actually buy good, nutritious foods. They don’t have the money to actually go out and buy prescriptions that perhaps they need for their blood pressure problems or their diabetic problems because the cost of rent is so high. That’s the first thing that they need to do with the limited income that they have.

There’s a real disconnect between housing and income. However, when it comes to addressing housing needs, we tend to equate the lack of affordable housing with supply of units and the affordability of those units,

which results in a disconnect between housing and income. An inadequate income is one of the main causes of housing insecurity in that people are not earning enough; they’re not making a liveable wage to pay for housing. We often hear in this House that we have too many public sector jobs, that we need to move those public sector jobs into the private market. But, in fact, when they move into the private market, all it does is it drives those wages down. So now we have more people living with lower wages, trying to make ends meet.

The rising cost of rent coupled with income insecurity increases the challenges of housing affordability for low-income Canadians living in poverty and struggling to meet their basic needs. I mean, just look at what’s happening at a federal level: increasing the age when people can now collect old age security from 65 to 67. So we’ve got those 46% of seniors already living in poverty, and now we’re going to add a new layer of people. They haven’t even determined how they’re going to meet that gap between 65 and 67, but I think it’s only going to increase the income insecurity for a lot of Canadians.

0930

I want to talk about the wealth gap. As the gap between the rich and poor widens, we need a conscious effort to address poverty to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of income, can access affordable housing. Housing is a human right recognized by the United Nations, and it’s a fundamental right. The Ontario Human Rights Commission knows that low social and economic status is a common factor in housing discrimination, but in spite of the law, people still experience discrimination on that basis. It happens here in Ontario, it happens across this country, and it shouldn’t be happening. There is nothing more important than a safe, affordable house for people to live in.

Supportive housing is also important to the housing sector, and I want to talk a little bit about an affordable housing building in my riding. It’s called Canal View Homes, and I talked about this briefly in a member’s statement early on. I talked about a woman named MaryJane Huneault. This building has, I think, 42 or 46 units that are targeted at people with mental health disabilities. The building was built with federal and provincial dollars on the premise that it would always have supports in that particular program, and after 20 years, last year, the supportive housing dollars were discontinued: \$150,000.

There were just two people, two staff members there, who supported 46 residents. MaryJane Huneault was somebody who for years had cycled in and out of the mental health unit at our local hospital. Once she found stable housing at Canal View, she never had another admission to the hospital in 20 years. But the government, for some reason, decided that they would cut that funding, and now those 46 residents are actually struggling at Canal View because they don’t have the supports they need to keep them in sustainable housing. So health care costs are then going to rise.

This government, the Liberal government, has also allowed school boards to sell off surplus properties

without even looking at them as a potential for affordable housing. School boards have sold them off because they are trying to balance their budgets, but that would be a great way to try and work with the co-ops, for example: provide the property and have the co-ops do the development.

We have one such unit through Community Living in Port Colborne, where 15 supportive housing units were built in a surplus school a number of years ago, but there's been no such development since. In my riding, for many years, a number of schools sat vacant and empty. One high school recently burned down, the subject of vandalism. It was on a beautiful piece of property right along the Welland River. It could have been developed into wonderful co-op units and space, but before any development could actually occur, it lost its life to fire.

We also need some co-operation, and we need a spirit of co-operation from each level of government. For a housing strategy to be sustainable, adaptable and innovative, we need to work with the federal government and we need to work with other governments and municipalities to try and reduce poverty and to try and increase affordable housing strategies. But there is no spirit of co-operation, Speaker, because one year this government is uploading and the next year it's downloading.

The changes to the community start-up and maintenance benefit in the recent spring budget—that is going to affect poverty in this region. It's going to increase homelessness in this region. Depending on who you talk to, the reduction in the total amount of dollars for those benefits is somewhere between \$60 million and \$120 million to the communities across this province. The money used to support a maximum \$799-a-month benefit to a single person for the last month's rent, to move them from a shelter to a sustainable apartment, or perhaps for an emergency repair or an odd utility bill. That's been discontinued; 50% of that funding has been cut. The program, they say, was to provide more flexibility to municipalities, with 50% dollars and by increasing who the funding could actually apply to. So the dollar pie is getting smaller, but the people pie is actually getting bigger, and it is going to increase homelessness in this province.

If you look at what it costs—so, many of these people who become homeless either end up in the hospital, they end up in a shelter or they end up in corrections. Speaker, it costs \$1,000 a day to keep someone in the hospital; it costs \$300 a day to keep someone in a jail cell; and it costs \$1,500 a month to keep someone in a shelter. So I think it was really short-sighted to reduce a benefit for people that would have cost \$800 once every two years, potentially, and have them end up in a shelter at \$1,500 a month.

The other piece is that the social assistance review is about to come out; it has been in the works for a couple of years. And here we are, reducing benefits to the same people that the social assistance review is about—consultation at its best.

Now I want to turn to the benefits of co-op housing, and there are lots of benefits. It offers benefits that no

other form of rental housing has. It gives a democratic voice to residents, allowing them to shape their own environment.

There are 2,100 non-profit co-ops, and 250,000 people across Canada living in them. There are 550 co-ops here in the province of Ontario. They are subject to the legal requirements of government funding programs.

The business and community decisions in housing co-ops are often made by the residents themselves. The members collectively take responsibility for their housing and to protect their purposes. In all other forms of rental housing, tenants have rights, but subject to them, they hold no power in the decision-making of their living, and the distinction is significant. Co-op members working together, operating their housing, develop broader forms of interaction and initiative, and they behave like communities.

0940

I can talk about one of the co-ops in my own riding, and I actually live right next door to that co-op. It is called the St. Charles co-op, and it's a mixed community. There are co-operative apartments on the beautiful Welland recreational canal; there are co-op townhouses; and then, in that mix, there are private maisonettes. Generally it's couples or older couples or singles who actually live in these maisonettes, and those are private kind of bungalow—attached townhouses. Then there's actually a private retirement home. You'll often actually see people from the maisonettes moving into the retirement home as they age. But all of these people interact together. There are many functions there throughout the year—July 1 celebrations. They invite each other to their events. I've attended many a celebration at St. Charles.

The people who live in co-ops are also very politically inclined. I've attended many meetings around election times at a federal level and at a provincial level. They actually hold debates at their co-ops. They want to know what their politicians at a municipal level, provincial or federal level are going to do for them. I've had many a co-op member work an election campaign for me. They really are communities. They are friends, they are families, and they're very politically engaged. It's a very positive result for people who are able to actually move into the co-op sector from any other form of rental properties.

In some of our co-ops—I would say probably in most of our co-ops—they have rent geared to income, and some of their units are also market rents. In that model, the market rents actually assist the co-op in providing income to do the needed maintenance on the buildings.

I was the vice-chair for about five years of Niagara Regional Housing, which was kind of arm's length from the Niagara regional council. I worked with Betty Ann Baker, who is the CEO of Niagara Peninsula Homes; I talked about her earlier today. It's interesting: It's actually in my area, in Welland, that the first co-op was actually ever built for the Niagara-Hamilton region. We're talking about an area of around a million people, and the first one was actually established—it was Briar Rose Co-

op—in Welland. It was in response to a need for safe and affordable housing.

The Welland riding has moved forward over the years, embracing the value of co-operative housing. It has produced more than 500 units in my riding. One of them includes the Mel Swart Co-op. Many of you will remember Mel Swart; he was a popular and respected politician from the Welland riding for the New Democrats from 1975 to 1988. Usually, things are named after important people after they die, but in fact the people of Welland thought Mel Swart was so great and so important that they actually named it for him while he was still alive. I attended many an AGM with Mel over the years at his co-op.

Betty Ann also talked to me about the SHRRP program, and she talked about the joint federal-provincial program. She viewed that program as kind of a win-win situation for the investment of maintenance for social housing and employment initiatives. Niagara Peninsula Homes was able to maintain and make the necessary repairs to their units by hiring younger workers, many of whom moved into apprenticeship programs. So you can see that, in fact, in the co-op movement, we do more than just build units; we help build lives.

Through Niagara Peninsula Homes, they developed a number of programs that I've been involved with over the years. One of those programs was Niagara Presents; I think it's now called Niagara enterprises. It was actually a way of working with the food producers in the Niagara region and with women who were unemployed to create products that they now sell in the retail market. They have also, in the last couple of years, created a program to assist women who are unemployed or women who have fallen on hard times through unemployment or through domestic abuse or who have mental health issues.

They've created a training program through Niagara Peninsula Homes. I was actually able to attend a graduation a couple of months ago. Many of these women who went through this—I think it's a 12-week program—when they graduated, already had found jobs. It also addressed women who perhaps had been laid off and were underemployed, and it gave them the training and the tools and the self-confidence and self-esteem to actually get back out into the workforce. So co-ops, as I say, are more than just a roof over your head.

There was an evaluation done in 2003, and it was evaluating how residents feel about where they're living. There was certainly greater resident involvement in the operation of co-operative housing than in other types of housing. More than 90% of co-op residents have participated in the operation of their housing, and 65% to 70% felt that they had the ability to influence decisions, and that they had a greater sense of security and tenure than in the other housing markets.

For provincial co-ops, the evaluation survey showed 92% resident involvement compared to only 4.1% in a mixed-income non-profit rental housing and 17% in a non-profit rental housing. So you can see that people are really involved in their communities in the co-op sector.

The main impacts on quality of life for co-operative residents versus residents in other tenures are increased social support, sense of community, improved relations with friends and neighbours, and feelings of independence and security. The residents who were actually surveyed in the co-operative housing sector said they had an improved quality of life for the occupants compared with other forms of housing, and participation in their housing actually leads to improved social support.

The ratio of involvement of co-ops to condominiums—now, many of us are living in condominiums here in Toronto while we're sitting in the House doing our work. Only half of condominium residents said that they had gained more friends or strengthened personal supports, compared to 75% of co-op residents. So co-op residents were reportedly more satisfied with the sense of community than any residents living in other forms of housing.

We need to be looking at affordable housing as a contributor to better health. Precarious housing in Ontario—whether defined by level of inadequate or affordable housing, homelessness or under-housing—can be solved in this decade, but we have to have the will to be able to do that. The lack of accessible affordable housing is a pressing problem—precarious. It contributes to poor health for many, and it leads to pervasive but avoidable health inequalities. Health equity suggests that the role of society is to reduce the health disparities gap between those who are advantaged and those who are marginalized.

I just want to take a couple of minutes to go back and summarize. Bill 65, the co-operatives statute amendment, will improve the speed and efficiency of resolution of tenant disputes by taking them out of courts. Additional action is needed to support the viability of co-op housing in Toronto and to deal with the lack of affordable housing across Ontario.

0950

There is a real need for the bill. It has been eight years since it was first being lobbied for the change. It's been promised since 2007, and it's certainly time to move on it. It's the only system that is still in the court system, so it needs to move to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Co-op evictions are costly and they take a long time, and eviction costs can be very expensive not only to the tenants but to the co-op, as well as to the larger community.

There are limitations to the bill; I did speak briefly about them. Currently, there's an appeal process in the co-op system, and the bill proposes to amend that appeal system. There will be still some issues out of the co-op housing sector that will require the use of the court system, but we don't believe that there's any need to give the court open-ended eviction power. There is elimination of appeals by the co-op member. We believe that that actually is unfair and that it probably should be reinstated.

The Landlord and Tenant Board needs the power to determine the subsidy questions, the questions around the rental piece.

There was a report from Chief Justice LeSage recommending that the Toronto Housing Authority should take steps to recommend an amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act to allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to assess the appropriateness of rent-geared-to-income decisions, but the prohibition in section 203 is in direct conflict with the Landlord and Tenant Board's obligation to fairly adjudicate disputes about tenants and now co-op members—obligations to pay the rent lawfully owing.

Landlord and Tenant Board members routinely make decisions about the correctness of rent calculations for tenants in the private sector, subject to rent regulation provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act, including setting rents on above-guideline-increase applications.

We believe that leaving co-op members and tenants of non-profit landlords without an effective way to challenge incorrect rents is not fair. That is one of the limitations of the bill.

I think that I pretty much—so I think I'll close now, Speaker.

We need to move forward with this one small step to improve the efficiency and reduce the costs for the co-op housing sector around eviction issues, but there are many other initiatives that could improve the quality of lives of co-op members and Ontarians, like continuing to grow the co-op sector with opportunities for community-based developments.

Co-ops are more than just a roof over people's heads. Co-ops have harnessed the goodwill of members to create self-determining communities in which they can rightly take pride.

I want to thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak about this important issue, and I look forward to further debate.

Certainly, the co-op sector is hoping that this bill is going to be brought forward by the government in a very timely manner. They hope that we won't be debating it for days and days and days, because they actually would like to move on, get the bill passed and move on with their new disputes system. Hopefully, we'll be able to accommodate them over the remainder of this session and get this bill passed.

Thank you very much for being here, and thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I just want to commend the member from Welland this morning for very thoughtful, very articulate comments on Bill 65, and certainly a continuation of the goodwill that I believe was clearly demonstrated yesterday in this House by the leadoff remarks from the member from Leeds–Grenville, and today, of course, followed by what I thought were very positive remarks from the member from Welland.

I think it's appropriate that she noted the former member from Welland, Mr. Swart. When you look at the history of the Ontario Legislature, nobody more than Mel, of course, brought forward issues that were very important to the consumer in the province of Ontario. If

you look back at some of the newspapers out of Welland and St. Catharines, there are often great pictures of Mr. Swart being in this House with a particular product that he was highlighting that needed to be changed or consumer protection that needed to be changed because there was something amok going on in that particular sector.

I think it's fair to say he was the ultimate defender of the consumer in the province of Ontario, an individual who made an enormous contribution to the public life here in the province of Ontario, followed by a more colourful member, Mr. Kormos, and now the current member for Welland, who falls in those very distinguished footsteps.

She noted the key reasons in Bill 65 to provide some reform. Currently, most of these disputes are in the courts and get tied up for many, many months in the courts, which is a clear detriment to people who are living in co-ops in the province of Ontario. We all have co-ops in our ridings. Whether you're in Welland, in Thorold, in Peterborough or Bowmanville or Oshawa, there are great examples of co-op organizations and boards of directors that work so hard each and every day on behalf of the residents in that co-op movement.

The camaraderie on Bill 65 is a pleasure, so we're going to move this forward, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to commend the member from Welland for her one hour—almost one hour—and her impassioned plea on behalf of vulnerable people. I would say it was a broad rambling on the issue of social awareness.

I have listened over the last three days to the minister, Kathleen Wynne, as well as our critic, the member from Leeds–Grenville, yesterday. There really is unanimous agreement on this bill, and I'm surprised the government is kind of wasting time here in the Legislature; they should be getting it into a committee.

I respect the members from the stakeholder groups here this morning, as well. They were here listening to these long speeches. I suspect our position is to agree 100% that this is an efficient way of dealing with disputes, by moving them out of the courts and saving both sides, the landlord as well as the tenant, considerable money. My notes would say that the minister's technical briefing said it was in the order of between \$3,000 and \$5,000 each to resolve disputes today, even if you can get to court. So I think sending it to the Landlord and Tenant Board would be a much more efficient way of dealing with disputes, and that's important.

I think the important thing she said—it's important that the government members, the few of them who are here—this bill isn't really about affordable housing at all. It's got virtually nothing to do with that, really, which is a very important thing. But you did mention, I think, that it was a very good report.

In 2003, I believe, they promised something in the order of 20,000 new low-cost housing or affordable housing, and they haven't delivered on that promise. Of course,

they didn't tell you all the other things they were going to do. They did promise—they've not closed the coal plants after 10 years, either. They promise everything and do nothing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, first I want to thank the member from Welland for putting forward the case very strongly, very completely, setting the context for the issue before us, and I want to thank the co-op housing federation for spending the time—years, I believe—moving this issue forward.

I had the privilege, the opportunity, before I got into political life to manage housing co-ops. You have to know, Speaker, that housing co-operatives provide good-quality housing for a range of people, but predominantly middle-income and low-income working people. They were set up in the first place to give people good-quality housing at a price they could afford.

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These are not deep-pocketed organizations. When the member from Welland cited the cost of eviction in the current climate of \$49,000—up to \$100,000 in exceptional cases—it was very clear to me that it was time to move on. Those sorts of expenses, when an alternative is available that is affordable, that ensures that there's justice, a fair hearing between the organization, the co-operative and the resident, a fair hearing at a lower cost on an expedited basis—it's very clear that we have to take this forward.

The opposition has said that this bill does the job; it needs to go to committee. I agree. Let's move this forward. I don't see it as controversial. The government introduced the bill. The opposition and the third party both think that it has the merit it needs to actually go through committee and be passed. Let's go there so that those working families can have affordable and just processes for dealing with these kind of conflicts.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. John Milloy: It's a pleasure for me to join in on this debate, and I want to congratulate the member from Welland for her speech today and for her support for this bill. I just want to say, if I may speak as House leader, what a pleasure it is to hear support from all sides of this House.

I'd be remiss not to congratulate the Co-operative Housing Federation and the representatives who are here today, including Harvey Cooper. I think that poor Mr. Cooper has trekked to every constituency office in the province of Ontario to make his case.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Harvey never sleeps.

Hon. John Milloy: He never sleeps, says my friend Mr. Leal. I had a very, very good meeting with him some time ago, and in fact regularly meet with representatives of the co-ops that exist in my riding. I think what's important when people look at this legislation is to realize that we're not talking about a small group. The stats are very clear: There are approximately 550 co-op providers,

according to the stats I have, representing 44,000 households and 125,000 people. I suspect that anyone who sat down and looked at this bill for the first time—and indeed when I started to understand the co-op sector through the meetings I had—they would be very shocked, Mr. Speaker, to realize that disputes right now, disputes of the nature that have been talked about in the debate, actually have to go to court. Intuitively, many people would think that they would be dealt with in a similar fashion to what's happening in the landlord and tenant act.

If passed, as has been pointed out, Bill 65 would allow co-operative boards to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve tenure disputes that are currently provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act. As I say, I think most people would be surprised that it already doesn't exist. It's time we moved forward with this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Welland, you have two minutes for a reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the members from Peterborough, from Durham and from Toronto–Danforth, the Minister of Community and Social Services, and, of course, the Co-operative Housing Federation for bringing this very important issue back to us year after year after year.

The member from Durham said something right: We don't have any committees, so how do we actually get this bill passed if we don't have any committees? Hopefully—I know we have a meeting today—we'll be getting those committees back up and running, and we can move a lot of these bills off to committee so that we can get them passed.

However, it sounds like there's all-party support for this bill, so we could do unanimous consent for third reading and just get it over with, right? This is a really important issue. It's not just about the bill. This is an issue that's about people; 125,000 people across this province live in co-op housing. The money that we'll save in court costs, in legal fees and in the real time of the people who actually manage and work the co-ops can be better used for upgrades and repairs and programs in the co-op communities. It's hundreds of thousands of dollars.

So I look forward to getting this bill passed and moving on to more—not more important issues than this, but to the bigger issues of affordable housing: How are we going to fund that? How are we going to make more affordable units here in the province of Ontario? I'll be dealing with some of that in my private member's bill in a couple of weeks.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank Harvey and our friends from the co-op movement. This is a very important and—I think to say it's a long-overdue piece of legislation is probably an understatement. It has been a lot of work. Probably many lawyers in the public and private sector have made a good living out of this

legislative initiative, and I'm very proud to be part of a government that has landed this and brought this home. It is no small feat, and it is extremely important to the fairness for all people living in co-ops.

I am proudly the MPP who represents probably more co-ops than any other MPP in the country, I'm going to take a guess. I live in a neighbourhood in this no-man's-land between Corktown and St. Lawrence. We can't quite figure out what to call the neighbourhood. We have about 30,000 more people coming in, a lot of them in this provincial government's affordable housing initiatives and a new mixed-income neighbourhood. We're sort of planning a Regent Park there, you know, the great work we have done with our municipal and federal partners in re-establishing mixed-income neighbourhoods and affordable housing. It's really transformative, and to people like Diane MacLean and the folks who have initiated those, these were very grassroots. Now, when we're planning new downtown neighbourhoods, we're actually taking the spirit of mixing income.

It is a concern of mine and a hope that one day we will get back to more co-ops. When I was mayor of Winnipeg, we saw—under the best intentions of governments of other stripes, but governments of a similar set of values—efforts to continue co-ops. It is hard now, I think, because of land prices and some of the challenges facing co-ops. I still think they are the most underutilized solution to a whole wide range of housing units, and I'm hoping, as we go forward, that those of us from all parties—I know the member from Welland spoke earlier. I think she and I share a set of values and ideas around this, about getting back to supporting the co-op movement in a greater way.

But the way you support people is not necessarily by doing the things that we want in here; it's by doing the things that people in co-ops want. The Residential Tenancies Act amendments will actually finally put in place a fair dispute resolution system for members and folks who are in arrears, who are persistent in the late payment of rent, whether it's been illegal or problematic behaviours, and where there is interfering with reasonable enjoyment or there's wilful damage.

I live in a condo in the middle of a whole lot of co-ops. Almost everything that we have is shared. Having a sense of co-operative values means that we live in the middle of our neighbourhoods, in the middle of our common areas. We don't have large SUVs in our front lawns. We don't live in areas where we have pools or a suburban lifestyle where everything we want is on our property. My parents, when we were growing up, moved to the suburbs. There was no main street; there was a shopping mall. Most of us living in central Toronto in co-ops and condos don't have balconies; we don't have backyards. We live in the middle of our libraries, our public services, our schools. We live in shared public spaces which are precious and few, and the civility of those relationships really defines the livability of our experience, because you have to be a bit of a social animal to want to live the co-op life. Seventy per cent of

my constituents don't own an automobile; we have to live in a walkable neighbourhood. The very idea of sharing and familiarity and collaboration is inherent to my constituents.

Bob Rae, a former Premier, now a member of Parliament, and David Crombie are two authors of a great deal of the co-ops in St. Lawrence—the brilliant planning leadership of the former Mayor Crombie in setting height restrictions. Not until Barbara Hall did we have anyone who actually understood how you revitalize and create scale, and understood the importance—that co-ops would naturally gravitate to that kind of standard of space and that kind of spatial organization. Bob Rae, as a Premier here, leader of what is now the third party, I think led a very powerful vision for co-ops, which we haven't really seen very often in Canada; it's very typical in Europe. That legacy is there. This is continuing, I think, in a legacy not just shared by our party but, quite frankly, to be fair, being shared by the third party—that we have shared this idea.

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We can't just build something, get the rules in and then ignore them. One of the things that I am proud of here is the great work that people in the co-op system do, that they continue to have expectations of government, they continue to bring those values to government, and they ask us to put in a set of rules so it's not us making decisions. I really think that most people out there today feel that government, corporations, the cable company, the insurance companies are telling them how to live their lives. What people actually want is more choices. They want a decent process. So when we work with people who voluntarily and creatively want government to put in some sort of organizational plan, some set of rules so that they can resolve disputes themselves, that's a pretty positive thing and a very mature kind of thing, and I think this is a really critical piece of it.

The other thing that often comes up is, are people fairly [*inaudible*]? Mr. Speaker, I represent the most complicated of communities. When I knock on doors, I literally knock on a door in a co-op where I am looking at an Afghani family where there is one man, his wife, usually another older woman who is described as a cousin—often is a second wife, quite frankly—and five or six or seven children. Women in that area often don't ever leave their house. They live a very old-world kind of experience. Three doors down, I will meet a young transgender woman who is just going through a sex change operation. These people get on the elevator every morning. They have the most unusual lives and the most complex lives. It is one of the great joys of being a downtown member of Parliament.

But what is different about simply living in a co-op or living in a condo is that in a co-op, these people have relationships. They get to know each other across incredible social boundaries, cultural and religious boundaries, where you couldn't even imagine them talking to each other in certain parts of the world. So the idea of having a fair dispute resolution isn't just about resolving issues

when there is a conflict. It's actually about building relationships and building civil society discourse.

An elderly person who may have grown up in a small rural community in Ontario, who has retired to the city to be close to health care—she may have some health challenges that require greater attention than she can get in her community—or many elderly people who are moving downtown because they're empty-nesters or because they need to get health care. Sometimes very socially conservative folks are moving into a gay ghetto or a building that is 90% Tamil people who just arrived here from Sri Lanka, escaping what was a near genocide experience of a horrible civil war—kids who are growing up and going to school, who saw their parents shot.

We don't often talk about the roles that co-ops play in leadership. They don't only engage these folks; they help them build into leadership roles. I know there's many of us who represent those areas which have a lot of co-ops. You go to the awards ceremonies and you stand in the room and you look at who's leading these folks, who's getting elected—I mean, they're the most diverse place. If we had that kind of diversity here, it would kind of blow us away. But it's also the role that they play.

I just want to take a few minutes, because it's pretty hard to talk about the penalties and rules and make them really interesting, and we are a little bit in the entertainment mode. They say politics is Hollywood for ugly people—referring only to myself.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I was going to say that.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I am a thorn amongst all the roses here. Yes, I have more attractive people behind me, for contrast.

It's kind of extraordinary to me that all of these things go on in our society, Mr. Speaker, and they're what actually build our democracy. They're the things that actually build respect. They are things in which people work together on all kinds of community issues.

The co-ops in my area have launched community garden programs and local food programs. That started because people started talking to each other about their challenges, or they observed that an elderly person wasn't able to get shopping or afford food or had trouble doing that. People cook together, they take care of each other, and it is really quite extraordinary in what we sort of call the civility of our society.

I always find it extremely discouraging when I hear politicians use the word "taxpayer"—we pay taxes; it's an activity we do, we in government have the responsibility to be the prudent stewards of the public purse, to get value for people's tax dollars and to manage them officially—or "voters," because we're more than voters. Voting is an important responsibility—

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, we're recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's my great privilege to introduce two guests today. We have with us Moreen Miller, who is president of the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association; and we have with us Ken Lucyshyn, vice-president of Walker Industries in the Niagara area, one of the largest quarrying operations in Ontario.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's my pleasure today to introduce the family of page Caelius. We have here today Sam Musharbash, who is Caelius's father; Phoenix Tarantino, Caelius's brother; Michelina Tarantino, the maternal grandmother; and Amal Musharbash, the paternal grandmother. They are all here today to watch the Legislature, but especially to watch page Caelius.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Ajax-Pickering's newest page, Katherine Parker's, family today—we love her and call her Katie. I'd ask them to stand as I introduce the family. Her mother, Jillian Daffern; her father, John Parker; her grandfather Charles Daffern; Katie's uncle Paul Daffern and his daughters, Miss Veronica Daffern and Miss Cynthia Daffern; Katie's uncle Chris Daffern; and a special guest, Mr. Sim Chhabra from the riding of Mississauga-Cooksville.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to introduce to you, sitting in the members' gallery with my assistant Gaggan Gill, who's next to Moreen, Karlie Pipher. Karlie Pipher is from my riding. She's a very avid curler; her boyfriend is Scott Howard—a member of the Ontario champions for seven years in a row, the Canadian champions and the World champion team, Glenn Howard. Welcome, Karlie.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm pleased this morning to introduce 11 recipients of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in my riding of St. Paul's. At noon today in room 230, I will be presenting medals to the following outstanding individuals who are here today in the gallery: Courtney Betty; Kathy Biasi; Brendan Caldwell; Peter O'Brian; Susan Poizner; Paulette Senior; Metta Spencer; John Legge; Harvey Manning; Stan Muthulingam; and Lisa Tobio. Many of their friends and family are in attendance today, and I'd like to extend a warm welcome to them as well. You are all welcome to join us at noon in room 230.

Mr. Michael Coteau: In the east gallery today, I'd like to welcome my aunt and uncle, Mr. Cosnel and Dorothy Baptise. Welcome to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

I would also like to take a moment to welcome Seneca Hill Public School, who are joining us here at the Legislature today.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to welcome here at Queen's Park Alex Lolua and John Grimshaw of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. They're here today to meet with me, and I welcome them here in the Legislature.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: My friend the Minister of Children and Youth Services announced that some of the folks are down here today to receive their Queen's Dia-

mond Jubilee Medals, including my friend Stan Muthulingnam. But I just want to introduce, all the way from Malaysia, his aunt Sivahambikai Manikam, who's joining us all the way from Malaysia to see Stan get his medal.

I want to thank Minister Hoskins for the recognition and welcome our guest from halfway around the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I just have one. We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the finance, economic development and tourism committee of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament of South Africa. Welcome to Queen's Park. Thank you for joining us.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Acting Premier. On Tuesday, the Premier broke his code of silence to deliver a contrived theatrical performance for the cameras. His eleventh-hour melodramatic appeal to avoid accountability fooled no one. It didn't fool the press gallery, it didn't fool the Liberal caucus and it didn't fool the millions of Ontarians who are outraged by the government's cavalier response to squandering \$650 million.

The Premier's piece of performance art was disingenuous because everyone knows it was he—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member needs to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I withdraw, Speaker.

Wasn't genuine? Because everyone knows it was the Premier and only the Premier who sealed Minister Bentley's fate.

So I ask the Acting Premier: When will the government finally come to the aid of Minister Bentley and allow the minister to table all of the documents requested by this House?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I think it's refreshing for everyone here if we look at what the situation is. This summer, the minister went in front of the estimates committee and was asked for documents and spoke about the competing interests.

The member who asked the question will know about competing interests, and I'd like to take him back to his time as energy minister and quote from the Globe and Mail here. January 16, 2002: "Energy Minister Jim Wilson is not able to speak freely about Ontario Power Generation, the main company he oversees as the province's electricity czar, because he has signed an unusual gag agreement.

"Under the agreement, he is to keep confidential any information the government-owned company tells him should be kept secret."

It goes on, Mr. Speaker: "The secrecy arrangement is sweeping and also covers information from almost anyone with business dealings with the corporation, such as contractors or suppliers."

There are competing interests here, and the member knows well about that from his past experience.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Nice try, House Leader, but it was the Ontario Securities Act that prevented me from speaking at the time. Unlike you guys, we don't break the law over here.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's pleas this week were as see-through and contrived as they were insulting. Nothing in this government happens without the consent of the Premier; we all know that. It was clearly his calculation to throw Mr. Bentley under the bus and to make the minister dispensable. The Premier denied Mr. Bentley the opportunity to come clean and table all of the requested documents. In doing so, he once again put himself first.

Ontarians deserve to know what happened. They deserve to know who made the decision to cancel the plants and who prevented the minister from tabling all of the documents. My question to the Acting Premier is this: Will the Premier testify at the committee and reveal how these cancellations came about?

Hon. John Milloy: I think we should let the committee do its work. But let me continue; I find this very interesting.

"Under the deal, Mr. Wilson acknowledged that disclosure of financial and commercial information from Ontario Power 'may prejudice significantly the competitive position of the corporation or result in undue loss of gain to parties other than the corporation,' according to an excerpt from his confidentiality agreement quoted in the Ministry of Finance brief.

"The corporation will identify such information as commercially sensitive at the time it provides the information to [Mr. Wilson] and will provide such information in confidence. [Mr. Wilson] will hold such identified information in confidence to such extent as may be permitted by law," it says."

This is the exact principle; the member should remember his time in cabinet. This is the exact principle that was before the committee.

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: This is the principle that it wrestled with all summer. This is the principle that we've—

1040

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

Stop the clock. I do want to make a quick comment, and that is: When the questions are being asked, I'm hearing noises coming from the same side. When the answers are being given, I'm hearing noise from the same side. And then I'm hearing cross-shots that aren't even germane to the question and answer. Please bring it down.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Acting Premier: \$650 million has been squandered saving Liberal seats, yet the

Premier and the Liberal caucus have not shown an ounce of regret or remorse. Not a single Liberal MPP or cabinet minister has apologized or accepted responsibility for this scandal.

Two years after cancelling the Oakville plant, the Premier and his government continue to stonewall every attempt to get to the bottom of this mess. A pattern is emerging, Speaker. The Liberal government has become debilitated by its own arrogance. The contempt motion was avoidable, but the Premier was unwilling to negotiate. He thumbed his nose at the opposition, the committee and this Legislature.

Acting Premier, now that we know that it was the Premier who threw Minister Bentley under the bus, as a leadership contender yourself, are you worried that you might be next?

Hon. John Milloy: You know, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the race to the bottom finally reached its finish line. We heard the member who just asked the question—the PC House leader—speak openly about how he might be moving to send the Minister of Energy to jail. Two days earlier, the Leader of the Opposition said the same thing.

The fact of the matter is, this was avoidable, to quote the member back to him. It was avoidable because we came to the table with proposal after proposal to find a way to balance the interests, interests that he was well aware of as a minister himself, interests between the public interests and the rights of committees to access such documentation. We came forward with proposal after proposal. They were rejected by the opposition out of hand, and then, when we tried to move an amendment, a substantial amendment that would have seen the committee focusing on this very important question, they gagged debate in the Legislature and they would not let us speak, even though dozens and dozens of our members wanted to speak in defence of a fine man, the Minister of Energy.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Acting Premier: As we continue to go through the gas plant cancellation documents, we're seeing more and more evidence of political involvement. It's a given fact now that crucial Ontario energy decisions are being made by Liberal campaign staff as opposed to energy experts, and while many of the documents point to this involvement, there are no documents turned over from the campaign people.

Why do you continue to protect your insiders and leave the energy minister to bear the brunt of this contempt hearing? Will you turn over all the documents the Speaker has ordered, and this time leave the whiteout in the desk drawer?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the government House leader

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, once again, I think we should let the committee do its work. The fact of the matter is that we have a committee of this Legislature that is going to be looking into the issue of documents;

36,000 pages were provided to the opposition—36,000 pages—and we went forward to the opposition with a way in which they could be provided to them that would protect public interest, public interest which the member from Simcoe–Grey is well aware of from his time as minister, and also acknowledge the rights of committees to ask for these documents.

It was a responsible way forward. It was complying with your ruling, and instead, Mr. Speaker, the opposition—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —dismissed it out of hand and would not sit at the table, roll up their sleeves and find a way in which this could be done. Instead, we've seen partisan politics go to a new low in the comments we've seen both inside and outside this place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: So let's talk a little bit about some of the documents we actually did receive. In Karen Howlett's Globe and Mail story the other day, she correctly details the Oakville sweetheart deal. The Liberals boast about getting the price reduced from \$17,000 to \$15,000 per month, but many contracts, Speaker, in actuality, are under \$10,000 a month. That's the real price.

So I don't know. Who do they think they're fooling, Speaker? Someone made a decision to award a \$3.3-billion sweetheart deal. Because the documents are redacted, let me ask: Was it the Premier? Was it the campaign team? Was it the former energy minister? Was it the Minister of Finance? Who was it, Speaker? You asked them to turn the documents over so we can get to the true documents in this scandal.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very happy to remind the member of who was in favour of the cancellation of these gas plants: It was every single party in this Legislature.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I ask him to go speak to the member for Halton. On June 1, 2010, he said, in this very place, "The people of Oakville have told you they don't want the proposed gas-fired power plant ... and I agree with them." The member for Halton, in a press release of September 14, 2010: "Minister, will you move the Oakville power plant?... I am asking the minister to consider moving this plant."

The member for Haldimand–Norfolk wrote a letter to the former Minister of Energy saying that "the potential for future alternate generation at Nanticoke to replace that slated for the proposed and disputed Clarkson plant should receive ample consideration."

And finally, the leader of the official opposition said on September 25, 2011, "We've opposed these projects in Oakville and Mississauga."

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: At the Premier's Oakville news conference, where he smiled and laughed and shrugged off the seriousness of this matter at hand, basically it was, "So we blew two power plants. It's only \$650 million."

The Liberals cancelled the Oakville power plant and then went to Oakville to take credit for it, a \$650-million photo op.

Speaker, we saw hubris when we expected humility. Paying out taxpayers' money in Oakville to save a seat was wrong, and I would hope that you would admit that. Keeping the documents is wrong, and I hope you admit that. Ontarians need to hear this from their Premier.

Hon. John Milloy: What is wrong is an attempt by this government that was thwarted by the opposition to find co-operation when it came to releasing those documents in a way which would protect the taxpayers. And then, when we put forward a substantial amendment, notice was given to all the opposition parties for an amendment that would allow this committee to undertake important work and grapple with the issue of public responsibility, as well as the responsibility to committees to produce documents. Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that they gagged us; they would not allow debate to go forward. They should be apologizing to the people of Ontario that democracy is not allowed to go forward in this place.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Saturday will be the one-year anniversary since the people of Ontario elected a minority government in this province. Has the government taken any lessons—

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is, has the government actually taken any lessons from their experience over this last year?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: One lesson I've learned is what a pleasure it is to work with the leader of the third party. Mr. Speaker, we have our differences, and I mean very profound differences, but we will as a government—and I am proud that a year ago today, Ontarians re-elected a Liberal government in this province. I am proud that they ferreted out the inaccuracies and all of the inconsistencies of both opposition parties, and I look forward to the next election, when Ontarians will give Dalton McGuinty a majority Liberal government because of the work we've been doing over the course—

Interjections.

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

I found that comment unacceptable, so whoever it was, I would ask to withdraw. I ask the member to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I will withdraw.

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

Interjections.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll wait for a moment.

I do have a comment to make just before we continue. If the Attorney General and the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek would calm down in between ques-

tions, because—I didn't jump up right away, but I'm asking you to relax.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks very much, Speaker.

I hate to burst the Acting Premier's bubble, but people watching the Premier this week as he refused to take any responsibility for the hundreds of millions of dollars spent playing politics with gas plants worry that this government hasn't learned a thing.

The people of Ontario gave us all a clear message in the last election, and the by-election last month reinforced that message. Why does this government still seem to have trouble understanding that the people chose not to give them the power to do whatever they want whenever they want?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I am proud that just this week we passed the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

The people of Ontario have been watching this circus in the Legislature, where the opposition are up to their ears in what I would call a vile besmirch of the Legislative Assembly and everyone associated with it. Parliamentarians will look back at this as a very dark moment in parliamentary history. They will see what this is all about, and that's why Ontarians want to talk about jobs, and that's what we're going to talk about.

Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, we will not fire 55,000 teachers and nurses.

We appreciated the support of the leader of the third party on our budget. We appreciated the ability to get our throne speech passed. We are proud of the fact that October 2 marked the ninth anniversary of a Liberal government in this province, and we will continue to put forward a jobs—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I'm very proud of the real results that New Democrats have been able to achieve in this minority Legislature. We brought fairness to the budget, we improved our health system and helped parents who need child care with their busy lives.

But the fact remains that this government has been more interested in helping themselves than helping the people who sent them here. We heard it again today, in fact, just this morning, when the Premier made it very clear that he won't appear at committee to explain his role in the private power mess. We saw it when the government spent the summer scrambling and failing to win a by-election. We see it as the government creates gridlock in this House, all the while complaining that nothing is getting done.

The people have sent the government a clear message. My question is a simple one: Are they actually listening?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There's another important anniversary of October 6, Mr. Speaker: It's one year since we've seen a plan from the NDP. The first anniversary is the paper anniversary, and all we hear from—we've seen no paper. All we hear is pandering. The NDP: never done pandering.

We've laid out a budget that is consistent with our platform, and that budget has been passed. We are going to continue to focus on jobs and the economy, on better schools and on better health care. The people of Ontario know who's talking about those issues.

Premier McGuinty, just this morning, was at the agri summit—an important industry to this province and an important contributor to gross domestic product. It is a growing industry that is contributing enormously.

Our focus is on jobs; our focus is on a brighter future, with a clear plan to do just that.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Acting Premier. The people who sent us here tell us that they're getting tired and frustrated with a government that clearly doesn't seem to get it.

Yvonne, a mother of three, wrote to us to say, "As a taxpayer who has pretty well single-handedly brought up three daughters, I am, and have been for a long time, used to turning over every penny three times before I spend it ... only to now realize that our hard-earned money is frivolously being spent in absolutely ludicrous ways...."

"I have been watching the actions in the Legislature a little bit and I cannot stand the way straightforward questions are not being answered."

Why is the government so unwilling to provide some of the basic answers that Yvonne deserves to hear, Speaker?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yvonne, I hope, will listen to the lack of any plan or any idea of what to do about the future. Yvonne will also be aware that the leader of the third party says she's going to raise everyone's pay, give money to all kinds of organizations, balance the budget, and somehow everything is going to be just fine. The leader of the third party says we won't have nuclear power; we won't have coal power. The leader of the party has no plan.

So Yvonne, I say to you, if you're listening today: Look carefully at our plan. We have worked hard over the last year, and the eight years before that, to build a better and fairer society. There are, no doubt, more things to do, Mr. Speaker, but we will continue to focus on jobs, to focus on health care and education. I'm going to do everything I can to convince Yvonne that the best party in this Legislature, the best party to form a government, is the Ontario Liberal Party, led by Dalton McGuinty.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Interjections.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think the point was that Yvonne is saying that actions speak louder than words.

Ann, a senior on fixed income, writes, "I am disgusted and furious [at the government's] many secret deals. My hydro bill ... is becoming unmanageable. One friend I know says she will go back to oil lamps and wood as she

cannot continue to pay these bills and they are still climbing."

A constituent named Nathan writes, "I am frustrated that Dalton McGuinty can, on one hand, claim that we need to close provincial parks ... to pay down the deficit, while at the same time making financial mistakes such as ... gas power plant cancellation costs that are climbing into the hundreds of millions of dollars."

This is what everyday Ontarians are saying. These are the kinds of emails and letters that we're receiving daily. What does the government have to say to people like Nathan, who expect a little bit of accountability from a government that has taken so much from them?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, last week I spoke to Betty, who said to me that she's glad that we no longer have diesel generators in our downtown cities.

I spoke to Andrew, who says he's glad that our party has put a premium on closing coal-fired plants and has laid out a plan to replace that power in a cost-effective way.

I spoke to Peter, who told me that the only party in this Legislature that has a real plan is the Ontario Liberal Party.

I spoke to Mark, who said to me that the third party ought to say how it's going to balance the budget without laying people off and to stop pandering to every interest group across the province—no darn plan; never done pandering.

This government will continue to fight for working Ontarians with a strong plan for job growth, better schools and better health care. We look forward to meeting you on the campaign—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not helpful. You can look confused, but it's not helpful using persons' names.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me how out of touch the government across the way has become. People are feeling the squeeze in tough times, and they don't see a government on their side.

Marie from Ottawa tells us, "My salary has gone down \$22,000, and everything, particularly hydro, is going up. It is not the Ontario I grew up in. I fear for the future of my children."

The Hartley family adds, "[We are] very concerned about how the Liberals have attacked the middle and working class."

Peter, from the London area, adds, "There needs to be accountability for this tremendous waste. The ways we could have better used that money are too numerous to count. It's criminal to abuse power as it appears to have been abused."

When will people like Peter see the accountability that they expect from their government instead of the hubris that we get from the Acting Premier?

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I spoke to Burinder, who can see through the leader of the third party. He said to me that he recognizes that they have no plan to get the province's finances in order.

I had the opportunity to speak to Mohammed from Toronto, who said to me that governments have to come to terms with the fiscal challenges they're met with at the same time as they make important investments in education and in health care.

I spoke with Jeanne from Sudbury and she told me what a good job Rick Bartolucci has done for northern Ontario.

We can see through that. You don't speak any more for average Ontarians than we do. This caucus, this government, represents Main Street Ontario. Our plans are about Main Street Ontario. It's about a better life, better schools, better health care, and I stand with those Ontarians who can see through that. We look forward to the next election when we'll have a vigorous debate about all these important issues.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Acting Premier. It's becoming increasingly clear that the Premier of Ontario was a student of Machiavelli who is prepared to sacrifice the reputation of one of his trusted colleagues in order to save his own.

Even as the Premier asked the opposition to reconsider our position on the government's breach of parliamentary privilege, reminding us that the Minister of Energy is a good man with a good professional reputation, the Premier unceremoniously throws the minister under the bus—all this to protect the Liberal Party's campaign team and, most likely, the Premier's own involvement in the decision to cancel the gas plants.

The Minister of Energy must, in his heart of hearts, believe this treatment is grossly unfair to him personally. How can the minister possibly continue to serve with credibility when the Premier has shown him such callous disregard, potentially leading to the ruin of his professional reputation, all in the name of protecting the back-room boys who are apparently calling the shots within this government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I have a tremendous amount of respect for the member who just asked the question, but I quite frankly am very, very disappointed that he would be dragged down to those levels by his colleagues.

The simple fact of the matter is that there are some very serious issues at play here: the issue of solicitor-client privilege, the issue of commercial confidentiality—something that, as we found out this morning, his seatmate knows a great deal about as a minister. It's about balancing those issues with the rights and responsibilities of committees.

We came forward to the opposition on several occasions to put forward plans so that we could co-operate

and find a way to move forward with this, a way to deal with this, a way to charge a committee of the Legislature to look into this very serious matter, and what the opposition did is, they used their majority to go after a member of this Legislature, the Minister of Energy, an honourable minister, to the point where we have colleagues over there, members over there, who are openly speaking about sending him to jail.

The member who just asked a question, an honourable member—stand up and separate yourself from your colleagues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: Speaker, it need not have come to this. There were numerous decision points when the government could have done the right thing and consistently chose not to. The government could have released the requested documents to the estimates committee when first asked. They could have released all the requested documents, as the Speaker suggested, instead of whiting many of them out, most likely in an effort to delete the involvement of the government and the Liberal campaign team.

There could have been a public apology or at least some expression of contrition for the breach of parliamentary privilege leading to a potential finding of contempt, or more appropriately, in our parliamentary system of government, a minister—even the First Minister of the government—could have assumed responsibility and resigned.

Will the government House leader, on behalf of the government, now apologize to this House for the breach of parliamentary privilege, and will he now promise to ensure the release of all relevant documents to the finance committee without whiting them out?

Hon. John Milloy: Yes, there were ways to avoid this, Mr. Speaker. The government came forward to the opposition with two separate proposals, asking them to work with us to find a way to balance the various principles that were in play, as came forward from your ruling. They said no.

So what did we do? We came forward with an amendment in this Legislature, an amendment which would have charged the committee, which is right now holding hearings in this matter, to look into these important principles. It is outrageous what the opposition did. As well as musing out loud about sending an honourable member to jail, they stifled debate—they stifled debate in this Legislature through the passage of a closure motion.

Mr. Speaker, they have raced to the bottom, and as far as I'm concerned, they've crossed the finish line. That question is unbecoming of a member with as sterling a reputation as member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, on September 17, the Ministry of Labour announced that it was hiring an additional 18 employment standards officers to protect vulnerable

workers such as gas station attendants. Three days later, 19 employment standards officers were told they were out of a job.

Does the government actually plan to make the workplaces in this province safer for gas station attendants like Jayesh Prajapati, or was this just all for good publicity?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Over the last three years, the Ministry of Labour has made very significant progress in dealing with employment standards claims. Because of those investments, we've eliminated a huge backlog in claims and upgraded our processes.

We're now at the point where we're going to shift our focus to more proactive inspections, and we're doing that. Over the last year and a half, we've added 20 proactive inspectors, and last month we announced another 18. We've shifted our staff from dealing with incoming calls and processing the claims, now to providing more proactive enforcement of the ESA.

We know that our government has made some very significant progress in those employment standards in the province and with that temporary task force that we invested in back in 2010 to help reduce the backlog. That's a very significant thing, and that proactive inspection is what I think the people of Ontario want us to do: to get out of the office and out into the workplaces.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, you can't do proactive inspections without the adequate resources through the employment standards officers. With each passing day, it becomes clearer that Ontario must do more to protect vulnerable workers like Jayesh Prajapati. Jayesh earned little more than minimum wage, and because he feared he'd have to pay for stolen gas, he took it upon himself to protect himself and to protect his family.

How can this government even pretend to care about the rights of vulnerable workers when it secretly fires front-line workers just a few short days after it publicly announces its plans to protect them?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Speaker, my heart goes out to Jayesh's family. A man is dead. A woman is now without her husband, a son is without his father, and his family is now grieving, obviously.

Certainly, if any member has any suggestions on how to improve in a meaningful way how we enforce employment standards, my door is always open. As the Minister of Labour, I want everyone to go to work at the beginning of the day and come home safely at the end of the day.

We are the first government to conduct proactive inspections and employment standards blitzes. Based on this incident, my ministry has put in increased staffing with regard to employment standards at gas stations. We have put the resources in. We're seeing the results of those proactive inspections. I welcome any other suggestion the member may have.

IMMIGRANTS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, my riding of

Oak Ridges–Markham is a very diverse community. People from around the world call our community home, contributing to our local economy and enriching our local culture, so I know first-hand of the challenges our newcomers face when it comes to integrating into their new communities and putting their skills to work in the economy.

Recent federal cutbacks to settlement funding have not made overcoming these challenges any easier. That's why members of my community were pleased to hear that Ontario was taking leadership by developing its own immigration strategy. As a first step, Minister, you announced the creation of the Expert Roundtable on Immigration to consult with stakeholders, gather information and report back to you. I understand that the roundtable delivered their recommendations to you yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell us what their recommendations were and how they will affect the development of Ontario's immigration strategy?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for her excellent work in the riding as well.

Yesterday, I was pleased to receive the report of the Expert Roundtable on Immigration entitled *Expanding Our Routes to Success*. The recommendations addressed a number of issues, including immigrant selection, settlement, integration and foreign qualification recognition. The expert roundtable was chaired by Julia Deans, the former CEO of CivicAction. It included business leaders, academics, economists and immigration experts.

I also want to recognize and thank my parliamentary assistant, the member for Windsor West. She concurrently made consultations across the province. Combined, their findings and recommendations will contribute to the development of our long-term immigration strategy. It will also contribute to our ongoing discussions with the federal government.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I know that the people of Oak Ridges–Markham will be pleased to know of this progress. Our newcomers arrive with an incredible amount of skills, knowledge and experience, and an incredible drive to put their talents to work.

We're also fortunate to have great organizations like the Social Services Network of York region, which devotes itself to helping people from the South Asian community get settled and find work. This organization provides outreach programs, including weekly meetings, that provide all-encompassing support to newcomers who need to adapt, contribute and prosper in our Canadian society.

It's clear that newcomers play a vital role in our province. That's why we need to ensure that they have the support they need to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: How will Ontario's immigration strategy support our goal of helping newcomers contribute to our economy?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member is absolutely correct: Newcomers are key to Ontario's future economic growth and prosperity. Recent labour market projections indicate that in the next 10 years, over 625,000 new workers will be required in Ontario. Our province needs skilled immigrants to fill these jobs and boost our economic growth.

That's why we're developing a strategy that will focus on how immigration can best support the province's economy and help immigrants succeed. To achieve our goal, we welcome information and expert advice, including the expert roundtable. It's critical that we get this strategy right. We're developing an evidence-based strategy that will help further Ontario's prosperity and help immigrants succeed. We know that when newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, you should be ashamed that, as the head of finances, you allowed \$650 million of Ontario's hard-earned tax dollars to be squandered, which resulted in nothing. Let me define "nothing" for you, Minister: Not a single job was created, and no energy was added to the grid. With nothing to show for it, you've added even more Liberal scandal money to the provincial deficit. Ontario is in a financial, economic crisis, and it's obvious by your actions that all of the above could lead to a contempt motion.

Minister, as Ontario's finance minister, will you take responsibility for giving the Liberal campaign team the green light to add \$650 million to Ontario's deficit for nothing?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I am proud that Ontario is back from the brink of blackouts and brownouts, the legacy of that government. You can swim in this bathwater as long as you want. The people of Ontario want to talk about jobs. They want to talk about the economy.

I've just been informed that General Motors of Canada is adding a new shift at Oshawa and a new shift at St. Catharines, Mr. Speaker. That is what Ontarians are looking for. I remember when that party and their leader called our support of General Motors "corporate welfare." We reject that.

You can swim in that bathwater all you want; we're going to talk about jobs and a better economy. You want to lay people off; we want to hire them. That's what we're going to talk about, and you just keep swimming in that dirty bathwater as long as you want.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Minister. That was a great campaign speech, but my money is still on Kathleen Wynne to win the leadership.

Minister, you've lost control of the province's finances. You've allowed scandals to be financed by Ontario's credit card and doubled the deficit. You've presided over billions of dollars wasted at eHealth and Ornge, and you've wasted \$650 million on gas plants for the seat-saver program. All the while, you have allowed

the unemployment rate in Ontario to rise, and 600,000 men and women are struggling to find jobs. Our economy is hurting, and Minister, you've been in charge of the finances while health and education dollars are being wasted in scandals.

Minister, will you now please take responsibility for giving the Liberal campaign team the green light to waste 650 million Ontario taxpayer dollars?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, Ontarians understand that the world went through a dramatic economic decline, and that's why the federal Conservative government went from a healthy surplus to the largest deficit in federal history. That's why the federal Conservative government has added debt all over.

I think Ontarians see through that empty rhetoric. I think they see through the very dirty bathwater that they want to swim in. They want us to work on the economy, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're doing. That's why we invested in General Motors and Chrysler. That's why we are looking to keep teachers in classrooms and nurses in hospitals. That party wants to lay off teachers, lay off nurses. We reject that.

Yes, it is a campaign speech—a campaign for the government of Ontario under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty, who has taught them more than one lesson about what's right and important for the future of Ontario. That's what this government's about and that's what we're going to fight for.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I want to make a point here: I've been hearing it on all sides, where people, either heckling or when they're asking or answering a question, are referring to members by their names. There's a tradition that you do not do that, and there's a reason for it: It is to become less personal and more focused on issues. I'm going to ask all members to be reminded of not using individual names in this House.

New question.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Faith leaders are gathering in Ontario cities this Thanksgiving week, and the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition is actually here today at Queen's Park. They remind us that many of our neighbours are suffering. They also raise an extremely important question: Why has the government cut the community start-up and maintenance benefit by 50% and cancelled the home repair benefit when these two supports helped tens of thousands of low-income Ontarians stay in their homes and out of homelessness?

Hon. John Milloy: I first of all would like to welcome ISARC to the Legislature today. I've had the pleasure of working with that fine organization for many years as both an MPP and as a minister.

As I've said before in this House, I don't think anyone has a monopoly when it comes to compassion or concern for those who are in need. I was very pleased that with

the budget last spring, one of the few ministries that received a substantial increase in its budget was my ministry, as well as that of children and youth services. Although it was a substantial increase in relation to what else was going on across the board, at the same time there are pressures on my ministry, and we've had to find ways to do things differently and to make dollars go further.

One of those ways is a new approach to homelessness funding, a new approach to dealing with these housing issues. It is the creation of the community homelessness prevention initiative, which takes a number of programs—some of them under my ministry, some of them under the Ministry of Housing—gives them to the Ministry of Housing and then gives municipalities the opportunity to have a lot more flexibility in dealing with homelessness issues. We have also taken the CSUMB program—and a portion of that funding is going into this pot of money to allow municipalities to have the flexibility to deal with this issue.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again to the Minister of Community and Social Services: This government will spend hundreds of millions of dollars to move gas plants and to protect its own interests, but it won't help people struggling with illness or abusive relationships find or keep a safe home. Cutting these benefits hurts our neighbours and it won't save money, because people who lose these benefits will be forced to move to higher-cost shelters and to hospitals.

I ask again, why did the government make these hurtful cuts before even hearing the recommendations of their only social assistance review commission?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I've told this story before. I remember going to a poverty forum as a candidate in the last election. I went through the NDP platform, and I believe it took me four times to find their piece on poverty, which was a couple of bullets at the bottom of a page, I think, under "natural resources."

That member has no monopoly when it comes to compassion for the poor in this province, and I am proud of what our government has done, things like the Ontario child benefit; the raising of minimum wage; the raising of ODSP and OW rates; the fact that we've seen 325,000 jobs created; job retraining programs; our investments in education—all of it focused on helping those who are in need to come into the mainstream of the economy.

I'm proud of what we've done. I'm looking forward to the social assistance review that should be out in the next number of weeks. It's going to be an opportunity for us to strengthen the system even more.

1120

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Our government is making record investments in public transit, including four new LRT lines in Toronto, one of which will benefit

directly my riding of York South–Weston. My constituents rely on public transit to get to work and school and to reduce congestion on the roads.

Some of them have called or emailed me recently, expressing some concerns or confusion regarding the use of private-sector partners. Speaker, can the minister inform the House on how the LRT lines will be built and operated?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, I thank the member for her leadership on transit, and under the leadership of the Toronto Liberal caucus, we are investing \$8.4 billion in four new LRT lines in Toronto, the largest infrastructure project in Canada today.

We have finalized a partnership with the TTC. Together, we are building a seamless, integrated and reliable transit system that Toronto commuters expect and deserve. This agreement allows the government to work with the private sector to design, build, finance and maintain the new lines. At the same time, this new agreement allows for the TTC to operate the LRT system; namely, the TTC will be responsible for vehicle drivers, station operators and ticket staff; safety and enforcement; and dispatch and control of vehicle access throughout the system.

Importantly, the private sector is responsible for any cost overruns or delays. Despite the fictitious claims from the NDP, this project remains publicly owned.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister for that update. I'm glad to see that we are making great progress with our partners at the TTC.

The people in my riding, in York South–Weston, will be pleased to hear that we are moving forward with these new lines, and the people of Toronto want to see transit projects built. The TTC is a mix of subways, buses, streetcars, and now LRTs. Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain how the LRT lines will fit in the existing system?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The new LRT lines will be seamlessly integrated into the existing transit system. That means riders will pay one fare and easily transfer throughout the entire system, just like they currently do, between subways, buses and streetcars.

We are proud to be the only government in the past 20 years to actually build transit in the city of Toronto. Our record \$8.4-billion investment in LRTs will improve transit operations for riders, reduce congestion and keep our air clean. We reject the approach of the PCs, who actually filled in a subway under construction and who consistently vote against transit and strategic infrastructure funding. We reject their constant opposition to building new transit. The McGuinty government is getting the job done on public transit.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Acting Premier. In the estimates committee we asked for documents from the Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority, but there's one glaring

exemption from what we've received so far: Nothing, not one document, was either written to or from the former Minister of Energy, now the economic development minister.

That speaks to two things: Either the former minister was negligent in not keeping up with a vital part of his portfolio, or the government is withholding 100% of those documents. So the question is this: Is it negligence, or is this government covering something up?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Rob Leone: I withdraw.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what's negligent: What's negligent is stifling debate in this Legislature.

The fact of the matter is that we came forward with 36,000 pages of documents that were provided to the opposition, that were provided to the committee. The story behind those documents: I think members are well aware they have to do with balancing the rights of public interest, the rights of solicitor-client privilege—something recognized as a constitutional right—with the right of committees to examine documents.

At the same time, we came forward with an amendment that asked the committee to look into this very, very important issue, and that member and his colleagues used the opposition majority to stifle debate in this Legislature, to not allow our amendment to come forward, and now are openly musing about punitive action against a distinguished member of this Legislature, the Minister of Energy. I think that member has a lot of apologizing to do.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, the government House leader sounds like a broken record defending that government's broken record. The Liberals say the Minister of Energy is an honourable man, a good man, yet they exploit that very honourability, that very good loyalty that they have presented. They have chosen that minister to be a fall guy. There's nothing to say other than that.

The truth is, the Liberals could have released those documents sooner. They could have avoided this contempt debacle that they currently face, instead of burying a friend for selfish political reasons. Why does that Liberal government continue to value the energy minister's political career less than their own political legacy?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to ask the honourable member, why does he stand here and say that someone is guilty until proven innocent? Why does he stand here and prejudge the work of the committee? Not only does he have no respect for debate in this Legislature, but now he and his colleagues are standing up and prejudging the work of a committee that has not even begun. There has been a committee of this Legislature charged with looking into the issues around these documents. We tried to focus that committee on valuable work, but for partisan, vindictive reasons, they are going after a member of this Legislature, they are prejudging the work of the committee, and as far as I'm concerned, they owe the Minister of Energy an apology and they owe an apology to the

people of Ontario for not allowing democracy to continue in this Legislature.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Last week, the Ministry of Natural Resources unveiled some of its transformation plan, which includes significant cuts to jobs, parks and the long-standing Ontario ranger program.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And there's the problem. Nobody heard—luckily I did—that it was going to the Minister of Natural Resources. So let's keep it down.

Continue, please.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker.

For the past number of months, northerners have been on edge, worrying about whether the cuts will hit their communities, because in a northern community like Ignace, with a population of 1,000 or 1,500 people, the loss of only a few jobs can have a devastating effect on the local economy.

Nipigon mayor Richard Harvey said that he has had personal assurances from the minister that the MNR office in his town will not be closed. My question to the minister is simple. Can he provide the same assurances that the MNR won't cut jobs in other small towns across the northwest that are outside of his riding?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you for the question; I appreciate it. Certainly our ministry transformation plan, which we unveiled last week, and the operational changes that came with it are focused squarely on our determination to maintain our commitment to the core values and the core priorities of the Ministry of Natural Resources, including the protection of our natural resources, conserving biodiversity, supporting sustainable development and protecting Ontarians from natural hazards such as fires. Certainly our fiscal challenges have required us to make some tough decisions, but they are decisions based on maintaining those key priorities.

In terms of our magnificent Ontario parks system, we had 334 protected parks last week; we have 334 parks this week. In terms of our youth ranger program, we're moving to a program that will employ just as many people next summer.

These are the things that are important to Ontarians, and we're very committed in our ministry to maintaining those priorities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Minister of Natural Resources: People in northeastern Ontario are also outraged with this decision, which once again suggests we are second-class citizens in this province.

This summer, the Premier visited Elliot Lake following the tragic collapse of the mall, and he committed to helping rebuild the community and the local economy. Since the mall collapse, Elliot Lakers have experienced drastic job losses, unemployment and an uncertain future.

Now we have learned that they are closing Mississagi Provincial Park, resulting in further job losses in the community and across the north.

Is this the government's idea of helping out Elliot Lake and other northern communities?

1130

Hon. Michael Gravelle: As I've pointed out, our ministry certainly has fiscal challenges, and we need to recognize that. These were very, very tough decisions. But certainly in terms of our change in designation of parks from operating to non-operating, we were looking at visitation rates being low, we were looking at low campground occupancy and, may I say, some significant capital infrastructure needs for those parks.

Indeed, I will be sitting down and meeting with a number of northeastern Ontario mayors over the next couple of weeks, and I've had a number of conversations with others as well. We are very committed to maintaining our core priorities in the Ministry of Natural Resources, ones that you would expect us to maintain, such as protecting our natural resources and conserving our biodiversity, and sustainable development. These are important to us. We recognize how tough it is, but we're making the most thoughtful decisions we possibly can.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Earlier this fall, a group of innovators in the agri-food industry from across southwestern Ontario were honoured in my riding of Guelph with agri-food innovation awards for contributing to the success of Ontario's agri-food sector. I know from my colleagues in Peterborough and Sudbury that there have been regional award ceremonies in their communities as well.

Promoting Ontario foods and celebrating local success stories is part of the McGuinty government's plan for a stronger agri-food industry that creates jobs to help grow the province's economy. I was pleased to attend the presentation of the Premier's agri-food innovation awards today. So, Speaker, through you to the minister, can the minister tell us more about all the award winners?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the member from Guelph; we all know that Guelph is agriculture's Silicon Valley for innovation. There were some 50 people who received regional innovation awards this year, and just this morning, I was honoured to be joined by a number of colleagues. I appreciate the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane making a special effort to come out—good to see you there this morning—as well as other colleagues.

I was honoured to join the Premier at the agri-food summit. The Premier presented awards: The Premier's award for agri-food innovation went to Phil Short of Vineland Station. Short is a fruit grower, shipper and entrepreneur whose company, Vortex Packaging, created a recyclable and stackable fruit basket that has been widely adopted. And I was very proud to present Burning Kiln Winery of St. Williams with the minister's award for agri-food innovation for repurposing and adapting tobacco kilns to dry grapes, a process that has resulted in

award-winning wines, one of which is served daily in the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: This year's award winners were very impressive. With the eighth Premier's agri-food summit taking place today, it's a great reminder that since 2007, 285 producers, processors and agri-food organizations from across the province have been recognized at the annual Premier's summit on agri-food innovation. It's very fitting that, as was mentioned by the minister here yesterday, this week is Agriculture Week in Ontario, and the government is gathering with stakeholders to discuss agriculture and celebrate innovation in that industry. Can the minister tell this House what other messages were shared to the summit this morning?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm delighted to share some of the other messages. The most important message is, we want to celebrate our success in Ontario.

Interjection: Lots of good news out there.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: There is a lot of good news out there.

We want to celebrate not only our success, but we want to celebrate our innovations. We want to celebrate that our producers and processors produce and process the best-tasting, most nutritious and safest food in the world. Today, in fact, Premier McGuinty, at his summit on agri-food innovation, offered the \$10 local food challenge, asking families to shift—not spend more—simply shift \$10 of their local spending every week to purchase Ontario products, and if every family in Ontario did that, we could increase food sales by \$2.4 billion and create 10,000 new jobs.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question today is for the Attorney General. In order to justify the \$650-million decision to cancel these plants, we've heard cries of public outcry, energy inefficiency, load management and use of alternative energy. But there's really only one reason, isn't there? Your lawyer has been warning of it all along. The few unredacted documents we could piece together reveal the mad scramble among bureaucrats pitching creative excuses and evaluating the fallout of each; namely, public misfeasance.

We've also discovered that the former Minister of Energy asked for legal counsel, a Coles Notes version on tort of misfeasance, which is an abuse of public power and public office, including its defences. Minister, were you aware that your lawyers were giving advice about misfeasance to the former Minister of Energy, and does that make you responsible?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'll refer this to the House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to repeat it again: When it comes to the question of cancelling the gas plants, there was something very rare in this House; there was unanimity. We heard from the Progressive Conservative Party, we heard from the NDP, and we ourselves reached the same conclusion, that we shouldn't

go ahead with them. In fact, I'm told, and I've heard during some of the debate before they stifled it, that the fact of the matter was there were robocalls from their own candidate to people about how they wanted to cancel the plant.

The fact of the matter is, we cancelled the plant, then we went ahead with negotiations with one of the companies, and at that point, documents were asked for. We tried to work with the opposition to deal with those documents, to have the committee charged with the work to deal with this very, very important issue of the two competing principles. Mr. Speaker, the opposition have blocked us at every turn.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: That wasn't even remotely close to answering the question. I usually do enjoy the Attorney General's answers; he's usually quite entertaining.

Squandering what will likely be billions in failed energy projects for political gain is an outright abuse of government power, but then so is the breach of parliamentary privilege. Perhaps as the government's lawyer, you may also advise about what's worse: the former Minister of Energy's public misfeasance versus the current energy minister's contempt for Parliament. The extensive eulogizing about the life and character of the current energy minister says only one thing: His team has selected him as the go-to fall guy. But is he really the right fall guy?

There's a third, unseen dark force that's been nodding and winking all along. The Premier needs to step up, admit he was wrong, take responsibility and apologize to all the hard-working families of Ontario. Thus far the only people paying for the egregious mishandling of the energy file are the taxpayers, and it's time one of you owned up to this mess. Which one is it going to be?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to correct the record. Earlier today, I said that I didn't think the opposition could get any lower. I want to correct it: They just did get lower. That member stood up here, and he was judge, prosecutor and jury on the Minister of Energy. The fact is that there is a committee of this House that is going to be looking into this matter, and yet members stand up here on that side of the House, and they prejudge what's going on. Quite frankly, it's disgusting.

We saw 36,000 pages of documents that were put out. There were efforts by this side of the House to find a cooperative agreement with the other side. Instead, for vindictive, gutter politics, they have gone after an honourable member of this house, and they should apologize to him.

They should apologize to this committee because this committee does not deserve to be prejudged. Let's let the committee do its work. Let's look at its findings, and let's reach a conclusion on this important issue.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The west gallery is graced by the good Dr. Carolyn Bennett, the MP for St.

Paul's. We welcome you to be here. I stole the thunder of the member from St. Paul's.

This House stands adjourned until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Frank Klees: It's my privilege to introduce many front-line workers in first response. I will be making some specific introductions in the course of my remarks later, but I just generally want to extend a very warm welcome to all of our first responders who are here with us this afternoon.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: To my right, I'd like to welcome all the first responders in the gallery here and, in particular, Mr. Russell from the police, who is a resident in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East. Welcome, everyone, to Queen's Park.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know all members will want to welcome all of the first responders and thank them for what they do—and look forward to the discussion today on Bill 120 with Mr. Klees.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome, from my riding of Burlington, Carolyn Scholey, a constituent who was here on September 27 to show support for Bill 110 and who has returned today to do the same. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce Chris York, Kim Slook, Pat Hudak and Shannon Edsall. I think they're making their way, actually, through security at the moment to have time to listen to the Ombudsman CAS bill.

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

I would like to invite to the Speaker's gallery—acknowledge the member from London—no.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Elgin-Middlesex-London.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):—Elgin-Middlesex-London, a member from 1999 through until 2011 and Speaker of the House, Steve Peters. Mr. Peters is here with a group of people in the agriculture business to listen to the proceedings this afternoon.

We welcome all of our guests today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PAUL HENDERSON

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased today to rise to talk about and recognize a very special man from Lucknow, Ontario. He is from Huron-Bruce, and he was born during the winter, on a sleigh, actually in between Lucknow and Kincardine. He's described as a man of faith, integrity and heart. He played for the Maple Leafs and the Red Wings and has had a very respectable NHL career, but when you hear his name, you think of one

legendary goal for Canada. If you guessed Paul Henderson, you're correct.

The recent celebrations this past weekend of the 40th anniversary of the summit series gave cause for everyone to remember where they were when "the goal" was scored. The fact of the matter is, as my husband reminded me, it just wasn't about that one particular goal. Paul Henderson actually scored the winning goal in each of the final three games.

In the spirit of the 40th anniversary of the 1972 summit series and support of a hometown hero, I feel very strongly that Paul Henderson should be installed into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you.

In game 7, the Soviet goalie stopped Paul's first shot, but he recovered the rebound and slid it past the fallen goaltender to give Canada the 6-5 lead with only 34 seconds left to play. The goal won the game, the series and the hearts of all Canadians across this nation. The team returned home to massive crowds, and Paul Henderson became a national hero.

Back home, Paul is known for his big heart, his support for his hometown and his love and dedication to the game of hockey. I'm proud to take this opportunity to recognize Paul Henderson today.

PETER PAVLOVSKI

Ms. Soo Wong: It is with a heavy heart that I stand today to pay tribute to the life of my constituent Peter Pavlovski, who passed away tragically on September 14 while working on the job he loved as a TTC road master.

Peter was a loving husband, father, brother, uncle and friend. As his niece said during the funeral service, "Our Cheecho was the nucleus of our family. He always brought us all together for special occasions which centred around great-tasting food."

Peter's family was his life. He lived, worked and breathed for them. As his wife, Gina, told me, anything any family member or friend needed, he was there fixing, repairing or helping, even if it meant there was no time to fix something in his own home.

Peter worked at the Toronto Transit Commission for 22 years. He was first hired as a summer student and worked his way up to subway track maintenance. He was so proud when he was promoted to the position of TTC road master. He worked hard at his job; he made sure the job was done right. Most importantly, he treated his colleagues with respect.

On behalf of myself, the residents of Scarborough-Agincourt and everyone in this House, I offer my deepest condolences to his wife, Gina, their three children, Kelsey, Marissa and Andrew, and their entire family.

AGRICULTURE WEEK

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: As farmers prepare to harvest their remaining crops and as we prepare to celebrate

Thanksgiving, let's remember where and from whom that food is coming.

I am pleased to speak today in celebration of Ontario Agriculture Week. I want to thank my predecessor, the former MPP Bert Johnson, for taking the initiative to establish Ontario Agriculture Week in 1998.

Ontario's agri-food sector contributes more than \$33 billion to our economy each year and employs nearly 700,000 people. In Perth county, 20% of all jobs are tied to agriculture. In Wellington county, agriculture represents in excess of \$433 million in total gross farm receipts.

Along with many of my colleagues from all parties, I was pleased to attend the International Plowing Match held in Roseville two weeks ago, and I am looking forward to next year's match, which is being held in Perth-Wellington near the town of Mitchell. This will be the 100th anniversary of the International Plowing Match.

Tomorrow, October 5, I am hosting two open houses to mark Ontario Agriculture Week. I invite my constituents to join me from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the Arthur Public Library, or in Mitchell, at the Royal Canadian Legion, from 2 to 4 p.m.

I thank all the dedicated, hard-working farm families in Perth-Wellington and across the entire province for putting food on our table. As the saying goes: If you ate today, thank a farmer.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIBET

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise today to draw the House's attention to an international situation occurring in Tibet. Right now, almost 40 Tibetans have set themselves on fire and burned themselves to death. Nuns and monks are routinely rounded up, arrested, tortured and many executed.

Tibetans are not allowed to speak their language or to have a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama up in their homes.

The reason I bring the House's attention to all of this is that I understand the Premier is leading a trade delegation to China, but not only to China, into the territory of Tibet.

I would ask what Amnesty International asks, I would ask what Tibetans around the world ask, I would ask what His Holiness himself has asked, and that is not that we do not do trade with China, not that we do not travel there, but that when we do, we raise the issue of human rights with those we speak to, particularly as this government is going to go into the occupied region of Tibet and particularly because I hope they witness some of which I've described.

Again, I rise in compassion for those who suffer in Tibet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has called for autonomy for that region. I plead with this government: Do not go on a trade mission without mentioning human rights in Tibet.

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I rise today to speak to a very important issue. Tomorrow, October 5, is World Teach-

ers' Day. Growing up in a middle-class family, education was indeed my passport into today's hyper-competitive world—a passport that would not have been possible without the wonderful teachers who not only taught me reading, writing and arithmetic, but who consoled me when I needed consoling, who cheered me on when I needed to be encouraged and who taught me that the values of discipline, hard work and integrity are just as important as getting good grades.

1310

It is these teachers, and every teacher around the world, that I rise today to salute. Closer to home here in Ontario, we have one of the best public school systems in the English-speaking world, and that of course would not be possible without our teachers—so a special shout-out to all of our teachers here in Ontario.

Even closer to home, I'm proud that the Dufferin-Peel Catholic school board, of which my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville is a part, will be making a special effort to recognize World Teachers' Day and thank the close to 6,000 teachers in their board who do the terrific work that they do every single day.

Mr. Speaker, I do hope that you and the rest of the members of this Legislature will join me in thanking the teachers of this province for the excellent job that they do every single day.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott: I wish to update the House on the hospital projects currently under way in Wellington–Halton Hills.

Georgetown Hospital is being transformed to meet the needs of our residents in the 21st century with a new and expanded emergency department and the installation of a new CT scanner and integrated diagnostic imaging department. Last May, we broke ground beside the hospital to kick off the project, and construction is well under way. One year ago, the Minister of Health joined us in Georgetown to announce a provincial grant of up to \$2.6 million towards the project. Our community continues to be very grateful for this support.

The planning for our new Groves Memorial Community Hospital, in the township of Centre Wellington, continues to gain momentum. Recently the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network endorsed the program and service elements which Groves had submitted, and the LHIN urged the ministry to prioritize the determination of project volumes and bed numbers. Next steps include working with Infrastructure Ontario on cost estimates for design and construction, and meetings with hospital staff and stakeholders to help shape the project design. An architectural firm has been selected and hired, and we believe we're on track to begin the tendering process by 2014-15, which was the date announced by the province last August.

All of this is great news for my constituents, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank everyone at the Georgetown and

Groves hospitals for embracing the promise of the future in local health care excellence.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Last week, I was joined by the member for Nickel Belt for a series of town hall meetings on the status of health care in northwestern Ontario. These sessions were held in Atikokan, Fort Frances, Rainy River, Kenora and Dryden, and they illustrated that the health care model that's being pushed by this government is failing small communities. Whether it's women in Atikokan who are being forced to travel to Thunder Bay for maternity services because the government doesn't want to pay for them to access them at home in Atikokan, or a couple in Kenora who have lived in Ontario for four years but who still have to drive seven hours back to Saskatchewan to get their prescriptions filled, or the mother in Kenora who had to drive to Winnipeg after her newborn was airlifted there following a traumatic birth because she was not allowed to accompany the infant on the airplane, the fact is that our health care is leaving northerners frustrated and scared that the services they need may not be there when they need them the most.

The goal of these meetings was to hear directly from the people who are attempting to access these services. While the experiences differed from town to town, the fact is that something needs to be done, and that was heard loud and clear.

In the coming weeks, we will bring these examples to the Minister of Health in the hopes of seeing real action on these shortcomings. It's my hope that she will work with us and all members of this House to improve access to essential services across the north and across all of Ontario.

ATHLETIC FACILITIES

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Just last Thursday, on September 27, I had the great pleasure of joining our Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, along with my colleague sitting to my left, the MPP for Scarborough–Agincourt, in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East for a very, very special groundbreaking ceremony. Through the support and partnership of all levels of government, we joined the Toronto 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games organizing committee to launch the aquatics centre and field house, the largest investment ever made in the history of Canadian amateur sport. The project will create 150 construction jobs and is the first of five brand new athletic facilities being built in the region for the games.

The University of Toronto Scarborough campus is proud to be the home of the state-of-the-art multi-purpose athletic centre, which will host swimming, diving, synchronized swimming, fencing and portions of modern pentathlon.

I want to congratulate the U of T Scarborough campus principal, Franco Vaccarino, and all of the staff and the

students at the facility for their leadership in making this project a reality.

Following the summer of 2015, the facility will take on a permanent new life, serving university students, my constituents in Pickering–Scarborough East, and indeed all Ontarians, for generations to come.

It was an exciting day for all. This will be a fully accessible venue, which is an important part of what's being constructed. I just want to congratulate everyone who is going to be part of the People's Games. Congratulations to all.

BASEBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to stand today and congratulate the Clarington Orioles Minor Mosquitoes for winning the Eastern Ontario Baseball Association championship.

The Orioles captured the gold medal in Ajax, defeating the top-seeded Ajax team and winning the two-game final against the undefeated Cobourg Cardinals. Congratulations to team members Jacob Weeden, Thomas Aronowicz, Breckin Krummenacher, Cameron Lugtenburg, Landon Bentley, Camden Stickney, Cameron Brown, Tyler McGarvey, Ayden Wood, Nathan McCabe, Ethan Robertson, Cameron Noble and Noah Mitchell. Congratulations also to coaches Jack Bentley, Rob Stickney, Kevin Brown, Andrew Krummenacher and Steve Wood.

It was truly a major-league effort by the Clarington Orioles Minor Mosquito AA baseball team. Congratulations for your hard work and a great season. Keep up the great work, and congratulations to all those involved, especially their parents and families.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Kenora–Rainy River has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Natural Resources concerning job cuts resulting from the MNR's transformation plan. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, October 16, at 6 p.m.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (TROUBLE DE STRESS POST-TRAUMATIQUE)

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 129, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post traumatic stress disorder / Projet de loi 129, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail relativement au trouble de stress post-traumatique.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The bill amends the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, to provide that a front-line worker, such as a paramedic, police officer or firefighter, who sustains mental stress arising out of and in the course of his or her employment is entitled to benefits under the insurance plan. The bill also specifies that post-traumatic stress disorder is a type of mental stress.

PROMOTING LOCAL FOOD ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 POUR LA PROMOTION DES ALIMENTS LOCAUX

Mr. McMeekin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 130, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2012 and to amend the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Act with respect to program creation and other matters / Projet de loi 130, Loi édictant la Loi de 2012 sur les aliments locaux et modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales en ce qui concerne la création de programmes et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

1320

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I will make my statement during ministerial statements.

ENHANCING RED LIGHT CAMERA SYSTEM ENFORCEMENT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 RENFORÇANT LES MESURES D'EXÉCUTION À L'ÉGARD DU SYSTÈME PHOTOGRAPHIQUE RELIÉ AUX FEUX ROUGES

Mr. Naqvi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Provincial Offences Act with respect to red light camera system evidence / Projet de loi 131, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et la Loi sur les infractions provinciales relativement aux preuves obtenues au moyen d'un système photographique relié aux feux rouges.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act with respect to service of offence notices issued in proceedings based on evidence obtained through the use of a red-light camera system. The amendments provide that offence notices may be served by mail to addresses whether in or outside Ontario, and incorporate into the act related rules currently set out in the regulations.

The bill also amends the Provincial Offences Act with respect to proceedings based on evidence obtained through the use of a red-light camera system. The amendments provide that in those proceedings, section 48.1 of the act regarding certified evidence shall apply to a statement respecting ownership of a vehicle certified by a government of a jurisdiction outside Ontario in the same way that it applies to such a statement certified by the Ministry of Transportation.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ONTARIO PRODUCE

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Before I begin, I just want to acknowledge a few good folk who are here from the Niagara food sector. They are down, many of them, for the Premier's eighth annual agri-food summit and the innovation awards. But I digress.

Let me just introduce some folk here. Jamie Reaume is here. He's active with the Holland Marsh and chair of the Ontario Food Terminal. Welcome, Jamie. Frank Ingratta, former deputy minister, is here. Brian Gilroy from the Ontario Apple Growers is here. Bill George from the Grape Growers of Ontario is here. Mark Wales, president of OFA, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, is here, as is Ron Bonnett, the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

We have Bob Chorney from Farmers' Markets Ontario; Art Smith from the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association; Phil Tregunno from the Ontario Tender Fruit Producers' Marketing Board; Denise Zaborowski from Foodland Ontario; and of course our good friend, a former member and Speaker of the House, the Honourable Steve Peters from the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors. Welcome.

There are some folk from Sustain Ontario here as well, and one other very special guest, my local councillor from Flamborough, who has been a friend to me for a quarter of a century, Rob Pasuta. Rob, welcome.

Mr. Speaker, today—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Today I am pleased to introduce a bill which would enact the Promoting Local Food Act, 2012. Coming up on Thanksgiving, with the fall harvest season now in full swing, I think this is the most opportune time to bring this bill forward.

If passed, the legislation and supporting initiatives would help more people find, buy and eat Ontario-grown, -harvested and -processed food and beverages, the best-tasting, most nutritious and safest food in the world. It would fulfil our commitment to introducing legislation that supports, promotes and celebrates all the good things that grow in Ontario. You all know the song: "Good things grow in Ontario." If every household in Ontario shifted, not spent more but simply shifted, \$10 of their weekly food spending to local food, it would result in a \$2.4-billion boost in sales and create some 10,000 agri-food jobs.

Interjection: That's a lot.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It is a lot.

The local food act, if the bill is passed, would help foster successful and resilient local food economies and systems throughout Ontario, increase awareness of the diversity of local food in Ontario, and, of course, encourage the development of new export markets for local food.

Speaker, if passed, the act would also amend other legislation to make the process for establishing local food and other programs more efficient and transparent. I know how much this Legislative Assembly appreciates efficiency and transparency.

We want Ontarians to know that they can eat great local food at home, in restaurants, at work, in schools, in hospitals—in fact, wherever they are. This proposed act, if passed, will allow us to build on an already good awareness. I don't know if you know this, but the Foodland Ontario logo is the second most recognized logo in Ontario: 92% of Ontarians. There's only one, I'm told, that's better known, and that's McDonald's, so we've got a little bit of work to do yet, no slight intended to McDonald's.

Mr. Speaker, we want to use this act to translate to more sales of local food and create greater demand and more food production. We know that food production creates jobs and economic growth.

Of course, in order to succeed, we need to work collaboratively, together. We need to talk. We need to plan. We need to struggle to see what we can do together. This summer, Mr. Speaker, we set that very tone by engaging people all across Ontario, gathering in their ideas on building a stronger food culture, a culture of engagement and collaboration and one that we want to foster.

Going forward, we would work with other ministries, including health and education, with the broader public sector and with industry partners to develop goals in a number of areas: production and processing and the link between the two, distribution, sales, marketing, retailing—

Hon. Michael Chan: And eating.

1330

Hon. Ted McMeekin:—and eating too, my colleague says. That's the best part, right?

Once we have those goals, we would collaborate on achieving them: sharing knowledge, connections and resources to support the success of our diverse local food economies. It's a matter of connecting the dots and knowing where the dots are in the beginning, to connect them together.

Since 2003, we have accomplished much with our farm, food and community partners. Ontario, in fact, has invested more than \$100 million in local food activities. Foodland Ontario is, of course, a very powerful marketing tool, as I mentioned.

By the way, my figure was wrong. It's recognized by 94% of Ontarians, not 92%. That's what happens when you get a little older and you start losing some of those figures—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Ninety-four is a great number.

Hon. Ted McMeekin:—94%.

But there's more to do, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday our Premier announced that his upcoming trade mission to China in January 2013 will in fact showcase Ontario both as a great source of quality food products and innovation as well as a prime destination for investment, right here in Ontario.

Hon. Michael Chan: Good stuff. I like that.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It is good stuff.

That's why we are also proposing a number of non-legislative initiatives: a ministers' forum; more education; more support for communities and regions working on local food. We are looking at establishing a local food fund to help with some of these dots that we're connecting.

Speaker, the time is right. We have all the elements of success: willing shoppers, more retail interest than ever, and skilled farmers and processors. Supporting this act and these activities will mean a more robust local food system, more economic activity in rural Ontario and more jobs throughout the province.

SMALL BUSINESS MONTH

Hon. Brad Duguid: I rise today to recognize Small Business Month in Ontario—and I promise my colleagues I'm not going to sing—not even one note. I promise you.

I'd like to start by introducing someone whom most of us around here know: Satinder Chera, vice-president, communications, in Ontario, at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, right over here in the government gallery. Give him a round of applause. We all know Satinder.

This government has been working very closely with the CFIB to determine how we can better serve the needs of small business. I think that's a non-partisan thing to do. Our relationship is collaborative, and I'm pleased to say that I'm confident that the work we're doing with the

CFIB will make a difference for small and medium-sized businesses and all Ontarians.

I'm pleased to be involved with this. Please allow me to publicly thank Satinder and his group for his leadership on behalf of Ontario's small and medium-sized businesses.

I ask all sides of this House to join me today in celebrating the contributions that small businesses make to our economy and to our quality of life. These businesses are at the heart of Ontario's economy. Some 97% of Ontario employers have fewer than 100 people on their payroll. More than one third of Canada's small and medium-sized businesses are located right here in Ontario.

Small businesses make an impact in more ways than just numbers. Small businesses give many of our young people their all-important first experience in the workplace. They also expose young people to a career option that they might not be aware of: the option of being their own boss—and we need that. We need more of that.

Today, Ontario is competing with the world to attract the best and the brightest, to create globally competitive companies and to compete and win in the global economy. We need more Ontarians who are willing to be entrepreneurs, small business owners; people who want to not simply find a job but create jobs.

We've been working hard to ensure that the economic conditions here in Ontario foster growth and help small businesses thrive. We provide services across the province where entrepreneurs can get the help they need, everything from writing a business plan to developing an export strategy. The dedicated business consultants in our 57 small business enterprise centres provide support to small business owners and entrepreneurs, helping thousands of Ontarians every year.

I'm proud of the efforts our government has taken to partner with small businesses in order to find ways to reduce red tape and reduce taxes on businesses and consumers. We've cut over 80,000 regulatory burdens that were no longer necessary. That's a 70%—17%; I wish it were 70%—but it's a 17% reduction since we started in 2008.

Ontario's reforms have reduced taxes for Ontario businesses by over \$8 billion a year. That's one reason that Site Selection magazine has ranked Ontario the most competitive province in Canada for three straight years.

We know we can never stop looking for new ways to help small business owners succeed and excel in their endeavours. That's why we're working with the CFIB to identify and address the outstanding challenges facing small businesses that have not yet been addressed through our Open for Business initiative.

Earlier this year, in partnership with the CFIB, we held a number of round tables with small business owners. I found that experience to be invaluable in helping me understand the priorities of small businesses in Ontario and how we can address those priorities through our Open for Business initiative to create faster, smarter and streamlined government-to-business services.

CFIB has recognized our efforts to cut red tape and improve government-to-business services for small business. This year, Ontario moved up a full grade in their red tape report card. This was the most significant improvement in Canada, and we're very proud of that.

We also want to support the next generation of entrepreneurs to help them realize their dreams. That's why we look at ways to serve entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs even better, to make sure people have easy access to the best business advice wherever they are and whenever they need it.

Mr. Speaker, several events will take place this month in support of small businesses. Ontario's small business enterprise centres will be holding more than 20 Bridges to Better Business conferences in communities across the province. Our province will be collaborating with the federal government on National Small Business Week events being held across Ontario between October 14 and October 20. The CFIB will be holding Small Business Saturday on October 20, and later this month, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce will recognize the accomplishments of leading companies across Ontario, including small and medium-sized businesses, with the Ontario Business Achievement Awards.

Ontario is proud to be an integral part of all these events. While I mentioned the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, let me also thank and commend them for administering our Export Market Access Program, which helps small and medium-sized companies become export-ready and bring their products and services on to international markets.

Mr. Speaker, more than half of all Ontarians working for a business work for a small or medium-sized business. This October, let's recognize, celebrate and support Ontario's small businesses and Ontario's entrepreneurs, whose energy, drive and innovation will help Ontario become a global economic leader.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Responses?

ONTARIO PRODUCE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I, too, want to welcome all the guests in the audience who are here today for the introduction of these two pieces of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I was expecting that a local food act would lay out a strategy to strengthen our agriculture industry and make a difference in the availability of local food, but that's not what this bill does. This bill addresses only one small part. It could have been accomplished by simply passing a previous NDP bill or, frankly, by the Premier giving directions to the ministries.

The people of Ontario are increasingly aware of the importance of local food. I commend people who are making the effort to buy local food and support our farmers. Unfortunately, this government doesn't understand that in order to support local food, you need to support the local farmers. The PC caucus gets that.

This summer we launched a province-wide survey of Ontario farmers. We asked them what challenges they are facing, what the government priorities should be to strengthen agriculture and what the government can do to increase local food. What we heard was that this government's policies are part of the problem. We heard about red tape, taxes, increasing hydro costs and that the programs are too complicated.

Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents said red tape on Ontario farms is increasing. Farmers now spend the equivalent of four weeks a year just dealing with government forms and paperwork. For this bill to truly support farmers and local food, it needs to address this problem.

This government has not made farmers or agriculture a priority. They capped the Risk Management Program at \$100 million and then spent more than six times that amount, \$650 million, in a political decision to relocate two power plants.

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When asked about the biggest challenge farmers are facing, they responded, "regulations," "hydro costs," and "rising input costs." When we asked farmers the most important thing that the government could do to ensure the availability of local food, they said, "Government should work with farmers instead of simply enforcing more and more red tape without any accountability."

"Don't put wind turbines on good agricultural land": another quote.

We heard, "We need more local abattoirs. Government regulations are killing the local meat-packing industry."

If you support local food, those are all issues that need to be addressed, Minister.

As we celebrate Agriculture Week and Thanksgiving, I ask everyone to support our farmers by buying great local Ontario food, and by telling this government we need a real local food act to address these challenges so we can continue to have that great Ontario food that the minister was trying to sing about, Mr. Speaker—just trying.

SMALL BUSINESS MONTH

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased to rise in the House today in recognition of Small Business Month. As members of this House know, I come from a small business background—and a proud member of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Our family business began in 1948 as an auto, farm and general hardware store. Over the years, the family business developed into a Home Hardware Building Centre, auto and farm supply store, Rogers and LCBO agency store. I'm proud to say that we now employ 65 people in the village of Newbury. I've watched my parents, Gary and Susan McNaughton, work day in and day out, often making significant financial and personal sacrifices to ensure that the family business continued to grow.

This story is one that can be heard right across this province. There are many examples of great men and women who have worked tirelessly to grow their business and contribute to Ontario's economy.

Tim Hudak, the entire PC caucus and myself are committed to making Ontario the best place to own and operate a small business. We are working to help make energy prices affordable for small businesses, to cut red tape and to get the books back to balance in this province. Our mission is to make it easier to start, grow and expand a business here in Ontario. The PC caucus is committed to doing this because we understand the value that small businesses bring to Ontario's economy, and we are committed to supporting and encouraging that.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the hard-working men and women who work tirelessly to drive Ontario's economy forward through their commitment to small businesses.

SMALL BUSINESS MONTH

Ms. Catherine Fife: This morning, I was pleased to attend the launch of a new company, Hyphen, in Kitchener–Waterloo. Hyphen is a division of Christie Digital. Hyphen will address the local need for superior, faster and more conveniently located prototyping and environmental testing services, all under one roof. It's really quite an amazing company. Like many companies in Kitchener–Waterloo, for Christie, innovation is key to their success, and Hyphen is continuing that tradition in combination with a strong trend towards research and development.

The conversation in this province of how companies like Christie Digital and Hyphen can continue to grow and prosper is ongoing, and I know the minister would share my belief that research and development and supporting start-ups is key to improving productivity and thus creating jobs.

The tag line for Hyphen is "Build-Test-Optimize." It's a great tag line for a company, but quite honestly, it's a good tag line for a strong economic and job creation strategy for the province of Ontario. Of course, we need more than a quick tag line to foster job growth.

That said, we do know how to build conditions for economic growth by offering tax credits for those companies that create real jobs and by fostering learning through a training credit. Reducing the corporate tax rate for small businesses to 2% from 4.5%, as proposed by the NDP in the last budget, would also be helpful.

We have some tested models for growth, like our job creator tax credit, which would focus tax dollars strategically at those companies that create jobs. This idea has been forwarded to the Premier's Jobs and Prosperity Council, and we strongly believe it is deserving of the government's support.

Finally, we can and we should optimize our potential by supporting entrepreneurs. In a recent op-ed by Iain Klugman in the Financial Post, "Start-up Funding Crucial To Future Innovation," Mr. Klugman rightly points out

that we should be looking chiefly to our entrepreneurs to commercialize new ideas and innovations. Governments can and should foster this spirit so that more companies like Hyphen can expand, grow and hire.

ONTARIO PRODUCE

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaker, it is once again an honour to stand in this place and speak on behalf of the New Democratic caucus in response to the Minister of Agriculture regarding the local food act. The time is very appropriate: during Agriculture Week in Ontario and just before Thanksgiving, when families celebrate their blessings and farmers celebrate the harvest—hopefully partly completed and hopefully better than anticipated.

Everyone should also be thankful for what the agricultural sector does for Ontario: 700,000 jobs and over \$30 billion in economic activity. The NDP is solidly behind the concept of Ontarians having access and enjoyment of more local food. In fact, our leader, Andrea Horwath, introduced a private member's bill to that effect in September 2010.

Who would not be in favour of more local food? But as always, Speaker, the devil is in the details. The people in Timiskaming know a lot about the importance of local food to the economy. The Little Clay Belt is a fertile valley dotted with productive dairy farms. We had one cheese factory in our area. When its owner announced its closure, the local community banded together, led by a group of farmers, and, with the help of Dairy Farmers of Ontario and East Gen, we saved the plant. It was a long, hard fight, and now, years later, we can say with confidence that Thornloe Cheese is here to stay.

But we learned something in the process: People are not eating more cheese because they buy ours; they could be eating less of someone else's cheese. So the government's sales pitch that a \$10-per-week shift to local food per family will increase economic activity by 10,000 jobs, while great public relations—great—is somewhat suspect. Unless Ontarians are going to eat more food, the \$10 could be displaced from one supplier to another. So we are not increasing overall economic activity unless you are displacing imports, and even then there are people in Ontario who make their living importing food.

The New Democratic Party is hoping that the government will take this opportunity to work with us and to pass substantive legislation that will truly increase the consumption of local food and further strengthen the agricultural sector. If you ate today, thank a farmer, a processor, a retailer, and please don't forget the cook.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order for the chief government whip.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I do rise on a point of order to handle something we should have handled a little earlier today. I seek unanimous consent to revert back to motions at this time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The chief government whip is seeking unanimous consent to move back into motions. Agreed? Agreed.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Brad Duguid: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion. Agreed? Agreed.

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice of ballot item 69 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: My constituents from the riding of Durham present the following petition. I want to thank the constituents: Frank Agueci, Robert McJannett, Rob Purdy and Peter Barber. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

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"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks."

I'm pleased to sign, support this and present it to Parnika.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Miss Monique Taylor: I am happy to rise once again to read more of these petitions to the House.

"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 couldn't agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I will sign my name to this petition and give it to page Simran to deliver to the Clerk.

WIRELESS SERVICE AGREEMENTS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas more than two thirds of Ontarians have a wireless service agreement;

"Whereas the majority of cellphone contracts are postpaid, often causing consumers surprise when they are charged for services they did not agree to or they did not know would result in added costs;

"Whereas consumers would benefit from clear and easy-to-understand language that describes the real costs and terms of wireless service agreements for cellphones, smart phones and other mobile devices;

"Whereas it is the responsibility of businesses to make sure their customers know what services they are paying for;

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

"That Bill 82, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2012 be adopted to make it easier for consumers to understand the costs and terms of wireless services agreements while ensuring service providers are upfront with information before contracts are signed."

I endorse this petition and send it to the table via page Maya.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government is forcing Ontario municipalities to build industrial wind turbines without any local say or local approval; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government transferred decision-making power from elected municipal governments to unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats; and

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

General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus has committed to restore local decision-making powers and to building renewable energy projects only in places where they are welcomed, wanted and at prices Ontario families can afford;

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

“That the McGuinty government restore local decision-making powers for renewable energy projects and immediately stop forcing new industrial wind developments on municipalities that have not approved them and whose citizens do not want them in their community.”

I support this petition and send it with page Simran.

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, sign it and give it to page Zakhar.

FAMILY SAFETY

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I have a petition today.

“Safer Families program in Peel region:

“Whereas the Safer Families program is a successful partnership of Catholic Family Services Peel Dufferin, Family Services of Peel, and the Peel Children’s Aid Society (CAS), receives year-to-year funding from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and is a critical component of social services to families within the Peel community; and

“Whereas the intervention model for Safer Families currently operates with no waiting lists, an important consideration for families experiencing domestic violence and child protection concerns, as they require immediate access to service; and

“Whereas the Safer Families program is aligned with Ontario’s child poverty agenda, is committed to preventing violence against women, and contributes to community capacity building to support child welfare delivery; and

“Whereas currently, Safer Families serves 14% of all domestic violence cases referred to Peel Children’s Aid

Society, and has the ability to double the number of cases it handles with proper funding;

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

“That the government of Ontario adjust its funding to supply ongoing core funding rather than year-to-year funding, and realign funding to double the percentage of cases referred by the Peel Children’s Aid Society and served by the Safer Families program.”

I support this petition wholeheartedly, and I sign here and give it to page Patrick.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario halted construction and cancelled the project to build an electrical generation station in Mississauga in the autumn of 2011, during an election period, after construction was under way; and

“Whereas Minister of Energy Chris Bentley has stated publicly that the Ontario Liberal Party campaign team made the decision to halt construction and cancel the project to help win the seats of five existing Liberal Party members of the Legislature, including seats in Oakville, Mississauga and Etobicoke; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario also arbitrarily cancelled a project to build a natural gas power plant in Oakville in 2010 to save a Liberal seat; and

“Whereas initial reports indicate that the cancellation of both the Mississauga and Oakville power plants will cost Ontario taxpayers at least \$640 million; and

“Whereas the Minister of Energy deliberately hid and continues to withhold documents detailing these costs from Ontarians;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as tax- and ratepayers of Ontario, to immediately reconstitute the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and refer the matter of the Ministry of Energy’s withholding of documents relating to the Mississauga and Oakville power plants to the committee for extensive review and further investigation.”

I obviously support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Katherine to take to the table.

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 couldn't agree more. On behalf of the thousand or more dogs killed because of the way they look, I'm going to sign it and I'm going to give it to Ethan. He's going to deliver it to the table. Thank you.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition from the York South–Weston community and residents.

“Whereas there have been several incidents of violence and crime related to the illegal sale and service of alcohol in our community; and

“Whereas we, as a community, want safety and peace of mind and know that giving law enforcement better tools to combat criminal actions will help meet this goal;

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

“We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 93, the Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places), 2012 into law.”

I agree with this petition, and I will hand it over to page Caelius—I hope I pronounced that right—and I will sign it.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt;

“Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and Oak Ridges moraine;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier government to plan, protect and enforce clear, effective policies governing the application and permitting process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries;

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“Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Minister of the Environment initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent contamination of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt.”

I've affixed my signature, as I agree, and given it to page Jacqueline.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

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

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

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

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with Health Sciences North, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

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

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

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas all Ontarians have the right to a safe home environment;

“Whereas the government of Ontario works to reduce all barriers in place that prevent victims of domestic violence from fleeing abusive situations;

“Whereas the Residential Tenancies Act does not take into consideration the special circumstances facing a tenant who is suffering from abuse;

“Whereas those that live in fear for their personal safety and that of their children should not be financially penalized for the early termination of their residential leases;

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

“That Bill 22, the Escaping Domestic Violence Act, 2011, be adopted so that victims of domestic violence be afforded a mechanism for the early termination of their lease to allow them to leave an abusive relationship and find a safe place for themselves and their children to call home.”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature and send it to the table via page Sashin.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Jim Wilson: A petition to uphold the decision of the consolidated hearings board for Duntroon quarry:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Office of Consolidated Hearings, a panel made up of two members of the Ontario Municipal Board and a vice-chair of the Environmental Review Tribunal, heard evidence for 139 days over the course of

39 weeks, where they heard from 36 experts, seven lay witnesses and numerous participants; and

“Whereas the evidence at the hearings made it overwhelmingly clear that the proposed Duntroon quarry would create ... over 150 indirect jobs and contribute significantly to the local economy; and

“Whereas the proposal has been studied for nine years and represents the continuation of a long-established land use in the area, where an existing quarry has been operating for over 40 years without significant negative impacts; and

“Whereas Walker Industries has entered into agreements with Clearview township and the county of Simcoe to provide substantial benefits to the municipalities that are above and beyond those required by the Aggregate Resources Act, the Planning Act and the Municipal Act; and

“Whereas the haul route along Simcoe County Road 91 has been used for this purpose for more than 40 years, steps have been taken to minimize environmental impacts, and there has been no opposition from the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the county of Simcoe or Clearview township;

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

“That the McGuinty government respect the decision made by the Office of Consolidated Hearings and allow the Duntroon quarry to move forward so that our environment can be protected and good jobs can be maintained and created for local families in need of work.”

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Katherine to bring it to the clerks’ table.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

FIRST RESPONDERS DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR DES PREMIERS INTERVENANTS

Mr. Klees moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 123, An Act to proclaim First Responders Day /
Projet de loi 123, Loi proclamant le Jour des premiers intervenants.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Klees has moved second reading of Bill 123, An Act to proclaim First Responders Day. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I’ll correct you: For the record, it’s Bill 123.

It’s an honour for me to bring the First Responders Day Act forward for consideration. If this bill passes second reading today, I hope we would all agree that we will bring it to third reading quickly and that it will receive royal assent in time for us to celebrate First Responders Day on May 1 of the coming year and every May 1 thereafter.

In the course of discussing my reasons for dedicating my private member’s bill to the first responders of this province, I will be recognizing the many special guests who have joined us today to observe this debate. Every member of this Legislature and members of the press gallery received a copy of this book, entitled 911: True Tales of Courage and Compassion. I want to welcome the author, Vali Stone, who, along with her family and friends, is joining us in the members’ west gallery. Welcome, and thank you for the key role that you’ve played in bringing the First Responders Day Act to the floor of this Legislature.

Joining Ms. Stone from the East Gwillimbury fire department are Fire Chief Ken Beckett and Deputy Fire Chief Phil Dawson.

For those who have read 911, you will know that Chief Beckett is one of those first responders who was willing to share some of his most memorable experiences on behalf of us all. I want to thank him for doing that. Perhaps more so than any other account in this book, Chief Beckett’s description of a call to which he responded on March 8, 1997, impressed on me the extent to which first responders in our communities are exposed to human suffering and are called upon to put the lives of others first, and must constantly struggle with subordinating their own personal feelings in the face of the tragedy they have just encountered.

Here is how Chief Beckett described that call:

“It was 10:30 a.m. on Mount Albert Road. The centre median was covered with heavy, wet slush from the previous night’s snowfall. A driver got sucked into a dense rut and came across the road, hitting my daughter-in-law Kathy’s car. My son Tim, a firefighter at the same station, was off that day, helping his brother-in-law

move, and my daughter was on her way to our house to bring us our two grandsons, Brian, aged 2, and Kevin, aged 5, for my wife to babysit while Kathy went to work.

“My pager went off, and I was debating whether I should attend with the rest of the crew when I received a phone call from a friend of mine suggesting that I should respond as there had been a serious accident and he believed that my daughter-in-law was involved.

“There are no words to describe the fear that grips one’s heart when it comes to a family call.”

Speaker, Chief Beckett goes on to describe how the children were airlifted to Sick Children’s Hospital. Both were in a coma. Two-year-old Brian tragically succumbed to his injuries. His brother would eventually survive. He describes how one of the most difficult challenges in the job is dealing with a death, and especially a death that involves a family member or a friend.

Chief Beckett, we want to thank you for sharing that very personal experience with us, and through you, we also want to express our sincere appreciation to the men and women who put themselves in harm’s way every day to carry out their professional calling as first responders.

Also joining us today is Fire Chief John Lynn from the city of Barrie. I want to acknowledge Fire Chief Jeff McCormick from the Brantford Fire Department, and from the Goderich Fire Department, we welcome firefighter Dale Baechler.

Speaker, today we have an opportunity to honour the men and women who are serving on our front lines as emergency responders in our province every day, by passing a bill that will set aside a special day of recognition for all first responders.

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Also in the members’ gallery, from the York Regional Police Services, I’m pleased to welcome Inspector Angelo De Lorenzi and constable Ken Golding. From the Toronto Police Services, we welcome Acting Deputy Chief Tom Russell, tactical training constable Derrick Goobie, and police officer Brent Pilkey. They’re joined by Mr. David McFadden, the president of the Police Association of Ontario.

We know all too well that the men and women of our police services never know what their day will bring. We can’t begin to imagine the emotions of their families every day, wondering what will happen and whether their spouse or their father will return home safely.

In his contribution to the 911 book, Josip Susic, a constable with the York Regional Police Service, put it this way: “As police officers, we are always putting our lives on the line for the sake of public safety. I do not consider my life as important as that of my partner or civilians. It could be my military background, but even if I get injured or lose my life, I know I did it because it was my choice to take this job. For me, it’s more important to save someone, even if it means that I might never make it home.”

Constable Susic’s comments are not empty words. These men and women risk their lives to protect ours on a daily basis, and we cannot take that for granted. But we

don’t just want to wait to express our gratitude at a memorial. That’s why we have before us this bill that will designate every May 1 as First Responders Day.

The intention is that whether it’s through statements here in this Legislature, or recognitions in municipal offices across the province, or tributes in school auditoriums, we would take the time every May 1 to acknowledge that our communities are safe, our homes are protected and our lives are secure because of the dedication of the first responders in our province.

I want to acknowledge the presence of Mr. Paul Charbonneau, past president of the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs; and from the Toronto Paramedic Association, president Geoff MacBride and paramedics Don Meikle and Judy Belanger. Again, I want to thank Judy for her insight into the world of paramedics through her contribution in this book.

I also want to thank Ken Horton, from the Toronto EMS, and his colleagues who are here today. I want to thank you for your expression of support for this bill.

To underscore the impact of paramedics in our lives, here is a letter that was sent to Ornge, our province’s air ambulance service, this past summer from the mother of a two-year-old boy. I want to read it into the record in support of the front-line paramedics, pilots and dispatchers at Ornge and in celebration of the work that they do. The letter reads as follows:

“I would ask that you pass along this message to the Ornge team (including Dennis and Dan) who airlifted our son to SickKids in July.

“Our son Brendan was brought into the hospital about 8:30 a.m. by ambulance after a near-drowning incident at our family camp. He was stabilized by the ER team and then airlifted to SickKids by Ornge paramedics Dennis and Dan.

“I wanted to let Dennis and Dan (and the pilots—didn’t catch their names) know that Brendan was discharged on Sunday and we are now at home. He is back to his wonderful self, laughing and smiling and up to two-year-old antics. He is truly a miracle. As per MRI and neurology, no brain injury is suspected.

“I remember being so amazed by the professionalism and competence of our Ornge team. I couldn’t have asked for better people to literally have our son’s life in their hands. We credit his amazing recovery to the top-notch care he received at all stages of this ordeal. We have our little boy back, because of you.”

Speaker, there are stories like these every day that go unnoticed and unrecognized. We want to thank and honour the paramedics, the pilots, the dispatchers at Ornge, the paramedics right across this province, who carry out their duty every day on our behalf. It is because of them that we have the security that we do.

I also want to acknowledge Mr. John Saunders, the president of the International Association of Emergency Managers. In fact, it’s Mr. Saunders who is responsible for the term “emergency managers” being included in the definition of first responders in this bill. I also want to thank him for affirming that May 1 is in fact an appro-

appropriate designated day in this province, and the reason is that the first week in May is national Emergency Preparedness Week. Mr. Saunders is joined by the president of the Ontario Association of Emergency Managers, Mr. Rob McDonald.

I also want to thank Denise Stone, the community emergency management coordinator for the region of Niagara, for joining us today.

A special welcome to Councillor Jim Foubister from the city of Sarnia.

Last but not least, I want to acknowledge, from my hometown of Aurora, our manager of special projects, Mr. Jim Kyle; and, representing York region's St. John Ambulance and the many volunteers of that great organization across the province, Russell Walter.

A few weeks ago, I found this book on my desk. I opened it up. Inside was a note that said, "Frank: Thought you would like to review this before I call on Friday in regards to the private bill for first responders. Thank you, Vali Stone." I read the book, and after reading the book, I realized that we have a responsibility in this province to honour and recognize the men and women who have dedicated their lives to serving us on the front lines in the various capacities of first responders.

There are some 34 accounts of first responders in this book who have given us an insight into what their day is like. I highly recommend that we all read it. I highly recommend to the public that they do, because I believe they will see in a very different light the work that the first responders do in this province. These are ordinary people who carry out extraordinary feats every day. They deserve to be honoured by having this bill passed today so that every year on May 1 we would take the time to recognize the incredible work that these amazing people within our communities carry out for us selflessly every day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my honour to rise in support of this bill. In fact, all of us in the New Democratic Party, including our leader, Andrea Horwath, are in support of this bill. I rise only for a minute or two, because my colleagues will be taking time as well, just to thank those who have come down to celebrate this day that this bill is tabled and will hopefully pass, and to bring your attention to the third time a bill of ours has been tabled as well. That is to provide presumed diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder for front-line responders, which is something that we have been working on, a third time tabling.

This bill is modeled on a bill introduced by our leader, Andrea Horwath, where it was presumed diagnosis for certain kinds of cancers for firefighters coming out of the Plastimet fire. That was the inspiration for that. That bill was taken up by the government and introduced, and I would urge my colleagues across the aisle to do the same with the member from Newmarket-Aurora's bill, and ultimately the same with our post-traumatic stress dis-

order as a presumed diagnosis for front-line responders too.

Certainly in my constituency office we've had a number of paramedics and others bring to light some incredibly tragic cases, moments when they risked their lives. Some recovered and, unfortunately, some did not. My husband was a police officer for a while after high school in Waterloo region and experienced first-hand what it was to be a police officer and to go into situations of danger. He's never forgotten it. He went on to university wanting to become a detective and ended up teaching college—an only slightly safer job, I must say. But certainly wherever front-line responders are mentioned, my husband is there to defend them and the work that they do because he knows what it looks like.

So to all of you, we thank you on behalf of the New Democratic Party and our leader, Andrea Horwath, for the work that you do. We celebrate the member from Newmarket-Aurora in this initiative and we hope to extend that initiative so you are better protected. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

1420

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is my pleasure to rise and speak in support of this very important bill before us, to proclaim May 1 of each year as First Responders Day.

I'm very happy to support this, and I, too, want to thank everyone who's here today and everyone who is not here today from the first responders community. I know it includes many people: police, firefighters, military personnel—we often forget about those folks, and we shouldn't—paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, nurses, doctors and emergency medical technicians.

For me, Speaker, I know first-hand of the good work these folks do in my community in Pickering-Scarborough East. As many members here know, I come from a long line of firefighters. My father was a firefighter in Toronto at the Yorkville station here. My two uncles were firefighters as well. So as a young girl, I heard many stories about the very brave work that they and their colleagues did.

In terms of the bill itself, as I said, I'm just absolutely thrilled to support it. We want to make sure that we recognize all of our first responders, all over Ontario, when they respond to emergencies, and this is a great way to do that. Our government continues to work with all the sectors to ensure that all our first responders have the tools that they need to continue their good work.

In terms of the day itself, I just want to acknowledge—and I think because of the good work of many members in this Legislature, we have a number of other days designated to May 1. We just want to make sure that, when we move forward with May 1 for this bill—we want to flag that there are other days, such as Emergency Preparedness Week and National Police Week and so on—all very important things, but we want to make sure that if events are organized, the events don't

coincide and that we do indeed celebrate the important work of first responders here.

Some other first responders who may be considered under the act—perhaps this could be clarified as we go forward—are correctional officers, sergeants, OSPCA investigators and 911 operators. It may be, Speaker, that 911 operators are already captured under the term of “dispatchers” under this bill, but I just offer that as a potential suggestion and consideration as we finalize this going forward.

So, again, I’m just absolutely thrilled to speak on behalf of this bill. I once again thank all the first responders who are here today and those who are no longer with us as well. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I’m pleased to support my colleague Frank Klees on Bill 123 for First Responders Day in Ontario.

For someone who does a lot of talking in this House, it has got to be the shortest piece of legislation I’ve ever seen. It’s a total of 11 words, and they probably have more impact than a lot of the things we’ve been debating here in the last two or three weeks.

I can tell you that I fully support this. I wanted to bring my personal experience, after having a fire last May 8 at my home, and the reaction I got working with all of the first responders in my community. I’d been critic for community safety and correctional services for eight years prior to that and have worked a lot with police and fire, but until something actually happens to you, until you actually have, for example, a fire, you really can’t visualize it.

My colleagues have teased me, but I went home from here. I had been up since 4:30 in the morning. I went home and I was having a little snooze—

Laughter.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I was, because I had four events that night. I often do that in the day; I have a quick snooze. I laid down for just a few seconds. My wife had just left the house. I heard all of a sudden the smoke alarms going off in our house, and I’m thinking—first of all, I thought it was some new noise coming out of my BlackBerry. I’ve got to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, I actually went down—and to all my friends here, I couldn’t believe it when I went into my basement and I actually saw my home on fire. You just do not think it can happen to you. My initial reaction was, I was panicking so hard. I honestly couldn’t remember whether it was 911 or 411 to call. I was so excited and so—there’s just no time. There is no time. Those fires spread rapidly. You couldn’t run out and get a bucket of water or something and think you’re going to go back in and douse it. This thing was wide open. The firefighters told me after that fires today are so much faster than they would have been in a home, say, 40 years ago. They’re like 20 times faster because of the chemicals in our homes.

So we called the fire department quickly—and, by the way, Mr. Speaker, it seems like one of the longest waits

you could ever imagine, waiting for those trucks to come. In fact, the reality is, it was only a couple of minutes. It’s a volunteer fire department where I live. They were phenomenal, and they had the support of all four halls. The first came from the Coldwater station—Chief Lynn from Barrie lives near the Coldwater station; he would know that. They came, followed immediately by the two paramedics, and the OPP arrived just a minute or two later. It was amazing to see how the whole organization worked.

Now, I’m a pretty high-strung person, as a lot of people would probably imagine, and I really wanted to get my hands on that fire hose and put the fire out myself. Of course, the first thing they do is say, “You’re going to have a heart attack if you don’t stop it right now. Sit down. We’ll look after it.” Ladies and gentlemen, I couldn’t believe how organized everyone was and how it fell into place. People were calm and cool. They came and asked me, “Where do you think the fire is?” I said, “It’s right below that door that you’re looking at right there,” and in no time the whole gang was there. They were in the house and they had the fire out, and I’ll thank them forever for that.

Sometimes you hear people say, “Let it burn to the ground.” You know what? That’s the worst thing that could have happened, because then you have all kinds of problems with your insurance. This house had all kinds of smoke damage, and it was very easy for the insurance adjusters to go in and do an inventory of what we had, because not a lot got burned; it was all right there. But I thank them.

The police were there. I said to the officer, “Well, why are you here?” I wasn’t sure how it actually worked. He said, “Well, in case there’s another body in the house or something like that, we’ve got to be here to investigate it.” Then I asked the two ladies who were paramedics, “Why are you here?” They said, “In case you get sick now because of this.” But you know what? It was amazing.

I want to thank all the people, like Glenn Higgins from the Orillia Professional Fire Fighters Association—it was an off-day, but he heard about it and he came out—and Mike Gagnon from the Midland Professional Firefighters Association. I got a call from Fred Leblanc from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association and Kevin White from the Barrie firefighters. It was just amazing how this network of people worked.

I particularly want to thank our own volunteer fire department in the township of Severn. We have some full-time people, but Chief Eric Dowell and Deputy Chief Cranney—and one special lady who came to the fire was a lady who, just the very night before, was in a fancy evening gown and I was getting my picture taken with her at the Women of Distinction Awards, Debbie Sammit, who owns a business called Pretty Woman Fitness. She was one of the first ones into the house putting out the fire, and it was amazing. She’s a volunteer firefighter as well, of course. It was really, really amazing to watch this whole team of people work.

I don’t think a lot of us understand what we’ve got in our communities. You know, you see those trucks going

by. Somebody else's house is on fire or somebody else has had an accident. But when it's your home and you've actually seen this whole organization come in to work and how they work together, the training they do, the comradeship between each other, it's really and truly a great thing to see, to know that we have that in our communities right across our province.

Member from Newmarket–Aurora, I think it's a phenomenal bill. It ties in nicely with what we expect. It's good to see that all three parties are agreeing on this. Hey, let's not fool around with this. Let's get this thing passed, okay? Let's make sure that next May 1, whether there's an election on or whether we're back here debating everything at the time, we do something really positive for our first responders. That's all the fire departments, the paramedics, the volunteers, everyone in our communities who helps work on first response. Let's give them something really positive at that time and pass this bill.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you appreciated my story here because, I've got to tell you, until you've lived something like a fire, you just won't believe it. I've told this story to many people, and I also want to say, as I close here, that the fire departments have been amazing to talk to. In comments I've made and interviews I've done—I've done some TV interviews as well, promoting smoke alarms, smoke detectors, emergency preparedness. It's really—

Interjection: Sprinklers.

1430

Mr. Garfield Dunlop:—sprinklers, the carbon monoxide bill—these are all very important pieces of legislation.

They're not down here lobbying for the good of their health; these are things that will help save lives. That's why, when we tell our stories and we allow people to come for their opportunities to lobby here, we should be listening to these types of people in particular, because it does save lives.

Thank you for the opportunity, and let's hope we can get this bill passed, okay?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today as our party's critic for community safety.

Before I begin, I'd like to give a quick shout-out to the first responders in Windsor and Essex county, who do such a great job for our community, keeping us safe. Often, as I'm driving around Essex county, I'll pop into a fire hall. The folks there are so gracious with me as I check out their new rigging and jump on the truck and play with all those cool tools that they have.

They really do provide an essential service, of course. We know they are quite literally lifesavers in our community. It goes without saying that the service that they provide is invaluable. We ask them, each and every day, to put the public's health and safety above their own. We

ask them to put their lives and their bodies on the line, risking personal injury and sometimes death.

We also ask them to bear witness, day in and day out, to personal strife and to tragedy that many of us here in this House could never imagine. That certainly makes them unique in our communities, unique in our province, in the role that they play. But it also makes them vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder, something that we know is more common, and more commonly identified as well, and something that today you've heard my colleague from Parkdale–High Park announce as a third attempt to initiate that type of coverage as presumptive legislation under the WSIB.

We hold our first responders to a higher standard, and we ask them to perform at their peak in the highest-of-stress situations. So this day certainly will serve as a reminder for us to pay tribute to the work and the service that they do, but there is much more work that needs to be done. My colleague Paul Miller has initiated several attempts to ensure that there are sprinklers in long-term-care and retirement homes. That's an issue supported by firefighters. We also know that paramedics suffer some of the highest incidences of workplace violence. It is certainly an issue that needs to be addressed.

Also, as we honour you on any given day but certainly on May 1, let us remember that you are essential services, and you are prohibited, under certain parameters, from removing your labour. Let us ensure that you are compensated under those parameters and not taken advantage of because we ask you to perform those services whether you can or cannot. It is the pledge that I give you, as a New Democrat, as the critic for corrections and community safety, that I value the work that you do and that we should not only honour you each and every day but ensure that you have fairness in your workplaces; health and safety legislation that continues to keep you safe; and the tools and resources to help all of us in this province remain safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 123, An Act to proclaim First Responders Day.

Before I speak to the bill, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and salute all of the first responders who are here in the Legislature. We are honoured to have you here, and thank you so much for taking the time to come to our Legislature.

Coming to the bill itself, its goal is very laudable and straightforward: to proclaim May 1 of each year as First Responders Day. This includes police officers, firefighters, military personnel, paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, nurses, doctors and emergency medical technicians.

My colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East already alluded to this, but I'd like to add my voice as well, to say that perhaps we should consider including correctional officers and sergeants. Also, I seek clarification as to whether the 911 operators are already captured under "dispatchers."

Earlier, a member was speaking about his personal experience with a fire emergency. I agree with him that unless you yourself experience an emergency, you don't really ever appreciate to the fullest extent the services that these great folks provide us.

Personally, I do remember one night a couple of years ago: It was around 11:00 at night, and I was ready to turn into bed when the alarms in my house started to go off. I was very nervous. I thought there was an intruder somewhere in my backyard and I was calling 911 desperately. I can tell you, my heart was pounding. I can still remember that. As I speak about it, my heart is pounding, because it was definitely a very, very scary time for me, and I can almost feel the relief I felt when those boots came up to the door and said, "Are you okay, ma'am?" Thank you so much to the good folks at Peel police for that personal service that I still remember.

I want to take a moment to just put this into perspective, because there's very, very few of us who can ever claim that we helped save a life, but right here are these men and women who can claim saving not one life but several lives, and how do you put a price on that? How do we as a society ever begin to thank them? Thank you so much. Words are inadequate. Something like this is overdue.

Lastly, I'd also like to take a moment to recognize first responders of a different kind: ordinary men and women who sometimes, in an emergency, without any training, throw caution to the wind and jump in to help a neighbour or a stranger in danger.

Again, I reiterate my support for this overdue formal recognition for the men and women who, every single day, put their lives on the line so that the rest of us are safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to speak today in support of Bill 123, An Act to proclaim First Responders Day, tabled by my colleague the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

First responders risk their lives in order to protect our lives. Establishing May 1 as First Responders Day would give us the opportunity to reflect on the vital role of our first responders. Whether it is a police officer, a paramedic, a nurse, a member of our armed forces, a firefighter or many of the other professionals who serve us, we need to acknowledge the contributions they make to keep us safe.

I think of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. As thousands ran from the towers, the first responders were running in. Bill 123 is not only important on a province-wide level, but it is also important to me on a personal level. My son and my daughter-in-law are proud members of the Guelph Police Service. Another one of my sons is a volunteer firefighter for the North Perth Fire Service. I know how they have dedicated themselves to public service and I know about the risks they take to protect the people of their communities.

This summer, one of my granddaughters fell and broke her arm. It was a serious break, and she needed to

be taken from the hospital in Owen Sound to London. An air ambulance was called and she was flown to London for emergency surgery. My wife, Jane, accompanied our granddaughter on that flight, and she couldn't say enough positive things about the professionalism of the paramedics. The air ambulance team reassured my granddaughter and took care of all of her needs.

Bill 123 also gives me pause to think about two firefighters from North Perth who made the ultimate sacrifice. On March 17 of last year, North Perth volunteer firefighters Ray Walter and Ken Rea died as they battled a fire in a retail store in Listowel. Here's what one eyewitness, Kelly Irwin, had to say: "You could see flames all along the west side and flames were shooting out of the roof. I heard a series of pops, like small explosions. I saw about five firefighters go in the front of the building and I didn't see any come out."

My son was working as a dispatcher the day of the deadly fire. He told me that when word got out that the two firefighters were missing, he was inundated with phone calls from local families. They were all anxious to know if their loved one was accounted for. Firefighters Walter and Rea made the ultimate sacrifice. If passed, Bill 123 would help us remember them.

The member for Newmarket–Aurora shared with me a copy of the book entitled 911: True Tales of Courage and Compassion. The book was written by one of his constituents, Vali Stone, and it provided the inspiration for his private member's bill. I am pleased that Ms. Stone can be with us in the gallery today and I welcome her to Queen's Park.

1440

I would like to end my remarks by quoting from the foreword to Ms. Stone's book: "911 emergency responders put themselves forward first to serve humanity and to help those who are in need, without any special treatment or expectations. They are here to make our lives better with their actions. They set the greatest example and they are our true heroes. May they always be protected and blessed."

Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, I'd like to commend the member from Newmarket–Aurora for his initiative. It's a wonderful thing he's doing.

I can speak from experience myself, Speaker, over the years. When I was a councillor in Stoney Creek, which went from a town to a city, once a year I would go out on the fire truck and spend 12 hours with the fire department. They even dressed me up. I even got to help with a little fire, a bin that was on fire. They turned the hose up a little bit; I almost got blown off the hose, but I got the fire out.

I ate with them. I spent a whole shift with them. I learned what they do. The expertise, the time restraints—they were not happy if they couldn't respond within four or five minutes to a fire in any part of our city. Can you imagine getting on the truck, getting out there, getting set

up, and all within five or six minutes? It's absolutely astonishing.

I also worked in heavy industry, in Stelco. We had our own fire department in the plant. It was so big, it was a city within a city. At Stelco, we had a small fire department. If we got into trouble, if one of our blast furnaces, our open-hearth furnaces or our by-products caught on fire and it didn't get attended to, it would take out half the city, no problem.

Our firefighters from the Hamilton fire department would be in there. They would evacuate all of us. Our firefighters would assist them. They would take control of the situation. Many, many times—many fires at the blast furnace, the open-hearth furnaces, all over the place that we had fires in that huge industrial complex—those firefighters were risking their lives, and I mean literally risking their lives, because at any time explosions could have taken out a city block, no problem. They were right there fighting it. I can't even relate to the bravery that would be needed to do something like that. They all have families at home, too, and they are risking their lives for us and the city; absolutely fantastic.

Let us not forget—I remember at times reading the paper over the years where you'd see that a police officer helped deliver a baby, or paramedics helped deliver a child en route. What would have happened if they didn't get attended to at that particular time? Talk about multi-tasking: They're delivering babies. I mean, these people are absolutely wonderful.

Sometimes you think, "Well, they work 12-hour shifts." That's a long shift. If you work 12-hour shifts, you have to be on top of things. They exercise; they try to keep themselves in shape. They have an exercise room. They are on top of their game at all times, and without them, I certainly wouldn't feel safe.

I can't thank them enough for what they do and what they will continue to do. I can't thank them enough for what their values are, what they stand for. As the member from Newmarket–Aurora said, they chose this profession knowing the risks, and they put their lives on the line on many occasions.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for what you do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in this House and to lend my voice to the member from Newmarket–Aurora, my good friend and my former MPP. Before 2007, when I got elected to this House, Mr. Frank Klees represented me at this wonderful House.

The bill is to proclaim May 1 in each year as First Responders Day. First responders are the men and women volunteers and professionals who act as the first line of contact for most Ontarians in a state of emergency. They are responsible for the protection and preservation of life and our properties, from our homes to our vehicles to our workplaces and schools. They are the men and women who play the critical role in keeping our communities safe.

These men and women who have dedicated their lives, time and skills to public service to make sure that our

children and our families live in a safe society deserve to be recognized. First responders play a critical role in ensuring that the safety and security of our society is maintained. I strongly support my honourable colleague's effort in introducing this bill to the Legislative Assembly.

As a fellow member from York region, I also had the privilege of introducing a motion to this Legislature in the last Parliament which celebrates and recognizes the important and vital work that doctors do on behalf of Ontarians every day. The motion proclaimed May 1 as Doctors' Day in Ontario. I, alongside all of my honourable colleagues, recognized the invaluable role doctors play in our daily lives, and thus unanimously voted in favour of the motion. This bill before us today will certainly complement Doctors' Day in Ontario, build up on the importance of the day and continue to raise awareness of the important work and contributions which first responders make every day to Ontario.

I have had the privilege of meeting many first responders during my term as MPP for Richmond Hill, and I have seen first-hand the important and critical role each and every one of these brave men and women play in ensuring the utmost safety of all Ontarians is maintained.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support the honourable member's private member's bill and hope all members of this House will do the same.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is also my pleasure to support this bill from the member from Newmarket–Aurora. I want to thank all of the first responders who came here to listen to the debate today. It means a lot when people take the time to support what's going on in their Legislative Assembly, and I thank you for that.

I want to gloat a little bit before I go on, because my partners didn't leave me that many minutes on the clock. The Sudbury firefighters, and as well as the Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association, Local 527, have decided to paint the main pumper at the main station in Sudbury hot pink with big pink ribbons for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which is the month of October. I was invited to see the truck. When you see a hot pink truck coming down the road, Mr. Speaker, every time there's a red light, people take out their cellphone and take pictures. Whenever they're stopped, they line up to take pictures of this thing. What a great idea, because right on the door is the phone number; the messages that breast cancer can be prevented, can be treated better, are all over the truck. All of the firefighters, for the month of October, wear a pink shirt. So I wanted to put that out there. I think they are the first to have done this, and it's really something that shows that not only do they help people in the day-to-day job that they do, but they also reach out to our community to try to help cast a broader net of helping people. I wanted to throw that in.

Last weekend, here again Local 527 of the Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association had an exercise where they invited city officials, MPPs, MPs and lots of our municipal councillors. They brought us out to one of

their exercise stations, where they trained us—I think I'm beyond training, but the rest of them did pretty good. We went through auto extrication and lift up the jaws of life and all of this. They also showed us how to do forcible entry, which doesn't use a whole lot of—I thought brutal force got you through forcible entry. Not all, Mr. Speaker. It's all technique. It doesn't matter; the biggest steel door can be opened, if you know how. And there was a simulation of a kitchen fire, which is quite an impressive sight to see. The member, Mr. Dunlop, was sharing about when he had a fire in his house. I'd say this is as close to having a fire in your house.

1450

So I want to thank the police officers, the firefighters, the military personnel, the paramedics, the medical evacuation pilots, everybody who works at Ornge—I know you've had it tough; it will get better—the dispatchers, the nurses, the physicians, the technicians in our hospitals. Everybody, thank you for the work you do. We appreciate you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I, too, am very pleased to rise in support of Bill 123, which we have all heard will proclaim May 1 in each year as First Responders Day.

First responders are vital to keeping our community safe from life-threatening dangers, and they do risk their lives every day to protect us in our communities. So in return, we must do our best to protect them.

I just want to mention some of the measures that our government has taken for that. Recognizing the very important work of firefighters, it is now easier for full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters, as well as investigators who suffer fire-related illnesses, to qualify for workplace insurance benefits. These regulations now presume that eight types of cancer, as well as certain heart-related injuries that are suffered by firefighters, are work-related, unless proven otherwise.

Our government also passed legislation to allow mandatory retirement at age 60 for the province's salaried firefighters, and these changes standardize the retirement age for firefighters across the province.

I also want to mention, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour, that since February 1989 the Ontario fire service health and safety advisory committee has been advising and making recommendations to the Ministry of Labour on matters related to the occupational health and safety of Ontario firefighters. To date, the committee has developed 72 guidance notes relating to firefighter health and safety issues. So I want to thank all the first responders, police officers, dispatchers, everyone for the work they do every day.

Many of the other members mentioned personal stories. As the MPP for York South–Weston, I witnessed a tragedy in our riding. A family of four was destroyed by a fire. The mother had gone to do grocery shopping; the father was home with two girls. He left a pot on the stove, went outside to greet a friend and then realized that a fire had erupted. He went back into the home, saved the

baby, then went back in to save his other daughter—and they both perished.

The community got together and had a fundraiser for the mother, now a widow, and the little baby, and it was really nice to see that all the firefighters, the police officers and the doctors at the hospital all participated. The community came together in a tragedy.

Thank you for what you do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: With the few seconds that we have remaining to discuss this, I wanted to do two things: thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for bringing forward this private member's bill, and thank you for including volunteers, whether they're firefighters, paramedics or St. John Ambulance.

You know, there is a difference when someone makes a choice in their community to protect their community through a volunteer role, and I know many of the members here rely very heavily on those volunteers. So I'm very pleased that that is included in this special day, and I just want to thank you for bringing this forward. It's a pretty important motion for all of us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I'm going to do something different with my two minutes. I want to thank all of my colleagues who spoke in support of this bill. I would ask all of the first responders in the House today to please stand, if you would. I'm going to ask my colleagues to join me in an ovation to thank you for what you do.

Applause.

Mr. Frank Klees: And I'd like to ask Vali Stone if she would stand. I thank you for your initiative of this book and for giving us a tremendous insight into the work of first responders. Thank you.

Now, Speaker, I will leave it to this House to determine what the next steps are. I would like the bill referred to the committee on general government.

Interjection.

Mr. Frank Klees: My preference would be that we skip the vote and just go directly to committee. Of course we can't do that, but you can always try.

I've enjoyed very much the process of, first of all, contemplating what our first responders do. Then, I again want to thank everyone for coming because your encouragement—I know everyone is busy, and so the fact that you've taken the time to be here today to express your support, and through you your colleagues' support, is sincerely appreciated.

God bless you in what you do, and we look forward to celebrating you in a very special way on May 1 every year, starting this coming May 1. God bless you.

Applause.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I hate to interrupt. I want to invite everyone to room 228 for a reception with our first responders. Members, I know we have some more debate, but if you have some time, please join us. All of our guests are welcome to room 228 for some time together. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member made a request for a vote right away, but unfortunately it will mess up my notes. I can't do it that way. We will take the vote at the end of regular business.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in his office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / 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.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, it has been a tradition in this House to acknowledge our pages, and I don't know if there was an oversight today, but they didn't get thanked. We usually give them a standing ovation, and I would like to ask the members to join me in giving the pages a standing ovation.

Applause.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I thank the member for reminding us. Thank you to all the pages for a great job in the last couple of weeks.

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

Mr. Leal moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 120, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings / Projet de loi 120, Loi visant à protéger les régimes enregistrés d'épargne en vue de la retraite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise today in the House to speak in support of my private member's Bill 120, entitled An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings, 2012. As you may be aware, the purpose of this bill is to protect registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds, as well as deferred profit sharing plans, from most creditors. These plans, however—and I stress—will be subject to support orders under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996, and orders respecting the separation of property in family members.

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I want to thank Mr. Mark Gaskell, a constituent resident of mine in Peterborough riding, for having the initial foresight to raise this issue with me. Mr. Gaskell very succinctly expressed his desire for the Ontario Legislature to protect from creditors what retirement savings the people of Ontario manage to accumulate in various forms of registered retirement savings plans, as have the provinces of Saskatchewan in 2003; Newfoundland and Labrador in 2006; Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba in 2007; and Alberta in 2000. After a thorough investigation in this regard, I heartily agree with Mr. Gaskell's observation.

I'd like to take a moment to applaud the efforts of Minister Bartolucci for having brought forward a similar piece of private member's legislation in June 2003, entitled An Act exempting registered retirement plans from certain enforcement processes.

At the request of Mr. Frank Zinatelli, the vice-president and general counsel of the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association Inc., subsection 4(2), that Bill 120 does not apply with respect to payments out of registered plans to which the Insurance Act applies, has been incorporated.

I'd also note that RRSPs cannot be used as collateral in borrowing transactions.

In 2004, in the case of Amherst Crane Rentals versus Perring, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled that RRSPs should not be subject to seizure by creditors if a beneficiary has been named. The court's analysis was based on deciphering the legislative intent of the Succession Law Reform Act, section 53.

All governments in Canada encourage early and regular participation in retirement savings and ask that Canadians rely not only upon government to provide retirement income sufficient to maintain a reasonable and healthy lifestyle as we go.

To facilitate and provide investment incentives, Canadians are provided with tax deferrals on income amounts invested in retirement savings. Saving for retirement through various instrument vehicles, such as retirement savings plans—RSPs; deferred profit-sharing plans—DPSPs; or registered retirement income funds—RRIFs—is a wise and widely encouraged practice.

As Mr. Gaskell notes, in Ontario today, the vast majority of working people are self-employed or em-

ployed by small businesses. In fact, there are more than 340,000 small- and medium-sized enterprises across Ontario, which make up more than 99% of the province's businesses and account for more than 50% of all jobs. Many of these folks are not in a position to receive self-directed retirement vehicles to augment their pension plans as offered through the public or some private sector employment. As such, a considerable number of citizens must rely upon their personal investments, such as RRSPs, to sustain themselves through retirement years.

While all governments in Canada rightfully encourage these sorts of investments, current law in Ontario does not exempt DPSPs, RRIFs or RSPs from credit seizure. As such, the law in regard to credit seizure is inconsistent and therefore unfair in its treatment of registered retirement holders.

As previously stated, other provinces in Canada have already passed similar legislation with regard to this. In November 2007, the government of Manitoba, under the stewardship of Premier Greg Selinger, the then-finance minister, passed into law the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act. As Premier Selinger noted, "The Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act is designed to protect from creditors retirement savings held in deferred profit-sharing plans, registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds.... We want Manitobans to have retirement savings available in their senior years and so we have moved to protect these funds."

Likewise in 2005 the government of Canada, through amendments to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act under Bill C-55, initiated similar legislation. The act, subject to certain conditions and exemptions, exempts registered plans from being vested in a trustee as property available to satisfy the claims of bankrupt creditors. This bill has indeed received royal assent and has been proclaimed into law.

I can certainly understand why skeptics may be concerned that this legislation could possibly be used as a safe haven for debtors who wish to avoid or defraud their related creditors. However, this is certainly not the intent. As stated in the preamble, the legislation explicitly exempts orders made under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, meaning that parents who are defaulting on child support can still be pursued, as can separated spouses.

Also, with retirement pension plans, the credit protection provided in a new law would not apply to the enforcement of maintenance orders or orders from a division of family property. Similarly, the federal act protects against debit abuse by capping the amount of the exemption by making contributions within 12 months of a bankruptcy available to creditors by requiring that the exempted amount be locked in until rolled over into a retirement income fund annuity or similar product.

In this economic climate of uncertainty and the fluctuation of world markets, I believe that the spirit of this bill is not only fair, but timely. Ontario's manufacturing sector has been facing many challenges, cur-

rency appreciation being just one of them. The main goal of this legislation is to reinforce our government's commitment—all of our commitment—not only to protect those retirees whose plans have been left unprotected, but also to the entrepreneurial success of Ontario's small business community.

As a former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation and chair of the Small Business Agency of Ontario, I understand the fundamental challenges and concerns facing Ontario's small businesses, let alone the courage it takes to stand up and operate a successful small business. From streamlining regulations to reducing paper burden, perhaps we can further assist small business people in Ontario.

As stated in the 2008 British Columbia Chamber of Commerce report entitled *Advocacy and Policy: Retirement Savings Protection*, "It is imperative that ... business people who provide so much of our province's employment and their employees enjoy the same level of protection as ... those covered by the current list of exempted investments. Other provinces in Canada have recognized the inequity in retirement protection and ... enacted provincial exemption statutes to fully protect self-directed ... savings" plans.

Ontario has garnered an award for being the most competitive province in a competitive nation from Site Selection, an American-based magazine located in Georgia, according to a provincial news release. This is the third consecutive year the province has claimed this particular award. Ontario received this prestigious award based on a globally competitive tax system, a streamlined business environment and investments in education, health care, electricity and infrastructure.

I also note that the RBC Economics Research Provincial Outlook for the month of September indicated that Ontario is holding its own with a modest acceleration of growth at 2.2%. The RBC report noted that the housing sector is doing extremely well and the auto sector is back on track with the assembly of light vehicles surging by more than 19%.

In British Columbia and Manitoba, the business community has recognized the value of protecting RRSPs from creditors. Likewise, the Manitoba chair of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, on November 29, 2006, to Mr. Jon Gerrard, the leader of the Liberal Party of Manitoba, expresses their desire to see passage of the government's retirement protection proposal: "On behalf of the ... CFIB" in Manitoba "and ... 4,800 Manitoba members, I am writing in reference to the introduction of Bill 6, the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act.... The CFIB urges your party to support Bill 6 and ensure its passage as soon as possible. Removing this disincentive to" invest "in RRSPs by small business owners" and individuals "will ensure a fair and equitable solution to an issue they have faced ... far too long."

The United States, both at the federal level and the state level, have passed legislation to protect 401(k) plans for bankruptcy—401(k) plans are the equivalent of

RRSPs in the province of Ontario and Canada. The Employment Retirement Income Security Act protects retirement income held in most 401(k)s that are defined benefits.

As the American financial advisor company Charleston Financial Advisors LLC states: “ERISA contains an ‘anti-assignment’ rule that provides broad protection from creditors’ claims. This anti-assignment rule applies whether you’ve declared bankruptcy or not—no bankruptcy or judgment creditor can reach your 401(k) plan account, if the plan is governed by ERISA.”

This type of initiative certainly has not been overlooked by our counterparts in Washington. In 2006, the United States government signed into law the Pension Protection Act ensuring greater retirement security for American workers. In part, this pension protection initiative contains provisions for workers who have saved for retirement through defined contribution plans, much as we’ve been hearing in America during this presidential cycle. The 401(k)s are very similar to our registered retirement plans here in Ontario and, indeed, Canada.

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California, Illinois, Michigan, New York and Ohio are examples of states who provide this kind of protection. The Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act, a piece of United States federal legislation effective for bankruptcies, filed on October 17, 2005, gives protection to a debtor’s individual retirement account—IRA funds—in bankruptcy, by the way of exempting them from bankruptcy estate.

I believe that these challenging economic times call for a steady hand and wise economic decisions, no matter the size or the complexity. Each on our own, we can rise to the challenge of the global economy and move forward in a prudent and financially responsible way. As such, this is a simple idea that has the potential to protect Ontarians, both in terms of social security as we age and in terms of the present economic development situation.

As Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson stated in his last speech to Canadians in April 1968: “A wise man once observed that failures are only made by those who fail to dare, not by those who dare to fail.” Today, let all members of this Legislature be daring and pass Bill 120.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I’m pleased to be able to join in the debate on Bill 120, introduced by the member for Peterborough. A version of this bill was first introduced in 2008. It passed through the committee with amendments but was taken no further, even though it sat on the order paper for about three years. I understand that the current bill resembles the amended bill from the last Legislature. It would be interesting to hear from the ministers why the government did not move the previous bill forward after allowing it to pass through committee in 2010.

My colleague, I’m certain, has introduced a bill with a noble purpose, one that our party did not oppose in 2008, and one I would support taking to committee again for

discussion. We all support helping people in Ontario save for retirement and ensure that their savings are secure, yet some of the financial stakeholders I have recently consulted are concerned about the effectiveness of the bill. I would like to just go over a couple of the questions that were raised to me.

One question was: Should the individual who puts money in his RRSP be better off with creditors than a small business person who kept all his money available to build the business? We certainly hear of those people over and over again: people who recognize the value of continually plowing money back into their business. The question, is, I think, a fair one: Would the person who has the RRSP, in fact, be better off?

Would this bill be an incentive for a person who is going bankrupt to load up his RRSP contributions, to the detriment of creditors? The bill is attempting to make RRSPs judgment-proof by saying that a creditor can’t get money out of them, but the creditor can get at the money as it is drawn out for retirement. In fact, that’s the law. Does this mean we are hoping creditors will just go away or die if they have to wait for years until the person is old and has to start drawing the funds out?

RRSP funds have to start to be withdrawn at a certain age, which I think now is about 72. My contact has suggested that a creditor can get an order attached to an RRSP so that the order will be enforced when the money is withdrawn. Such an order would have to be renewed periodically to keep it alive, and it’s apparently not too expensive to continue the order. Will this bill achieve nothing more than just a deferral in enforcement? I think Bill 120 raises a lot of questions that we need answers to. What range of retirement savings can and should be protected from creditors? Many people use the equity built up in their home to fund their retirement, by moving to a less expensive home or community. I doubt we would ever consider protecting this equity from creditors. Are savings in an RRSP more like this equity or more like pension plans? There are no easy answers to these questions, but I think we need to ask them, and we need to have experts to look for advice.

I look forward to sending this bill to committee for a full and frank discussion. We need to hear the views of the public to ensure that we are fair to everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every Thursday that this House has been in session for the last 11 years that I have had the opportunity to stand here, I have watched good bills come and go. This is another example of a very good bill that ought to be law.

I want to preface my remarks on the bill itself with a plea to the Liberal members over there, particularly to the whip of the Liberal Party, who is the person putting this forward. Please do not let such a bill as this one or the one we debated before or the one we’re going to debate after today simply die—because most private members’ bills, in spite of what people say in this House, end up

nowhere. Most of them are approved here. Most of them go to committee, where they are never the subject of people coming to speak to them, they are never the subject of a committee report, and even those bills that are lucky enough to go through the committee stage and are referred back for third reading never get called by the government. So every time I have an opportunity to raise this issue, I try to raise it.

If we are truly serious about these bills, if we truly think that the member from Peterborough has a good idea and that we want to change how RRSPs and other things are protected in law from creditors so that people can retire in dignity with the money they have saved and put forward for that purpose, then we have to be prepared to do more than simply argue them in this Legislature. We have to be prepared, as legislators, to work together and to make sure that the caucuses—not just the House leaders and not just the Premier and not just the leaders—have the final say in what happens to these bills. We have dozens of good ideas each and every Parliament, dozens of ideas that die on the order paper and have to be reintroduced again and again.

Now, I do remember—and I apologize if this has been up here more than once before, but I do remember Mr. Leal standing in his place and arguing this same bill in the last Parliament. I remember everybody saying it was a good idea, and I remember it going back to oblivion. I don't want to see this happen again. And I will speak whenever I get a chance on any other bill that I think is worthy of going beyond this stage, to implore the people who are here to make sure this does not happen. Rise up in caucus if you have to rise up. Tell the House leaders, when that time comes and they're negotiating what bills need to go forward, that we don't want one from each party as a maximum, maybe to be discussed. We want all the good bills to come forward. We want them to see the light of day. It's not just a government bill that needs to be debated, and it's not just a government bill that holds some merit, because, in my view, some of them don't hold any merit at all. But I will say that for those private members' bills that we all agree upon in this place, we ought to do something about them.

It would be a total shame if Mr. Klees's bill—the member from Aurora, who spoke, and we gave standing ovations for that today—simply died. That would be a shame, and the first responders who were here would think very little of us if that's all that happened today. The same is true with Mr. Leal's bill, the member from Peterborough. The same will be true of the bill by my colleague from Hamilton Mountain. I think it's a good bill, too, and I hope that something happens with it.

So that's the preface to my remarks.

I'm only going to spend a minute or two on the actual bill itself, because I think Mr. Leal covered it quite well. I will be here when it comes to a vote, and I want something to be done with this, because the people of this province who put their money aside for retirement should not have it taken away if they find themselves in some kind of financial difficulty. Because what is going to

happen with them is they are going to live out their retirement years in penury and misery, even though they've done everything in their power, should some calamity befall them, whether it be a car accident, whether it's being sued, whether it's any number of things. They cannot live their life in poverty if they have tried their very best to put that money aside.

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Just in terms of the bill itself, there is a loophole in the current law, as Mr. Leal has pointed out: RRSPs are vulnerable to credit seizure. We have to close that loophole. As the proponent here has said, this is happening in many places across this country already. It's happening in the United States. People who know about this dilemma have tried to close the loophole. We have tried to close the loophole in Ontario before through the endeavours of the member from Peterborough, but it went nowhere.

But in this time, when all of us are talking about pensions, when pensions are one of the key defining issues that you see constantly in political thought, when Harry Arthurs gives his whole statement and gives us ideas of what should be done for pension reform, when we're talking about the Canada pension plan and whether it is sufficient, when we're talking about Ontario pensions, when we're talking about all people in this province having the opportunity to contribute to a pension and have one, then I think it's also time for us to do what is necessary here. I want us to protect RRSPs, registered retirement income funds, deferred profit-sharing plans and everything else. If Manitoba can do it, if the United States can do it, then we can do it here in Ontario, too.

The will has to extend beyond today. The will has to extend for the entire life of this Parliament, through all the processes: through the committee process, through third reading, through negotiations. We need to see this bill and so many others become law, because the best ideas of all are the ideas that individual members bring forward in this House and champion and want to see done for the benefit of all Ontarians.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It certainly is a pleasure to rise in this House and to see a more collegial atmosphere this afternoon than perhaps occurred a week or so ago.

I certainly am going to be supporting Bill 120, brought by our colleague from Peterborough. It does protect registered retirement savings plans, registered retirement income funds as well as deferred profit-sharing plans from creditors. I think it's a very well-balanced and well-thought-out bill because, of course, it does continue to ensure that, in the case of a separation of property in family matters, these will still be considered part of those settlements to support orders enforced under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996.

My colleagues on the other side of the House have made some, I think, very useful contributions in terms of,

first of all, perhaps having some more discussion at committee, and also the plea from the member for Beaches–East York to in fact consider our private members' bills that passed second reading here—that they should move forward. I certainly concur, and I'm sure many people on this side of the House, many of our members, would agree with that. Certainly, we will urge our House leaders to look at these again and ensure that they move forward.

The breadth of this bill is very interesting. I was interested to learn that there are some 400,000 small and medium businesses here in Ontario. I think this bill will provide some reassurance to those business owners that their investments in savings for their retirement will be protected.

We know that seniors are living in poverty in this province, an unfortunate number, and in some cases, this is because they have not had the desire or perhaps the opportunity to invest in the savings that are potentially there for them and which all governments, of course, encourage them to invest in.

In the research that I did, there were some interesting statistics in terms of bankruptcies in general in Canada. In fact, they are decreasing quite dramatically. There was a peak in 1997 of some 14,000 bankruptcies; in 2011, we were down to 3,600. So this is hopefully improved business planning on the part of entrepreneurs, perhaps more caution in terms of debt load. So there is some good news. There were in fact only some 1,276 bankruptcies in Ontario.

I think we all know that there are various types of creditors: unsecured creditors, secured creditors, preferred creditors. When a trustee in bankruptcy is appointed, they take into account what is considered the bankrupt's surplus income, and there's a very detailed list with dollar amounts attached, and the trustee decides what is required to maintain a reasonable standard of living. I think what's being argued here is that retirement savings should be part of that protected list, which is required to sustain a reasonable standard of living.

Other provinces have done this. The baby boomers are approaching retirement. More and more seniors need to be encouraged in every way to ensure that they do invest, that they are sustainable in terms of income through their retirement years. I think this is a very good bill which will further that goal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: I first want to thank the member from Peterborough for bringing this forward. I know he brought it back in 2008. It went through some process and never really got for a third reading, but I do commend him for that. I think he shows the type of person that I really think he is outside of all the ideology differences that we might have.

I think everyone here really would be supportive, it would be my sense, listening to the remarks today, of making sure that those people who take time to plan for their own retirement should be protected because they're not putting the money in the economy or into their

standard of living. They're assuring they'll have some sort of standard of living going into the future.

As remarks have been made by some of the other members, the small business person is the one I feel really has nobody but themselves, and self-reliance is a pretty Conservative premise. I support the bill for that reason as well but also for the real story about pensions themselves. This, I believe, is quite simple: It's to protect these from creditors and others. The member from our side Ms. Munro, from York–Simcoe, who's quite expert in this discussion, has written a paper on it, and I'm sure she has consulted with the Arthurs report as well.

But here's the real issue. The vast majority of people in Ontario don't have a pension, and that's the tragedy of it all. There has been a larger discussion. We should, with the aging population, provide for people to tie in, and some of the unions have been pushing this. The CPP plan should be amended so there could be a part 2—not a mandatory contribution but an optional contribution to a larger fund because the larger the fund, the more leverage it has in the marketplace for a better return on the investments.

Now I can tell you this, and the general public doesn't understand it: We provincial members do not have a defined benefit plan. We do have a pension. It's called a defined contribution plan, and that is quite a difference because all of the risk is off-loaded to the individual. The employer, be it the government—Premier McGuinty, in this case—gives us our contribution each year. It's sheltered in a plan. It's a registered pension plan.

Interjection: Thanks to Mike Harris.

Mr. John O'Toole: The government hasn't changed it in 10 years, so you can just stop the talking. It's very controversial.

Here's the issue. There are solutions to these things, but the plan itself, my plan—and I took the securities courses. I have some knowledge on the topic. I was a personnel manager for a large company at one time. Here's the deal: Most pensions are in mutual funds, and they're all basically in the ditch. They're all in the ditch by probably 15%. There isn't one plan in Ontario that's funded—not one. Okay? Despite what they tell you, they're not funded. Why? Because the market itself is down.

There are three fundamental assumptions actuarially in a pension. The number of people paying is important. One retired to 10 working, that was a typical model. In education today, it's one retired, and I think it's 2.5 working. There's not enough people contributing. Companies themselves are outsourcing and downsizing, and that's a problem—the number of people paying into it.

1530

Return on equity is the other assumption. It's about 6.5% to 7% over the longer term. Today, if you were to get 3%, you'd be overpaid on capital. You might get 1.5%, maybe up to 2.1% if you had \$500,000 or more to deposit into a plan. And life expectancy is a third assumption that's wrong. People are living past 90. I go to lots of 100th birthdays, and lots of 60ths and 65ths.

So there are three assumptions: life expectancy, return on equity and the number of people paying—the size and shape of the organization. All of the assumptions don't work today. There is no job that's going to last for 30 years today. So people need this protection, Mr. Leal; I'd agree with it in that context. I would also mention that your government has had two attempts at pension issues. Now, we all say the most expensive plan in Canada and in Ontario is the teachers' pension fund. They owe \$30 billion. And who is the employer? The employer is the taxpayer of Ontario. It isn't funded.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, it's \$30 billion on the operating side; I'm just saying it's over that—greater.

Now, we are all getting letters from AMAPCEO—the management people in the public sector—to not touch their pension. There is legislation before the government—I think it's passed already by Premier McGuinty and the Minister of Finance—to change that fund and pool it, a larger pool. But they don't want it done, and I think you should listen to employer groups.

I would say that OMERS and HOOPP and MPAC are all funds that are completely screwed up because of organizational changes—not the individuals; I'm not saying that. The plans themselves are amalgams of former plans. HOOPP is the hospital organizations. How do we deal with those groups that are succession groups within that?

It's an important bill, and I'd say, being that I'm almost 70—there are other people in the room older than me, but not too many—there comes to a point where I can't contribute and eventually I have to form an annuity. And what happens with an annuity when interest rates are low, which they are today—it's a very bad time to buy an annuity, because its future value is priced on today's cost of money. The worst time in the world to buy an annuity is when interest is low.

You should put your funds and give us more discretionary use. I think pensions generally should be top of mind for people. Make the rules to contribute simpler for people. Again, really what this does is protect them from seizure by creditors, and I think that's a laudable thing. I think I would put some time into working with the member from York-Simcoe, because she has done a lot of work on the pension side herself. I wonder why the government wouldn't take your bill and fast-track it into committee as a modest reform to pensions, sending a signal to the market that the basket of money you have is somehow protected.

Let's keep in mind that there are people who will see opportunities there, if they're looking to go into receivership or something. Say you were a small business person, and you saw the numbers going south. You'd be smart to hammer a couple of hundred thousand into a registered plan or a registered trust so it's protected, and then go bankrupt, and the people who have loaned you the money—my bank—lose the money, do you understand? There are ways to manipulate rules, and those who are manipulators will take advantage of that, I suspect.

My colleague the member from Oshawa and I both represent hard-working, middle-class people, and their income, whether it's deferred income in the form of a pension—that's a big discussion, because pensions are a source of reward for work. It's called deferred income. I think it's important to protect that sort of income as well. In fact, that's what is happening when those large, “too big to fail” companies—and the rules were changed by Rob Rae and Floyd Laughren. They changed the rules to deal with Algoma Steel, to take the money out of the surplus in the pension fund and use it to recapitalize the company so it would be competitive. What happened? All the large companies said, “We want that exemption from the ‘too big to fail’ rule.” Algoma, Inco, Dofasco, General Motors, Chrysler, Ford—none of them funded their pensions because of that rule change.

It was a mistake, and the moment government started tinkering with it, they assumed the liability for the deficits pensions are in. Almost every pension is in trouble, and this bill goes a little way to fix it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: This is where the member from Durham really needed 20 minutes. Regrettably, all you had was—what?—eight minutes. It was simply not enough. I really observed that.

I want to say that I support Bill 120 as well, as have all the members who have spoken. And I suspect that even the members who haven't spoken agree 100% with what you have said. I say to you, member from—

Ms. Soo Wong: Peterborough.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Peterborough—how could I have forgotten? A nice little town.

You made a strong case and you made a good case for why it should be in law. And what did you say? Well, you said six other provinces have done it and most of the states in America have done it, and then I think to myself as you argue that, why isn't Ontario doing it? The member from Peterborough introduced this in 2008. It was good then; it's good today.

I'm puzzled as to why your government hasn't done this in light of the fact that opposition members—the loyal opposition—are saying it's a good thing; we, the third party, say it's a good thing. And in spite of that support and in spite of the fact that six provinces have done it and most states have done it, your government still lags behind. I don't get it.

What I note, as well, in this debate is that it doesn't require your finance minister to put one single penny into this that I'm aware of—I could be wrong. If it is not a money issue, and the whole world has done it—and your Premier is saying no. I want to support you, Jeff, the member from Peterborough; tell me what I need to do to help. Because I know the member from Oak Ridges-Markham said, “We're all very supportive of trying to get bills into committee and get them passed”—she said that, but it's not happening. And I often have argued in this place that only once in the 1990s, when we were in government, did we pass 16 or 17 private members' bills.

It was an amazing feat, something that has not been repeated ever again by my colleagues on the right or you guys in the centre. And that to me makes no sense; it really doesn't.

If members are saying, "Yes, we should make it happen," then we can find a way to make it happen. We just have to do it. I am saying to you, member from Peterborough; Let's talk to the Premier, let's talk to the finance minister and say, "Where's the roadblock?" So that we can get this done—at least, once we set up committees, which is just a matter of a short period of time, I'm sure.

I think this is the kind of bill that—yes, there are other things that could be done, of course. Sixty-five per cent of the people, as the member from Durham said, don't have a pension whatsoever. Only 35% of people do, and most of them are civil servants. But yes, many in the private sector, where they have unions, God bless, have some form of a private defined benefit plan. But in some cases, it's not that great. But the majority of people have no pension whatsoever—and we're not just talking about small business people and high-income people that have an RRSP plan. The rest of the people that have no money have absolutely nothing except the CPP, to which they might have contributed, or the old age security and the supplement if they have no other money. We are income poor, and many are, in their senior years, very, very poor, so we have a lot of work to do.

This is a beginning that begins to protect some, but boy, do we need another plan. The New Democrats put into place—or at least as a proposal—the Ontario retirement plan, that protects the 65% of the people who have absolutely nothing. So let's move with this measure because at least it protects some people, and then move on to the next step where we can protect the majority of Ontarians who have absolutely nothing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm happy to speak to this bill. I want to make a couple of points.

First, we've heard a lot in the new economy—the conventional thinking about the new economy is that the new economy is going to be driven largely by small business. That's where the jobs are. So if that's where the jobs are, if that's where the economy is going to grow, if that's where our future is going to be over the next few years, then we have a special responsibility to all of the people who are employed in the world of small business.

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What is that special responsibility? Well, unlike those people who are employed in big business or big government, where they have well-established and secure pensions, all of those people in the world of small business—just as the small business owner is struggling to keep that business together and to build that business with three or four or five or six employees, so those employees themselves are struggling. They're struggling to make their weekly wage, their monthly wage, their yearly wage, but they also have a struggle or problem

with a longer-range plan, and that is planning their retirement.

If we're going to encourage small business, if we think that's where the jobs are in the future, we've also got to encourage employees not to be reluctant—not to be afraid—to work in the world of small business. We've got to make it attractive to them so that they're not always attracted to being employed in big companies and big government.

How can we help small business? How can we help those employees who want to work in small business, who have got a real job and can make a real contribution? What can we do? One of the things we can do is to help them plan for a secure retirement, and one of the ways that we do that, to help them plan for their secure retirement in the absence of a pension plan, is to help them to protect their retirement savings. That's what this bill is all about.

With a big pension plan, if a beneficiary runs into some problems—he's got to pay his debts and so on; maybe he goes bankrupt—he doesn't lose that pension plan. That sum of money in the pension plan is still managed by the big plan.

In the small business, the way the system works now, those savings that have been set aside in an RRSP or other retirement vehicles can be seized by creditors. That's not helpful to anybody, because the employee who has then lost his retirement plan is really getting hit twice. He's been hit sort of in midlife, at age 45 or 50, because he or she has had some difficult economic circumstances and has had to go into bankruptcy or lose other assets. But they're getting penalized a second time, further down the road, when they hit the age of 65 or 70 or whenever they choose to retire. They get penalized again 10 or 15 years down the road because they don't have that pension money that they had set aside years and years ago, years and years previously to that.

Why would we want to penalize those people twice? It's a question of fairness and equality, and it's also a question of helping small business attract the kinds of employees that would help small business to grow, to grow this economy, and to protect those small pensions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be able to add my voice to this bill, Bill 120. I want to thank the member from Peterborough for his persistence in ensuring this piece of legislation came forward, because as a rookie member of the House, this is news to me. I'm too young to understand, but I appreciate what the bill is intending to do.

I want to go back to the explanatory note from this particular bill, and I'm going to quote from the bill: "The purpose of the bill is to protect registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds, as well as deferred profit sharing plans, from most creditors."

That, I think, is the really important piece. On one hand, all governments across Canada are encouraging all

of us to participate, and participate early, in terms of your retirement and retirement savings. Finally we've got a piece of legislation that talks about that.

Let me remind the House: This afternoon, I believe, the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation stood here in the House, recognizing the month of October as Small Business Month, Mr. Speaker. This proposed legislation will help the vast majority of individuals who are self-employed or in small businesses.

In fact, there are more than 300,000 small and medium-sized businesses across Ontario, making up about 99% of the province's businesses and accounting for over 50% of the jobs created here in Ontario.

The proposed legislation also assures small businesses that if they do declare bankruptcy, their small retirement savings will not be part of the creditors' seizure. This piece of legislation is the right thing to do.

The other thing is, my colleague from Peterborough also mentioned about other provinces having similar legislation. Sometimes we look at other provinces that are ahead of us in certain legislation. Not all other provinces' legislation is good for Ontario, but in this case, the proposed legislation I think is the right thing to do to support and ensure that Ontarians growing old will not be living in poverty. If you already have saved money, and you wish those savings to continue, you don't want to be under the creditor.

However, this particular legislation also suggests the fact that there are exemptions from enforcement. It's clearly listed in the legislation. It talks about all rights and properties and interests of the plan holder in a registered plan being exempted from any enforcement. But there are exceptions clearly outlined in the legislation, in such a way that if it needs to deal with the Family Law Act in terms of dealing with the director of the Family Responsibility Office—so it will have some exemptions to deal with certain situations.

I want to commend the member from Peterborough for being persistent about this kind of legislation. We are helping consumers, and especially those who are already in their time and years, and you want to support them so that they will not be living in poverty in older years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member from Peterborough, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the colleagues who spoke in support of Bill 120 this afternoon: the member from Scarborough—Agincourt, the member from Willowdale, the member from Oak Ridges—Markham, the member from York—Simcoe, the member from Beaches—East York, the member from Durham and the member from Trinity—Spadina.

Hope springs eternal. Certainly, we're hoping Bill 120 will get to committee. I think the member from York—Simcoe raised some very legitimate questions. If Bill 120 gets to committee—and I hope it will; it sounds like we have support on all sides of the House this afternoon to make that happen—then we would have the opportunity

to call in those experts and to have the opportunity to discuss the contents of Bill 120.

You're right; the member from Beaches—East York was the Chair of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills. This bill—in its previous form, Bill 96—went to that committee. A number of experts came in, and they provided a presentation. We actually amended that version of the bill, Bill 96, back then. It was recommended to the House for third reading, but in the big scheme of things, it didn't happen this particular time.

I'm confident that Bill 120 will go to committee for an opportunity for it to be reviewed in committee, and then, hopefully, be brought back to the House as a private member's bill or, indeed, perhaps part of government legislation.

I think one of the biggest topics we have in Ontario today and throughout Canada is the discussion about pensions and providing income in our retirement years. Bill 120, as I indicated in my remarks, is modeled after similar legislation in other provinces across Canada—and, indeed, the United States. It is a fairly simple concept that would have great ramifications, I think, for many people in the province of Ontario.

We all remind ourselves that 65% of Ontarians don't have a defined benefit pension plan and are depending on other financial instruments to secure retirement.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll deal with the vote at the end of regular business.
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OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT ACT
(CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'OMBUDSMAN
(SOCIÉTÉS D'AIDE À L'ENFANCE)

Miss Taylor moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 110, An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to children's aid societies / Projet de loi 110, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman en ce qui a trait aux sociétés d'aide à l'enfance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation. Miss Taylor.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause.

Miss Monique Taylor: That is a good sign.

It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to start second reading debate of this act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to children's aid societies, my first private member's bill.

When I was first elected last October, I knew this was an issue I wanted to bring forward, an issue that needed to be brought forward. Ontario's 47 children's aid societies perform a critical role in our province. Through the Child and Family Services Act, they are charged with

the responsibility to ensure the well-being and safety of our children. Under that act, they must investigate allegations that children may be in need of protection. They must provide protection where necessary, and they must provide guidance, counselling and other services. They must provide care. They work with exceptionally vulnerable children and families.

To fulfill their mandate, children's aid societies are given extraordinary powers: powers to remove children from the family home, put them in foster care or put them up for adoption. The consequences of an intervention by a children's aid society can be life-changing for the children and for their families.

There can be no doubt of the importance of the role played by those working in child welfare, and there can be no doubt about the critical nature of their work. It is an exceptionally difficult job, and there are many dedicated professionals working within the system. But, unfortunately, sometimes mistakes are made, and when they are, the consequences are devastating: devastating for the child and devastating for their family. And on top of the heartache and turmoil they are experiencing, they are faced with processes and procedures that they find impossible to navigate.

For years, I have heard stories from people who felt that they had nowhere to turn if they had a concern about their children's aid society. Since being elected, particularly in my role as the NDP critic for children and youth services, I have continued to hear many similar stories from all across Ontario. I would be surprised if there were members in this House who had not heard from constituents whose lives have been turned upside down by a children's aid society and who feel absolutely powerless to do anything about it. Some of these folks are here with us today in the gallery. They are here to listen to the debate in the hope that, finally, after years of speaking out, they will see some action.

The welfare of our children is one of the most important things our government can do, and often drastic steps have to be taken. There can be very few life events as emotionally disturbing as a child being removed from the family. It's devastating for the child and devastating for their family. Yes, sometimes it has to be done. Sometimes that drastic step has to be taken. Sometimes it's the only option to ensure protection for a child. But when it happens, it's absolutely critical that we get it right.

Our system and processes need to be above reproach. We must be sure we are doing everything right to be fair to the child and their family. We must ensure that we know the full story. Decisions must be absent of any bias, and we must make sure the child is placed appropriately and safely in a new home.

Given the importance and the consequences of any actions, it seems quite frankly unbelievable that we do not have a mechanism for fully independent oversight of the agencies charged with the most responsible work on behalf of the government. We must extend the Ombudsman's mandate so that he can perform independent, fair-minded, unbiased investigations into complaints.

The Ombudsman himself has repeatedly called for his mandate to be extended to include the children's aid society. Here's one of the quotes from him from February of last year: "I can't think of any area more ripe for oversight than child welfare. Children die and no one takes responsibility; no one answers the important questions. It's just so sad."

Undoubtedly, some will say there's already oversight of the children's aid society. They will cite the Family Court. They will cite the Auditor General, and they will undoubtedly cite the Child and Family Services Review Board. In the past, they have even mentioned the Office of the Chief Coroner and the paediatric death review committee. Let's look at these.

Obviously the chief coroner and the paediatric death review committee carry out an essential, vital, highly skilled function. But they come in after there has been a death—once the ultimate damage is done. They can most certainly help us understand what went wrong, but that is a small comfort to the family who have perhaps been crying out for months or even years.

The role of the Auditor General is to look at the money. Again, an important function, but the mandate doesn't extend to the type of issues that we're dealing with.

I think most people will appreciate that fighting things out in Family Court is not the most desirable avenue to resolve issues. It is an adversarial venue and it's very costly and it can take forever for a case to move through the system. We hear of court dates being cancelled at the very last minute. We hear of last-minute scheduling of courts. To say that the families are feeling outgunned by the children's aid society's lawyers is an understatement.

That leaves us with the Child and Family Services Review Board, a body that was set up supposedly to address some of the key issues families are dealing with. Unfortunately, many families feel, from their own dealings with the board, that their concerns were not addressed. Mr. Speaker, the success of our child welfare system is, to a large extent, dependent on the public's confidence in the system, and that confidence has been eroded for many. That is a problem that we need to correct, and it was hoped the establishment of the CFSRB would help in that regard.

But that's not what I'm hearing in respect to the CFSRB. The reality is that the CFSRB has too narrow of a scope to deal with many of the problems. They can't deal with anything that's before the court or anything that has already been decided by the courts. They may only look at procedural matters, and they can't investigate allegations into abuse or neglect. Any of those seeking or receiving children's aid society services can only register a complaint, meaning that the grandparents or any other concerned family members are excluded from this process.

As a measure of limited scope to the CFSRB, it is worth noting that they have only made 350 decisions in the past six years. Get your pencils out. Meanwhile, the Ombudsman, even though he has no authority to

investigate, received 429 complaints in 2008-09, 296 in 2009-10, 386 in 2010-11, and 491 in 2011-12. That's a total of over 1,600 complaints about the children's aid society in four years.

It's clear that whatever mechanisms are in place, there's a desperate need for the Ombudsman. By giving the Ombudsman the capacity to oversee the children's aid society, we will get the broad general authority and respect that comes with that office. We get skilled investigators and achieve an ability to receive analysis of the problems.

Those benefits have not gone unnoticed by other jurisdictions all across Canada. BC, Alberta, Yukon, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador have all recognized the wisdom of giving their Ombudsman the responsibility to oversee child protection services. Yes, it's true that Ontario is the only province that uses a third party to deliver those services. But in doing so, it does not relinquish its responsibility. Ontario's children's aid societies act on behalf of the government. They are governed by the Child and Family Services Act, and they are funded to the tune of \$1.5 billion of Ontario government money. It's time that Ontario caught up with the rest of the country.

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Mr. Speaker, three weeks ago, all parties in this House supported the member for Windsor West's private member's bill to establish Children and Youth in Care Day. During debate on that bill, everyone, including the Minister of Children and Youth Services, said we needed to do more. That message was heard loud and clear across this House, and this is our opportunity to do more.

The Ombudsman can deal directly with some critical issues with respect to the children's aid society. In doing so, he can help us identify and better understand recurring problems in the system. I urge all members to support this bill and help us move towards a better, more just child welfare system in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we have members here with us in the House today who have been fighting this battle for many years. I congratulate them on everything that they do. They've been rallying Queen's Park, they've been rallying all of their MPPs for years. There are petitions—everything that's going on. These families can't take any more; they don't know where else to turn.

I'm blessed to be able to stand here today in support of these families, and I'm praying with everything that I've got inside of me that today this House is going to support this bill and we are going to get it to committee and we are going to enact it into law, because this is necessary. This isn't a joke; this is something that has to be done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to speak to Ms. Taylor's bill, the member for Hamilton Mountain, Bill 110, An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to children's aid societies. It would amend the Ombudsman Act, increasing the power of the Ombudsman to investigate Ontario's children's aid societies.

Ontario funds and monitors 47 children's aid societies as part of our commitment to support the well-being and protection of children. We believe in the important work done by children's aid societies and the crucial role they play in our communities. I truly commend any act which would seek to improve the accountability of any organization when they are found lacking, specifically one which services and cares for the young and vulnerable members of our communities.

It is my observation, however, that the children's aid societies have taken significant action over the last few years to ensure the accountability of these societies in the protection of children and youth they serve. The steps they have taken are effective. The mechanisms in place are mechanisms that Ontarians can have confidence in, that we're not lacking in accountability.

When I was first elected to this Legislature in 2003, I remember we heard a lot about the children's aid societies, about accountability and transparency, and the issues faced by the children under their care. The experience in Ottawa-Orléans is, the system needed help then, needed change, and children's aid societies and the government stepped up to this challenge.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in the years since my first being at this Legislature, I have heard less and less problems with the children's aid societies. I truly believe that they and we must be doing some of the right things. When I look at the changes that have been implemented—strengthened protections, improved resources and mechanisms for oversight that have been put in place—we're already on the right track. Already we have made so much progress in working with the children's aid societies, coming up with the mechanisms to better protect vulnerable children and youth.

We have implemented rigorous background checks for those proposing to care for a child receiving children's aid society services. These organizations have access to enhanced tools to assess risk to a child's safety and match their response to the needs of the child and family. Through alternate dispute resolution, we have promoted opportunities to resolve more child protection cases outside the courtroom.

These changes represent real progress which Ontarians can be proud of and have confidence in. In every other province in Canada, child protection is operated directly by government. In Ontario, we have chosen to have a different model, and I can proudly say that in this case, we are unique. We are unique in that our CASs are community-based, non-profit organizations with independent boards, community oversight and community representatives that are on those boards.

The model of community-based involvement has so many benefits. For example, when the community is involved in the governance of the society, they are more engaged and invested in the outcomes of families and children receiving services from a children's aid society. Perhaps most importantly, when children's aid societies are able to exercise innovation at the local level, it allows them to be sensitive and responsive to the local context, while delivering services in compliance with ministry

standards. This balanced approach means that our children's aid societies are accountable not only to the government but to the communities they serve.

Over the years, our government has taken important steps to further ensure the accountability of our children's aid societies: We have required that all children's aid societies have clear, transparent and consistent complaint review procedures; we have established the independent Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, which partners with children and youth and provides an independent voice for them to bring issues forward; and we have increased the mandate and powers of the Child and Family Services Review Board to independently review complaints related to children's aid societies and decisions of children's aid societies and adoption licensees.

I would like to take a moment to speak about the Child and Family Services Review Board, which operates at arm's length from government. The CFSRB is part of the social justice tribunals cluster that was formally designated on January 19, 2011. As I mentioned, it has the power to review complaints related to children's aid societies.

The Ombudsman is in fact able to investigate complaints about the Child and Family Services Review Board and report and issue recommendations arising from such a review. While not a direct oversight, the Ombudsman is still an important piece in this process.

It would seem to me that, through the CFSRB, the children's aid societies are already accountable to the Ombudsman, and while we absolutely remain committed to continuing to work closely with the Ombudsman to improve child protective services, I simply do not see a need here to fix something that is not broken, nor to duplicate an existing mechanism.

I think what I am trying to say can be summarized in a quote which I will finish off with. This was written by Mary Rutledge, the executive director of Family, Youth and Child Services of Muskoka, someone with first-hand knowledge and experience with the children's aid society:

"It is true that the Ombudsman does not have direct oversight, but that does not mean that they do not have input and authority ... the Minister of Children and Youth Services is accountable to the Ombudsman ... through government processes for system accountability, a local agency such as Family, Youth and Child Services of Muskoka is held to account for any complaint. The province chose not to stop at that level and put in place an independent panel; the Child and Family Services Review Board is fully mandated under the Child and Family Services Act and operates independent of government to hear and resolve complaints brought to it relating to child protection."

With that, I would like to conclude my comments today on Bill 110.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I want to commend the member from Hamilton Mountain for introducing Bill 110,

which would give the Ontario Ombudsman the authority to investigate and report on complaints to the province's children's aid societies. The Ombudsman himself has been calling for this authority for some time. He says, quite correctly, that the province's children's aid societies are going through a difficult period of structural revision and financial rationalization. The Ombudsman believes that his office is best equipped to investigate complaints against the children's aid societies because he will be able to identify systemic problems that may be at the root of some of the complaints. This is a good reason.

Right now, complaints against children's aid societies are dealt with by applying to the Child and Family Services Review Board. This is a tribunal that is part of the recently formed Social Justice Tribunals Ontario, which groups together, or clusters, several dispute resolution bodies. According to their annual statement, "Clustering will ensure the most efficient use of resources, and while that is important in and of itself, efficiency is also a key component of access to justice, since inefficient use of resources means that members of the public who seek to access the tribunals may be delayed or denied."

The same report tells us that during 2010-11, the Child and Family Services Review Board received 246 applications to have a complaint about children's aid society decisions reviewed by the board. In the same year, just 17 cases were heard, and in 11 of those, orders were made in favour of the applicant. So there was a problem with the original children's aid society decision in well over 50% of the cases reviewed. Since there were only 17 cases heard in 2010-11, there were some 229 open cases of kids improperly placed or unfairly removed from their families that have complaints about their current situation. That's 229 cases that were waiting to be heard.

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Mr. Speaker, we all know kids grow up fast. We also know that the parent-child relationship is dynamic and precious; it is central to our quality of life. Kids and parents can't afford to wait for the adjudicative process to get them there. It would appear that clustering is not working. The Ombudsman's office will provide a process that is efficient, objective and accountable to the public. For these reasons, I support Bill 110.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will try to put things in a little bit of perspective. We've heard from the member from Hamilton Mountain as to how the system presently works and what the system tries to do. There are lots of very good people, lots of social workers with good hearts and good intentions that work within the system and that really try to help. At the end of all this, we are human beings. It doesn't matter how hard we try, how good-intentioned we are, how big our hearts are, we all make mistakes. We all make mistakes because we are human beings.

If you find yourself working for the children's aid society, and all those good-intentioned social workers and everybody else who works there who love children

and want them to grow up to be all that they can be—they are human beings, and sometimes they get it wrong. When they get it wrong, the families involved try to get closure. They try to see what went wrong, what happened. The mechanism in place for them to do this is cumbersome, does not meet their expectations, does not meet their needs, and it fails them.

We have with us in the gallery today people that came down from Nickel Belt. Not very often, Mr. Speaker, do people come down from Nickel Belt; it is a long ride. It is a long and expensive ride. But right now Neil Haskett, Marjorie Beaudry, Lilliane Lalonde, Eve Thunderbird and Tammy Macintyre—they came down. They came down because they wanted to hear us. They wanted to hear what people had to say about this, because they are part of the hundreds of Ontarians throughout our province—throughout the geography—who want Ombudsman oversight. They want somebody who is on their side. They want an equal playing field so that we can get to the bottom of the questions that face them, their families and their children. They look to our Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman's office has the skills to do investigations. They know how to ask questions. They know how to get to the bottom of things. It could very well be that what he—because it's Mr. Marin—ends up saying is exactly what has been told to them, but they will hear it from a voice that they trust, that has their best interests.

It could very well be that we also discover that there are some systemic issues, that it doesn't matter how hard the people at the local level try to identify them and change them, that they are systemic, and only an office like the Ombudsman's office, which looks at complaints throughout our province—only his office will be able to bring meaningful changes to this.

Why is it that when we get elected and when we read the platforms of the three different parties—we all talk about the need for transparency. We all talk about the need for accountability. How do we make our democracy and how do we make our government stronger? A sure key to get there is transparency, accountability mechanisms. This is how you grow. This is how you get excellence out of the programs and services that we have.

To bring Ombudsman oversight to children's aid has nothing to do with—it's not because the children's aid society system is broken; it's not because they haven't done some good work. I could rhyme off hundreds of times where the children's aid society has done some excellent work. Children were helped because of what happened, and they ended up growing up to use their full potential because the children's aid society was there.

I'm not casting a spell that says, "Everything they do is wrong"—no, not at all. We need them. They do the work that they're mandated to do, and they do this to the best of their ability. Like every other human being, including the 107 MPPs in this chamber, they are human, and sometimes humans make mistakes.

When this happens, then you find out, being a family in a very, very vulnerable position—here you are, telling the people who have a say over whether your child is

going to be with you or not. You are trying to exercise your rights in a position that puts you at such a disadvantage that the chances of winning are really skewed, Mr. Speaker. They are really skewed.

They want an independent third party. The member from Hamilton Mountain has done her homework. She has shared with us the hundreds of complaints that the Ombudsman receives every year. What does he say to those parents? He tells them, "I'm sorry; I don't have oversight of children's aid." This is not what parents want to hear. The Ombudsman never asked for extra money; he never asked for anything. He asked for oversight so that he can help those parents.

I know that there are other members of my caucus who want to speak on this issue, so I will wrap up. But I would ask the people to really think about the situation where it's easy to say, "We need accountability. We want our programs and services to be stronger and better and meet the expectations of the people of Ontario." We have an opportunity to do that today by bringing Ombudsman oversight to the children's aid society.

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: My time is up.

Mr. Paul Miller: It was up five minutes ago.

M^{me} France Gélinas: My good friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has made sure that I heard him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to speak about this proposed Bill 110. With my remarks, I want to first thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services for his leadership role in his very complex, challenging ministry and in supporting children and youth across the province. The minister is doing a great job and I want to recognize him in the House.

The proposed Bill 110, as it says, is to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to children's aid societies. Let me go through some aspects of this particular legislation, Mr. Speaker, about what's currently happening in Ontario.

My colleague from Ottawa–Orléans spoke a little bit about it, but I want to reinforce that the message here is the fact that in Ontario, the children's protection system is completely different from other provinces'. It is important to know that the CASs in Ontario are accountable not only to the government but also to the communities they serve.

Ontario's CASs are structurally designed differently than any other provinces' in Canada. The Ontario CASs are independent legal entities. They are non-profit, community-based corporations with volunteer boards of directors, or Indian bands operating under the Indian Act.

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In contrast, as my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans said, the CASs across other provinces outside Ontario are directly operated out of a ministry or government department. Hence, their ombudsmen are involved to oversee their CAS activities.

Our government has taken a number of steps to ensure accountability. We all agree accountability is an important piece of agencies like the children's aid society, but I want to also stress a couple of other mechanisms the government has enacted.

We have established the independent Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, which provides an independent voice for children and youth by partnering with them to bring issues forward.

The other piece: We also have increased the mandate and the powers of the Child and Family Services Review Board to independently review complaints related to children's aid societies and decisions of children's aid societies and adoption licensees.

As we all know, currently the Ombudsman may investigate complaints about the Child and Family Services Review Board and report and issue recommendations arising from such a review. Right now, the Ombudsman of Ontario already has some role to play in reviewing CASs.

Furthermore, when all else fails, there is Family Court. It is available to any individual or family.

On top of that, in Ontario we have 12 other financial and administrative mechanisms to oversee the CASs. These mechanisms ensure some checks and balances of the CASs. It was absolutely correct when the member from Hamilton Mountain talked about the accountability and ensuring protection of every young person in Ontario, but I want to make sure that if we go the route of creating another layer of oversight, we need to ask, through the committee, to have more conversation about this particular bill. I am particularly sensitive, coming from my previous roots, to the fact that we create another layer on top of what I already spoke about. In terms of costs, I know the member from Nickel Belt talked about how there would be no additional costs, but let's not forget in this House that I remember as a young nurse how many Ombudsman offices have been closed across Ontario. I remember those days. So I'm particularly concerned, if we're going to create another layer of oversight, that the operation piece is within the budget of the government and, more importantly, is it really going to help young people by protecting young people, another independent lens to investigate, to review and provide very solid recommendations?

With regard to this particular bill, I think that there are merits. There are certainly merits in terms of making sure that this particular bill goes to a committee to have another review and bring in witnesses to the committee on how to improve it. I think all of us received a copy of the letter from the member from Hamilton Mountain, and I'd like to have more wording, because I think if we're going to create this layer called Ombudsman oversight of the CASs, I want a little bit more parameters, more definitions in terms of timeline, in terms of investigations, and more importantly, I want to hear from the experts out there, from the academics. Most importantly, we need to make sure this new layer of review by the Ombudsman that's being proposed by my colleague from

Hamilton Mountain will not become another bureaucratic layer to look at CASs, because we already have a number of them.

So I thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for bringing this forward.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 110 today. As I said in the House yesterday with regard to government bill 75, good public policy requires three foundational principles: oversight, recourse and accountability.

As legislators, we don't have oversight over all aspects of the administration of government. The work of many administrative bodies is exempt. The children's aid society is one of those. History has taught us that the need for oversight is imperative and that the Ombudsman is one means to achieve that end.

I'd like to read a little bit from the Ontario Royal Commission Inquiry into Civil Rights in discussing the origin of the Ombudsman, which developed in Sweden over 300 years ago. It states: "As royal power declined and representative democracy developed, Parliament felt the need of an official with duties similar to those of the Ombudsman to scrutinize the actions of administrative officials on behalf of, and to report to, the legislative body."

The Swedes recognized that "each official engaged in the administration of the affairs of government is largely answerable only to 'the law'" or their interpretation of it "and to" their "own conscience rather than to a higher official."

This can be problematic. Injustices deserve correction and this is difficult when, to quote later from the report, "There are wide areas of government into which the elected member of the Legislature has no power to inquire. We refer to the administrative" councils "of local governments ... and municipal bodies such as ... boards and ... commissions."

We can further extrapolate to include bodies such as children's aid societies, which do not allow oversight from elected officials.

"I would not for a moment suggest that the Ombudsman is a complete answer to the problems of administrative justice. He is ... just one tool, quite a good one, I think, but just one, and mankind needs many tools in this technological age."

Those are quotes from the royal commission in Ontario.

Speaker, an Ombudsman is not the be-all and end-all solution to the problems with the children's aid societies, but it does provide greater oversight and accountability. The existing act does provide a little bit, but as a legislator, I'd like to share my experience in one or two cases.

I would refer the members in this House to look at the Child and Family Services Act, section 103: "A child in care has a right ... to speak in private with ... and receive visits from ... a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario or of the Parliament of Canada."

I don't know how many members have actually tried to exercise that right. I have, and I have been stonewalled by some children's aid societies, which have actually gone out and prevented me from exercising my right over that child in care.

I've seen tragedies such as Andrew Skinner and his wife, Lindsay, who went through the turmoil of a children's aid society case, I believe, unfairly and unjustly, and they had no remedy. Our public policy can never, never be justified if it doesn't provide remedies to the tragedies it creates.

Andrew and Lindsay spent over \$300,000 trying to find a remedy. They are still deeply in debt and there still is no recourse. I encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to rise to support Bill 110, a bill presented by my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

Before I start, I just want to say how much I appreciated the remarks from the member Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I thought they were eminently reasonable, as with the other members who have spoken on the bill.

I spoke to Bill 120, introduced by the member from Peterborough, and I said about that bill that he presented a very strong case for why we needed a law that protects people's money in RRSPs and related retirement savings from credit seizure. He made a case, arguing that six other provinces in Canada are doing it and most states in America were doing it. I thought it was a reasonable, good case, and I felt his government should be doing it because it doesn't even cost a dime.

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Then I heard the member from Hamilton Mountain do a similarly good presentation in defence of Bill 110. It was coherent. It was compelling. It was reasonable, practical, sensible and unideological. What more do you want by way of defence of a particular bill?

Then, I listened to two members—the member from Ottawa–Orléans and the member from Scarborough–Agincourt. These are arguments that I've heard before on a similar bill that was presented in the past. These are arguments that the former minister made in this House on this bill, and I find them indefensible; I really do.

The member from Ottawa–Orléans says that we have community oversight. No, we don't. That we have a provincial advocate. Yes, we do, but it doesn't have the investigative powers that an Ombudsman has. We like the provincial advocate, but he doesn't do the job of what an Ombudsman could do by way of an investigation around problems.

The member from Ottawa–Orléans argues the system is not broken. We're not saying the system is broken. We're saying that when people have a problem and they have no one to turn to, where do you go? We're saying the Ombudsman is the only person you can go to. We're not saying the system is broken. We're not attacking

children's aid societies. We're saying when there is a problem that a young person faces or a family faces with children's aid, where do you go?

The member from Scarborough–Agincourt says this would be another layer. It's the same argument that previous Minister Broten made around this issue. It's not a layer; it is a person you go to when you want an independent problem to be investigated. When you want a strong advocate, when you want a fair-minded person to investigate a problem, you go to the Ombudsman.

Most of the other provinces in Canada do that, which is the case the member from Peterborough was making around his bill. If most other provinces in Canada are sensible and reasonable enough to say "We need Ombudsman oversight," why are you not doing it? My fear is that you're just too afraid. You're too afraid of negative publicity that could come from such an investigation. Rather than your Premier leading on this and saying, "We want problems to emerge. We want to see what the problems are, systemic or individual, because we want to solve them," rather than having a Premier and a minister who say that, they make all these senseless arguments against it that make you, all Liberals—all of you—look so bad. It's pitiful.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I just want to first start by acknowledging the member from Hamilton Mountain for the right reasons, for the right time. It's an item that's been here a couple of times before in different formats. I like to think that the title of the bill could almost be copied from Bill 115, putting children first; in fact, Bill 115 put them last basically. So a true name for this is "putting children first."

The member from Nickel Belt also said that we're all human and we all make mistakes. I think this is when you put children first—they say things that perhaps sometimes got the whole system started; they might accuse somebody of something. There needs to be a fair, independent, capable way of resolving these disputes fairly. That, I think, has been explained by most speakers, that the Ombudsperson is a trusted individual. In the case of the current one, Mr. Marin, he's certainly in the media more frequently than some of them. We'll leave it at that. But I think being an advocate type, the Ombudsman has to be fair in their dealings and reviews of cases under children's aid.

I meet with children's aid. In our case, I don't blame the children's aid specifically in the case. The member from Burlington said there are some inefficiencies in the system, and I think she said that there were 17 cases heard in 2010-11; and yet there are over 229 cases of children where the decisions made by somebody are being challenged but not being heard. So they are perhaps in the wrong placement of care.

I met recently with the New Heights Youth Centre in my riding, and these are children who, under some section, are in sort of open custody. They're 16- and 17-year-olds, and they're in this youth centre under the direction of and being paid for on a per diem basis by

children's aid, by taxpayers' money. I've had complaints of drugs and stuff like that being around and maybe not enough supervision, but when I'm meeting with these people and the neighbours who are affected by this, they tell me that on the per diem that's being paid, they don't have enough money to adequately supervise and oversee and help mentor these young children into a new point in life. Often, we hear from the government—and with all due respect, I see a couple of ministers here. They're saying that there's not enough money in the system to do the job properly. I don't want to put children's aid at blame, but I only say that having the Ombudsman come in or the Auditor General come in and say that there's an inappropriate use of money, resources, staff, whatever, is a good thing. I know my children's aid is in a deficit where they've laid off half the resource people who are really—I believe myself that they're trying to help children.

It's the system that needs the help. It needs the commentary from these independent officers of the Legislature, like the Ombudsman or the Auditor General, to come in and say, "There's a problem here. Here are some recommendations." That goes to the estimates or the review of the public accounts committee—many of my peers are on those committees—and they can take action and bring some results.

At the end of the day, helping children: That's really what this is about. I don't think it's picking wars or saying, "Okay, all children's aids are bad" and all that stuff. That's not the case at all. I think the arguments that have been made have been made very fairly here. The member from Burlington spoke in such a short term, but explained it very well: There are inefficiencies in the system, and the children are disadvantaged because of those inefficiencies, wait-lists etc.

Now, I've seen other CASs on the news with problems, and the disputes resolution system just does not seem to be working. They even appeal. I tell them myself to write to the Ombudsman on occasion. If I find that there's no satisfactory response from an indifferent minister, I sort of say, "Give the Ombudsman a bit of a poke."

But at the end of the day, I think everyone here wants to make sure that children are first, and that would be a good name for this bill. I just offer that as a recommendation. Putting children first: That's what this is about. I think that's what I hear being said in the Legislature today. I think children need a comfortable, supportive environment—preferably their homes—for their futures and for our collective future as a province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Hamilton Mountain, you have two minutes to reply.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the members for Ottawa–Orléans, Burlington, Nickel Belt, Scarborough–Agincourt, Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Trinity–Spadina and Durham. I would also like to recognize and thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services for

being here and listening to this debate today. I commend you for that. Thank you for being here.

This is a bill that, like I said, has been asked for, for many years. Families are in need. I've heard there are other systems in place, and yes, we know there are other systems in place, but there isn't enough of an oversight system to deal with all of the missing loophole pieces. That's where we need to look. How do we fill in those gaps? I mean, this isn't a new story. I've met with Ontario children's aid societies. I've met with the Provincial Advocate. I've talked to the Ombudsman. We all know that the system needs to be looked at, so let's just let the Ombudsman come in, take the roof off and have a look inside. Let's build a new roof.

I agree: We don't need layers on top of layers on top of layers, because that's only holding up the court systems longer, it's keeping the children in limbo longer. That's not the purpose of this. This is to make a system that works for everybody. For the children, for the families, let's get it right. Let's figure out how we can put families back together again instead of sometimes, unfortunately, pulling them apart where it's not necessary. These are the things that we need to look at. This is what I'm looking to the Ombudsman for.

I hope that you support this bill today. I know many people right across this entire province are looking to us for this today. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

FIRST RESPONDERS DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR DES PREMIERS INTERVENANTS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 61, standing in the name of Mr. Klees.

Mr. Klees has moved second reading of Bill 123.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank my honourable colleagues for this. I'd like it referred to the committee on general government, when it is struck.

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

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Leal has moved second reading of Bill 120.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks for all the support on all sides. I would want to send Bill 120 to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, which will probably be operating in the not-too-distant future.

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

OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT ACT
(CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'OMBUDSMAN
(SOCIÉTÉS D'AIDE À L'ENFANCE)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Miss Taylor has moved second reading of Bill 110.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Miss Taylor.

Miss Monique Taylor: I move it to justice policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): It is requested that the bill be referred to justice policy.

Agreed? So referred.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I move adjournment of the House.

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

This House stands adjourned until Monday, October 15, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1643.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
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Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
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Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Teresa Piruzza

Bob Delaney, Victor Fedeli

Cindy Forster, Monte McNaughton

Yasir Naqvi, Teresa Piruzza

Michael Prue, Peter Shurman

Soo Wong

Clerks / Greffiers: Valerie Quioc Lim, Katch Koch (pro. tem)

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