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Wednesday 27 February 2013

Mercredi 27 février 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 27 February 2013

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 27 février 2013

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 26, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The Minister of Consumer Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning. Thank you, Speaker.

It is a privilege to rise today and speak about the throne speech. Perhaps, if I may, Speaker, I'll start off with some of the highlights from the speech and then talk more specifically about that, and then I'd like to also discuss what the throne speech means in terms of my new portfolio as Minister of Consumer Services, and then hopefully tie all that back together.

In terms of the throne speech itself, we know that one of the key features of it is to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. That was in the budget last year. As you know, Speaker, we are ahead of schedule to do that; our projections are looking very good. But that really is a cornerstone of the speech, because at end of the day we need to be able to make sure we protect the programs and services that Ontarians have come to expect and enjoy, and make sure that our citizens are supported and that they are receiving the services they need from our government. That is a very critical piece of the throne speech. It's very much an even-handed approach: balancing the budget, allowing all parties to work together, finding savings where we can, but not just finding savings for the sake of finding savings—not at the risk of not helping the most vulnerable people, not at the risk of not providing the services that Ontarians expect their government to provide.

We also talked in the throne speech about increased accountability in the Legislature. We've seen some of that with respect to what the Minister of Health has put forward with Ornge, for example. The accountability framework there is, in my view, a model for other areas of government. I think that is an important feature of our throne speech, because at the end of the day we're all

accountable to the public, not just individual ministers and their portfolios, but all MPPs of the Legislature. So I don't think there would be any disagreement that accountability is absolutely key.

Something I'm really excited about that was in the throne speech is a focus on employment opportunities for Ontario's youth—in partnership with education, labour and private sector partners—because at the end of the day youth are our future. I think we can all agree on that. We do have some challenges with respect to youth unemployment, so focusing on a youth employment strategy—a real one that addresses the unemployment rates of young people in Ontario and helps create opportunities and paths for youth of our future. That ties in, of course, to what we provide from an education point of view for young people—whether it's at high school or post-secondary.

I know my kids in grade 10 are picking out their courses for grade 11 right now, and in a good way, I think, there are expectations that the kids start thinking about what it is they want to do and creating that path, whether it's employment after high school, college, university, the trades, and starting to think about what that looks like. Having said that, we all know that we don't always end up doing what we think we're going to do after we come out of the school system, but I think it is very helpful, the emphasis on career assessments and the emphasis on career planning.

Another feature of the throne speech is ensuring municipalities and families have input on local energy infrastructure in their communities, so that we ensure that we have willing hosts when it comes to energy infrastructure. Because at the end of the day municipalities are, as we know, independently elected democratic bodies, and it is not the role of the province to interfere with those decisions. We are very happy that we're going to ensure that municipalities do have input on local energy infrastructure. I know that's really important in the Durham side of my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, because it's very much an energy hub. We have the nuclear facilities; there's an emerging nuclear belt, if you will, for the GTA. Getting that right balance between nuclear and renewables is very important, and working closely with municipalities is what we're going to do going forward.

Next—and this isn't in any particular order—is ensuring a respectful partnership with labour leaders by building a sustainable process for wage negotiation through collective bargaining and interest arbitration. Already, just a mere matter of days after the throne speech, we're

seeing good progress there in a discussion with our education partners. We had fantastic news last Friday about extracurriculars at the high school level. This is incredibly promising. It's very important, not just to our government—in fact, more importantly, to the students of our education system. I think we set a new tone and a new pace with our bargaining partners, and I'm very, very hopeful that that positive approach will continue and that all parties involved in the process will be respected and that in turn will help us to continue to build the best education and health care system in the world.

Health care—I think it goes without saying that if you don't have your health, you don't have wealth, as they say. Our investments in health care are absolutely record-setting. They are well regarded, not just in Canada but around the world. It's very important that we continue to make the progress that we've made, whether it's reducing wait times, whether it is continuing to move with the health care agenda set out by the Minister of Health, which is focused, as you know, on providing the right health care at the right time in the right place. We have an aging population, and it is important that we understand the dynamics of that aging population. Within that aging population there is not a homogeneous group. We have young seniors; we have older seniors; we have seniors who may want to stay at home. So this whole concept of delivering health care in the community closer to home when it's needed is very important to seniors. For those seniors who cannot stay at home, we will, of course, continue to invest in long-term health care.

At the end of the day—we're doing a switch-up here with the Speakers—none of this can be achieved without working collaboratively with all the parties in the Legislature. We really are demonstrating that. The Premier has reached out to the opposition parties very early in the process, and there are good ideas. There are good ideas on all sides of the Legislature, and I'm hopeful that that positive tone that the Premier has set will continue and that we will work together, identifying good ideas from all parties, because at the end of the day it's in the best interests of our constituents that we do that.

0910

Just to share a quote with you from the throne speech, and what Premier Wynne talked about, she said, "Our government is committed to co-operating with opposition parties to move ... forward. We will focus on balancing the budget and ensuring opportunities for every Ontarian without letting anyone slip through the cracks. When we work together, Ontario is a place of endless possibilities." That was a quote from our new Premier.

I'll turn, if I may, to what the throne speech said about my ministry, the Ministry of Consumer Services—if I could give some highlights there and share that with the Legislature today.

You may recall, Speaker, in the throne speech, the Premier talked about strengthening the rights of Ontario consumers when it comes to door-to-door sales, debt settlement services, real estate transactions and mobile smart phone contracts.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It's all important stuff.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's very important stuff, as my colleague is mentioning.

When I think about the Ministry of Consumer Services, it is two parts. One is protecting consumer confidence and building public safety, but it's also respecting businesses and carrying a bit of a flag for businesses, reducing regulatory burden. When we have that right balance and we increase consumer confidence, that directly ties to jobs and the economy in this province. So it's a pretty small but mighty ministry.

It's a regulatory ministry; it has a very small number of employees. That has shifted dramatically over the last 10 years, from over 1,000 employees to about 150. But when you look at the agencies, the delegated administrative authorities associated with the ministry, they have about 1,200 employees. When you look at all the registrants and licensees of those agencies, I believe that number is about a quarter of a million.

The impact is broad, and as I said, it's all focused on consumer protection, public safety and ensuring that businesses adhere to the law but also are not burdened by regulation. I think it's a pretty exciting ministry. Many of the initiatives that have come out of consumer services are relatively low-cost and have a huge and positive impact on Ontarians.

Getting back to the throne speech, I think when we talk about what's in there, those initiatives also are not necessarily huge investments by the province but really promote the principle of consumer confidence and—

Interjections.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes—investments that make a big difference, as my colleagues are saying.

In the throne speech, what the Premier talked about is, because our marketplace must be fair and the prices we pay for certain services must be transparent, those specific initiatives—door-to-door sales, debt settlement, real estate transactions and mobile smart phone contracts—are going to be addressed.

There are some other things we're looking at in the ministry that weren't specifically mentioned in the throne speech, but let me just touch on the specific ones. I should also say that these, as well as other initiatives of the Ministry of Consumer Services—we'll take very strong action to protect Ontario consumers, and that is part of our commitment to ensuring a fair, safe and informed marketplace.

Looking at door-to-door sales, I think when we talk about door-to-door sales, people think of water heaters in particular. I think we all have heard about—or maybe even experienced it ourselves—the aggressive door-to-door sales practices of some door-to-door sales for water heaters, and it's a widespread and growing concern for many Ontario homeowners. In fact, I believe it's the number one complaint that gets called into or emailed into the Ministry of Consumer Services. That's why it's on the top of my to-do list; it's to look at that.

Just to put it in a bit of context, the number of inquiries/concerns/complaints the ministry has received on

this topic has increased more than tenfold from 2008 to 2012. So it's a big concern, and it's at the top of our list in terms of making sure our marketplace is fair. We're going to consider strengthening consumer protection measures in this area, and I look forward to making announcements soon on this.

Debt settlement services is another topic we've heard about a lot here in the Legislature and in our ridings. We intend to regulate debt settlement companies to protect vulnerable consumers from exaggerated claims and any abusive practices in the marketplace. We want to ensure that all businesses in this sector obey the law. After consultation with stakeholders, which is already under way, we will move forward to look at banning debt settlement companies from charging upfront fees, limiting the amount of fees consumers are charged and, of course, requiring a clear and transparent contract for these services, as well as a cooling-off period. That's high up on our list in terms of consumer protection.

I know that real estate transactions have also been in the news. I've had some inquiries from the media as well, since becoming Minister of Consumer Services. We're looking at ways we can do two things. One is to reduce the cost for consumers and provide them with more choices when they want to buy or sell a home. But we also want to look at ways we can reduce the regulatory burden for the real estate industry. This is a prime example, Speaker, where we need to balance the interests of consumers in Ontario but not put businesses out of business, not overly burden industries such as the real estate one with regulations. We want to make sure that they're necessary, that they're appropriate, that they're clear and that they're understood.

Another one I mentioned is mobile and smart phone contracts. I think we'll remember Bill 82, the Wireless Services Agreements Act that was introduced by a colleague of mine in the Legislature last session. We are looking at that very aggressively right now. Also, Speaker, the CRTC has come along too, and they're proceeding with consultation. So we need to determine how we can align ourselves with what the CRTC is doing: Is their code that comes out of that process going to be strong enough, or is our bill going to be strong enough? The good thing is that I think our bill has continued to strengthen. So we'll be determining fairly quickly what future action might be needed to protect consumers on this whole file of mobile and smart phone contracts.

For me too, Speaker—as I mentioned before, I have two teenagers, twins, and they have cellphones, and I have to confess that I'm not entirely clear what we signed up for when we got them their cellphones. I think many Ontarians feel that way too, and when you go to make a change in your contract or your phone or whatever, then you realize what the fine print actually said. The bottom line is that we need to make sure these kinds of contracts are fair and transparent. At the same time, there's no intent to overly burden the industry or put the industry out of business; that's not the intent here at all. So I'm looking forward to moving this file forward in my new role as Minister of Consumer Services.

Just to mention, too, some related initiatives—they weren't specifically mentioned in the throne speech, but they do fall under our commitment to a fair and transparent marketplace. The review of the Condominium Act: As many people here know, we're continuing with a very collaborative and public engagement process. My colleague MPP Albanese from York South–Weston actually held a second-round consultation in her riding just this week. I went to that, and it was just fantastic. She had people from all perspectives. She had owners, she had property managers, she had condo board members and it was a really good session. I know that another colleague of mine is having another session tomorrow night.

The reason this review of the act is happening is because the condominium market has changed dramatically since it came into force 11 years ago. As I mentioned in the House the other day, condos now account for half of all new houses built in the province, and over one million Ontarians call a condominium home. So it's very important that we look at that, going forward.

0920

We're also going to look at what parts of the consultation findings we can act on sooner rather than later. We want to make sure it's a thorough consultation. We have an expert panel, we have a residents' panel and there will be a further public review before this comes back to government. We'll look at what part of it we can move forward on based on the feedback from all stakeholders.

Home inspection is another popular issue out there, because at the end of the day, in the current state, anyone can call themselves a home inspector. We're working with home inspector associations, consumers, representatives—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It's Bartolucci's next career.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Pardon? Whose next career?

Interjection: Rick—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Okay, it might be someone's next career here in the Legislature, so maybe we'll get him involved in the stakeholder consultations.

Like other consumer protection initiatives, Speaker, our intent is to increase transparency of this profession and ensure, perhaps, a minimum standard of training and consistency in home inspections, and at the end of the day, enhancing consumer protection.

Last but not least, we're going to continue to focus on a fair marketplace and transparent prices. Consumer laws prohibit false, misleading or deceptive representation—such as ads, contracts or sales pitches. In sectors like motor vehicles and travel and credit, the law actually goes further. It regulates how advertising discloses all costs to ensure prices are transparent. We call that all-in pricing, Speaker. We will review these measures to see if they're providing the right level of pricing transparency and fairness in the marketplace.

In conclusion, Speaker, I look forward to supporting these measures in the throne speech as the Minister of Consumer Services. I look forward to hearing more feed-

back from all of my colleagues across the Legislature and the public as we go forward. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the comments that we heard earlier with regard to the throne speech. The Minister of Consumer Services actually quoted the Premier as saying that Ontario is a place of opportunities. This is where there's a divide in the road, Mr. Speaker, because unfortunately, with regard to the riding that I represent, Huron–Bruce in rural Ontario, people really can't agree to that any longer.

When you examine the throne speech further, my goodness, when it comes to the second-largest sector in this province, there was not a lot of mention in the throne speech in terms of how we can prop up rural Ontario, give them their voices back and, for goodness' sake, drive our sector forward in terms of the agri-food sector. Agriculture was mentioned once; rural was mentioned three times. Food was only mentioned once, which is rather ironic because we know it was forgotten about last week until it was drawn to their attention. But let that alone.

A place of opportunity means that Ontario needs to be a forum whereby voices can be heard. And really and truly, this Liberal government continues to strip away authority from municipalities. This Liberal government continues to turn a deaf ear to the issues that really matter. If Ontario was a place of opportunities, they would let municipalities have a voice and give them an opportunity to represent their constituents in their municipalities and define whether indeed they want to be a willing host community for development, such as industrial wind turbines. If Ontario was a place of opportunity, they would listen to experts that are coming forward, citing the fact that this Liberal government in no way can identify or prove that there are no associations to negative health impacts by industrial wind turbines.

This throne speech does not go far enough and we cannot support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate the Minister of Consumer Services for her appointment to cabinet. Congratulations on that. I know that you will do your best in that portfolio.

I was listening to your speech from the throne, and there were a lot of buzzwords in there: “working together,” “making sure we're not letting people fall through the cracks.” The NDP is prepared to support the throne speech. But we really—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: But—but, but, but. Listen for the “buts.” But there needs to be action. There need to be results when it comes to the budget. The budget is not going to be the same story as the throne speech with buzzwords and love-ins and—

Interjection: Kumbaya.

Miss Monique Taylor: Kumbaya. “Kumbaya” is a good word that I've used often.

This is something that we're serious about, and the Liberal government has to understand that the budget needs to prove results.

I was listening when you were speaking about the condos. I know that our member from Trinity–Spadina has put a lot of work into condos. I hope that you're planning on working with our members, working together, to create good results on behalf of the people of this province.

You know, there are priorities that we're looking for in the budget: home care, putting young people to work. These are things that were very vaguely touched on throughout the throne speech, and we're continuing to look for that dialogue to see specifics on how you're going to be pushing those priorities for us on our behalf and making sure that you truly are working with this side of the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. Let me first of all congratulate the Minister of Consumer Services for the initiatives that she is bringing forth with respect to consumer protection initiatives. Whether it relates to cellphones, hot water heaters, gym memberships—these are all good initiatives from which the people of Ontario will benefit as a whole.

Let me just address a couple of issues. You know, the thing that I was really taken with as far as the throne speech was concerned was the mention of a fair society. That's really what government should be all about: creating opportunities for everyone. Now, you know, by—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Huron–Bruce.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I find it very interesting that the Tory members would laugh about trying to create a fair society; a fair society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. That surely is what government—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, folks, we're a little feisty this morning. The Attorney General knows what buttons to push, and you're biting. I would suggest we cut it back a bit, please, because I cannot hear him. Thank you.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker. I cannot imagine why anybody would laugh at trying to create a fair society. That's what we should be all about in government, whether it's at this level, the federal level or the local level of government: to create as much opportunity as possible for our young people and to make sure that the most vulnerable in our society are looked after in the best way possible. That's why I look forward to the implementation of the Manure-Rankin—Lankin report.

Interjection: Manure?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Munir-Lankin report. Speaker, it's very early in the morning.

We need to make sure that the people, particularly at the bottom end of the economic scale, are given the best opportunities to succeed in life so that they can enjoy the same kind of lifestyle that many of us in this province have been able to reach.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: You haven't seen the light, John; that's your trouble.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member from Oxford. The member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to address the speech from the throne. As my esteemed colleague across the way from Kingston mentioned, there is a whole boatload of manure here.

I listened with intent to the Minister of Consumer Services talk—and rightfully so—about local input from municipalities and how this new Liberal government is going to actually listen to elected officials in a democracy, which is what we have. Mr. Speaker, this is lip service; we've seen this before. This is the same old song that we saw under Mr. McGuinty: how they respect and they want to listen and create some dialogue and reach out to the municipalities. But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, this government has ignored—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, folks, it's getting a little out of hand, yelling across the floor. I can't hear the member speaking. The next person that has a little outburst might be taking a walk.

Continue.

0930

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I will be talking about this a little later on, but I'm a little disheartened by what I'm hearing from across the floor. They talk about wanting to work together and co-operating together and moving forward. Again, this is the same old song that we hear repeatedly, over and over again. As a former educator—this is how we learn: through repetition. But the people of Ontario obviously haven't learned their lessons by listening to this government over and over again. We need a change, and we're putting forward some bold ideas that are going to bring positive change to the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to acknowledge the participation of the members opposite from Hamilton Mountain, Northumberland–Quinte West and of course the Attorney General as well, for their comments on the throne speech this morning.

There was some suggestion that the throne speech had high-level words, commitments that were not necessarily very specific or even believable. I just want to assure the

other parties that that is not the case. There is a genuine commitment here to work with all parties. I know for me, as the Minister of Consumer Services, the first thing I did was I called all four of my critics—four critics—and I was very pleased to have a discussion—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: You've got four critics?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, I have four critics. I have a red tape critic, a consumer services critic on the PC side; and also two members from the NDP, one for consumer services—and someone mentioned the member from Trinity–Spadina on condos, my fourth critic. I was very happy to talk to him about what he has done so far, related to condo review. I have arranged a technical briefing for all four critics, and I am very happy with our start in working together on this file. So I'm confident, I'm hopeful, that we can work together.

This is a minority government. The people of Ontario expect us to work together. The Ontario population has sent us here to work together, and I'm confident we can work collaboratively. We won't always agree, of course, but at the end of the day I think everyone will put forward what we believe is best for Ontarians. We have to do it within the fiscal framework I discussed earlier, and we'll provide the programs and services Ontarians will continue to enjoy. Thank you.

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

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: When I listened to the minister—and I'd like to congratulate her on her new post, by the way, Mr. Speaker. It's always nice to see a fresh face in the ministry. But again, it's a lot of the same old same old.

When the new Premier was selected by the Liberal Party—she wasn't elected by the people of Ontario, I would like to say—there was some hope. We were actually hoping that this new Premier would be sincere in working with us. But so far, we're only one week and a couple of days into the new session, and we're getting a lot of the same old same old: “We're reaching out to the opposition; we want to work with the opposition.” But the fact of the matter is that is not the case.

Again, they say, “We want to step back and we want to consult with local municipalities and give local municipalities a stronger voice,” but that is not happening. If the new Premier was sincere in what she's saying about working together and getting municipalities the rightful dignity that they have as elected officials in a democracy, she would put a moratorium on wind turbines today, Mr. Speaker—today.

We also heard from the Minister of Consumer Services, talking about the Green Energy Act and how that is a key to moving forward together for the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, this is the Auditor General, not myself, saying this. When this Liberal government came to power almost a decade ago, 25% of our electricity was produced by hydro, water power, in the province of Ontario. Today, after these intrusive industrial-sized wind turbines have been thrust upon us—unwillingly—only 22% of green energy in hydro is produced in the

province, and 3% is made up of wind and solar, so 25% is renewable green energy. We're at the same stage we were at a decade ago. We're spilling water over the falls at Niagara Falls and we're venting steam at nuclear power facilities because these industrial wind turbines are not producing energy when it's required. I just want to say that that was definitely a flawed policy, and if this new Premier wanted to actually listen, she would bring in a moratorium today.

We also heard the Minister of Consumer Services talk about extracurriculars. Well, Mr. Speaker, the backroom deals made by the new Premier with the federations and the union bosses haven't been disclosed. We don't know what deals have been made; we're not sure as to what the secret deals entail. What's going to happen when those details do come out? There's a two-year wage freeze, but when you have the president of OSSTF, Mr. Ken Coran, come out and say, "We're very pleased with the progress we're making," it makes one wonder. It makes one really sit there and wonder what kind of deal has been struck, whether or not this Liberal government—should they actually be in power a couple of years from now—will give the teachers an 8%, 10%, 12%, or 15% pay increase.

Mr. Speaker, transparency is what the people of this province asked for. This is what they want. They want us to work together. I agree, but we're not getting any of that. We're getting lip service from this government. It's the same old song, and people are really getting tired of it.

We heard about this government focusing on education and how it's a priority. Well, I am here today as a former high school teacher because these policies that the Liberals have brought in over the last decade have made a mockery of the education system in the province of Ontario.

They also said they're not going to make any cuts to education or health care. It was enlightening to us yesterday to hear that the Toronto District School Board will be actually firing hundreds of teachers and support staff because they have to make up for the \$55-million shortfall in their budget. The Liberals are firing teachers and support staff, and these are the individuals who do a great job day to day. I know, Mr. Speaker; I was on the front lines. These are people who actually care about the state of education in the province of Ontario. They don't have a political agenda. They get up in the morning, and they go and do their job to make sure that the young people of this province are going to have opportunities in the 21st century. We're not seeing that.

0940

We also hear this government repeatedly say it's either horses or health care. Right? So here's the double down, if you will, when it comes to the gambling on that scenario: We have the horse industry with 60,000 people whose livelihoods at stake, who are going to lose their jobs, because this government has ignored, again, the voices of people in Ontario. These are individuals who aren't asking for handouts. These are hard-working Ontarians who pay their taxes. They contribute to the coffers

of this province that support health care. Over a billion dollars last year was made by the horse racing industry that went into health care, went into education. I know the member from Niagara Falls would agree that this is important.

However, we're seeing cuts. Quinte Health Care is facing a crisis when it comes to the care that is given at the hospitals in Trenton—Trenton Memorial—Belleville and Picton. Some \$10 million has been slashed from their budget this year, yet we don't hear about this.

The Liberals are saying, "We care about health care. It's either horses or health care." Well, they've doubled down. They've killed the horse racing industry in this province, and they're killing the health care system that we can deliver.

They talk a good game. They're all about, "Oh, we're doing marvellous things in health care and education." I've given you examples where they're failing on education. They're failing on providing world-class health care, and they're failing the people of the province of Ontario.

We talk about the budget in the throne speech. The Minister of Consumer Services mentioned that they are serious about addressing overspending and taking austerity measures to make sure that the province gets back on track. Again, this is the same old song going round and round.

The first thing that the new Premier did when she was voted in by the Liberal Party to be the new Premier was to increase the size of cabinet by 22%. Now, what does that mean? People at home, watching on their televisions, are thinking, "Well, what does that mean?" It's not significant; it's not tangible. But here's what it means: It means an increase of \$3 million annually in salaries that go to friends who supported the new Premier—\$3 million. It doesn't sound like a lot of money, but I'm sure \$3 million could be spent better elsewhere. I'm throwing it out here: perhaps health care, or putting more EAs in the classrooms to ensure that children with special needs get the proper education that they're going to require.

We heard the minister talk about red tape, and how the Liberal Party is going to cut red tape to ensure that small businesses in the province of Ontario are going to be successful. The only red tape I've ever seen this party cut is at photo ops. If the minister and the Premier are serious about getting down to work and creating new jobs when it comes to small business, and reducing red tape, I would encourage the government to actually listen to the people.

When I'm in my riding—and I've had a lot of time in my riding in the last several months, since this government's prorogued government. I went around to the small businesses. I put out a small business survey, to get some feedback. What are the challenges that they're facing? You know what the number one thing was? The number one thing was red tape. The amount of time that the businesses spend in filling out forms and complying with regulations that this government has brought in takes away from their profit. We definitely heard that, through

the agricultural survey that my esteemed colleague from Oxford brought out. Mr. Speaker, four months is what the average farmer spends filling out forms—that would be four weeks. Sorry. Four weeks filling out forms—so one month out of a 12-month year; right?

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes. Four months every four years; right? One month out of the calendar year is what farmers have to fill out annually. That takes away from their productivity.

What I'm also hearing from the survey that the member from Oxford put out is that this takes away time from their families, time from their businesses, but also, more importantly, sometimes the forms are so complex that they actually have to hire other individuals to fill out the forms. It's unacceptable.

Red tape should be a priority, and Tim Hudak and the PC Party have made it very clear this would be a priority for our party, should we come to power. Mr. Speaker, we do care about small businesses. We do care about agriculture in the province of Ontario. We do care about listening to elected officials at the municipal level.

We heard the minister also talk about “top of the list.” What is not at the top of the list with this party? We hear them talk over and over again—again, lip service. What's the top priority? Well, the new Premier has said agriculture is a priority. That's why she took on that portfolio. But not food—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Not food.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes.

Yesterday, the minister, when questioned by the member from Oxford, our esteemed critic for food and rural affairs and agriculture—he has been asking for months to sit down and discuss the issues of agriculture and food and rural affairs. And what was the response we got from the new Premier? “I'm sorry. I'm sorry I haven't had time to sit down with you.”

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is the second-largest sector in producing revenue for this province, and we have a new Premier who doesn't have time to address the issues that we have in rural Ontario. It's unacceptable. “We don't have time.” Who says that? If it's truly a priority, give the portfolio to a competent individual who actually cares about rural Ontario.

We heard the minister, again, talk about fine print. Mr. Speaker, this is the fine print government. If I was to sign any kind of deal with the Liberals, either under Mr. McGuinty or the new Premier, Ms. Wynne—same old same old—I would definitely make sure that I would have my lawyers go over the fine print with a microscope, because this government cannot be trusted. The new Premier is not new at all. She was at the table for the gas plant scandals. She was at the table for Ornge. She was at the table for eHealth. It's the same old song. Fine print is absolutely correct—when it comes to fine print, I would caution any individual or political party to make sure that if you're entering a deal with this same old Liberal government, make sure you read the fine print.

Interjection: Same old.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Same old.

They talk about thorough consultation with stakeholders. Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm repeating myself because this is how we learn, but it's the same old song over there, right? They talk a good talk. I have to give credit where credit's due. The Liberal Party is extremely good at spinning the issues. They are very good at making sure that the general public doesn't actually get the facts.

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So when they say they want to consult—thorough consultation, as the minister pointed out—the fact of the matter is they turn a deaf ear to elected officials at the municipal level. We've seen this, again, with the wind turbines that are cropping up throughout the province of Ontario—in rural Ontario—with no consultation. They're denying the rights of elected officials. What does that say about this party and their views on democracy? Mr. Speaker, it's disheartening.

Again, as my esteemed colleague from Huron–Bruce pointed out, agriculture was only mentioned once in the throne speech. Now this Premier, Ms. Wynne, who has taken on the portfolio of agriculture and food—

Interjection: And food.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: And food—if she's truly committed to working with rural Ontario and the agricultural sector, you would think it would be a priority. You know what the priority is here, Mr. Speaker? The priority is trying to rebrand the Liberal Party as an actual party that can govern.

How many times in the throne speech was “new government” mentioned? Sixteen times, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: More than that.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: More than that. The member from Cambridge obviously, as a professor, has an astute account of how many times things were mentioned in the throne speech. But here's the fact: If the new Liberal government was interested, they would have mentioned agriculture more than once. So I'm a little disheartened, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the Liberal Party trying to spin and fool the people of Ontario once again, well, I'm here to say today it's not going to happen. It just cannot happen. It's time for a change. Ontario needs change. Tim Hudak and the PC Party are going to bring that change. We put forward white papers and bold ideas that are going to get this province back on track. We're going to provide the best health care, the best education system the world has. I'm proud to say that I sit over here today with my colleagues, and that's what we're going to do because Progressive Conservatives are good on their word.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker. It's nice to see you in the chair and it's nice to be back here in the Legislature four months later. Welcome back, everyone, and congratulations to the new Premier and to all the new cabinet ministers. I'm looking forward to getting things

going here again in the province of Ontario; it's been too long.

I think we can try to put a good spin on things, but as my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West was saying, people will not forget. You can't fool people all the time. So when we hear members from the same old government come here and talk about respect for workers, I can assure you that workers in this province have not forgotten this government's record when it comes to negotiating fairly, and that the parents in my community have not forgotten because their kids still do not have extracurriculars in their schools, and that's a result of very poor decision-making by this government. Nevertheless, we want to give them a chance to try to turn things around.

In response to the throne speech, I heard a lot of good things in there—a lot of talk, a lot of talk about talk, a lot of talk about conversations. Frankly, Speaker, when I talk to people and listen to people in my riding, people are desperate for action. They're desperate to see results come out of this Legislature. I think that we've been fairly clear—Andrea Horwath and the NDP have been quite clear—that we'll support the throne speech. It puts out some good concepts, but we actually need to see some concrete things in the budget. We've put forward some good ideas, things that matter to people across this province to make life easier, to make life more affordable. We want to see this government take these ideas seriously.

We want to see more affordable auto insurance in this province. People cannot pay their bills. The Premier may have forgotten to put “food” in the title of her ministry, but we've also seen that food has been totally forgotten by this government in terms of making sure that people can put food on the table. We need to make sure that we see those results in the budget.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning and respond to the comments from the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. When you contrast those to the comments we've just heard from the member from Davenport, you see two different approaches. One, I think, is a healthy approach; one is a positive approach; one is the approach that the people of Ontario would like us to bring to the table. The member from Davenport—if I could summarize his comments, what I took out of them is, “We don't agree on everything. We think you can probably do better on some things, but we're prepared to try to work with you as a government.”

When I listened to the first speaker, the speaker from Northumberland–Quinte West, I got this: “The sky is falling. Everything is wrong. The school system is in chaos. Health care is in chaos. I did a survey”—which I'd love to see. I think you should share that survey, certainly with the minister. Bring the survey into the House. We'd all love to have a look at it. That's what people in Ontario

are expecting us to do. If you've got information from your constituents, bring it into the House—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The members are all aware that we go through the Chair. We don't have cross-dialogue and arguments between each other.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will determine that. You come through the Chair.

And you: Don't respond directly across to the member. You know the rules. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker.

To get back to what I was trying to say: The approach we bring to this House is equally as important as the substance of the throne speech. I think the throne speech reached out to the other two parties. People in Ontario would like us to work on a number of priorities: jobs; the economy; making sure that everybody in the province of Ontario gets treated in an equitable way. Can we work together as three parties to ensure that happens? It appears, from the comments I've heard, that one party is showing a willingness to do that. The other—it's just the same old same old.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure to rise in the House, and it's good to be back. Again, I would like to extend my congratulations to the new ministers and the increase of government by 22%.

Having listened to the speech from the throne, personally I found it somewhat condescending. I also found it to be full of a lot of different platitudes. Premier Wynne's statement initially was encouraging to me, when I heard “a new way forward.” However, it's still more of the same.

Let's look at the stats. Right now, there are over 600,000 Ontarians out of work. The government will say that they've also created 300,000 jobs, public service jobs. Let's talk about ability to pay. Who pays for those public service jobs? Well, the taxpayers do.

Let's talk about debt for a moment. The debt, when this government came into being, was about \$125 billion, back in 2003. Unfortunately, on the backs of taxpayers that debt has just skyrocketed 220% over the last 10 years, somewhere in the neighbourhood—that could be escalating anywhere from \$275 billion to upwards of \$311 billion; a huge increase in the debt, and on the backs of taxpayers.

We talked about agriculture. Agriculture is huge in my area, and of course there's very little mentioned about that. But one thing I would like to make mention of: There was talk about downloading, allowing municipalities to have greater say. You know what? We, as a caucus, put forward motions on this floor, asking the government to put moratoriums on wind turbines, asking the government to give municipalities a say in whether they want turbines or not. My area now has over 300 turbines. In my opinion, it's too little, too late. We need a new change, and the PCs will provide that change.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I too want to extend congratulations to the new Premier and the ministers in their new roles. It's nice to see the new faces. It will be also enjoyable to start building some bridges so that I myself can start helping my constituents who are in desperate need in Algoma-Manitoulin.

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I enjoyed the throne speech. I have to say I enjoyed it because it touched on a lot of everything, but the specifics are not there. That's definitely something that I'm going to be focusing on—seeing how that throne speech is going to materialize into the actual budget that is going to be coming—because that's the important part. It's what's going to come out of that throne speech, and how that is going to assist the people of Algoma-Manitoulin and also the people of Ontario.

I enjoy listening to the debate on the throne speech, and that's one thing. I've listened to the government and I've listened to the Conservative Party, but when we do that, you listen, you kind of gauge yourself as far as what people are thinking and where the government is going to be coming with certain policies and the reaction that the Conservative Party has towards this. I choose to say that we can do something right now. I don't want to say that not until we come into power will we be able to do something. I choose to believe that we will do something where we can do something efficiently right now for all of our communities, and we need to get those results right away, not when we come into power. We need to get it done now because that's what Ontarians are expecting of us. We need to roll up our sleeves, we need to get focused as far as what we need to do, and we need to get this accomplished.

I like the nice words of having a genuine commitment, and I like hearing what my counterparts are saying as well. But until we actually get focused on what we need to accomplish here, we need to make sure that we look at everything that's going to be here. It is only responsible for us as the NDP to look at this budget, but we will hold you to the fire on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland-Quinte West has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again, I want to thank the members from Oakville and Davenport and also my esteemed colleague Mr. Nicholls, from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

What I'm hearing—and I like to listen because the fact of the matter is, you have to step back and listen to what is actually being said, but more important is what is actually being done. This government, unfortunately, has not learned their lesson. They're not listening or doing, and that's rather unfortunate.

I know my esteemed colleagues here in the third party, the NDP, have good intent in wanting to work with the Liberal Party. They're always optimistic that the Liberal Party is going to do something they can support, maybe

the budget, but unfortunately, the fact of the matter is, the governing party and the same old Premier that we've had for the last decade are not going to change. They're not going to change. They're not going to listen to the people of this province. They're not going to actually do anything substantive that is going to improve the lives of 600,000 individuals who woke up this morning without a job. They're not going to do anything that is going to improve the spending that this government spends. So, unfortunately, we can't trust this Liberal government—

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It is a pleasure to stand up and speak in response to the speech from the throne. I am grateful to have this opportunity to speak to it and to raise a northern perspective.

As I told my constituents, my initial reaction was surprise and then disappointment. Surprise because, as it appears, this government has been listening; at least they've been doing that much. They touched on a number of issues that are important to northerners and to people across the province. But then disappointment because when you listened closely to the speech from the throne, you noticed that yes, they had mentioned broad issues, just broad strokes of some of the key priorities, but there was a failure to commit, and that's what's really frustrating. So, really, when you scrutinized it, it was a hollow speech and one that didn't provide much in the way of solutions to our problems.

It did touch on a number of issues, as I said. It committed to having an aboriginal focus: sharing in resources, closing the gap with First Nations, Métis and Inuit children; and a commitment to energy conservation. It also touched on home care, which is very big in the northwest; youth employment; hydro prices, also something very big in the northwest; auto insurance rates; and economic development. But again, that's all it did: touch on these issues.

When it comes to a vision, a plan or even a direction, we're left looking for answers in the Premier's chair, and really, what we've been left with is basically the sound of crickets just chirping in the distance. There's no plan. There's no vision. That's what's truly disappointing.

So other than it being a desperate attempt to rebrand the same old Liberal government as a new one, we're left with hollow phrases. Here are some quotes that I pulled in terms of any kind of commitment in the throne speech: understanding and expanding “access to home care”—very vague concepts; “protecting individuals against fraud and working to reduce” auto “insurance rates”; working “to evaluate corporate tax compliance”; and to work with partners to help young people “find placements, internships and co-op programs.” It's not exactly the strong language that we're looking for; again, no real commitment to any of these really important concepts.

Really what it did was it just made a mockery. That's what I felt like; I felt like I was kind of mocked. I think people in the northwest felt they were mocked. Again, there's a recognition that these are some of the issues, but

it seemed as though the government wasn't really committed to making any changes.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Lip service.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Lip service; exactly. I was kind of left with the impression that the government knows what the problems are, but they almost seem to hope that we go to the polls quickly enough, before the electorate figures out that they don't really have a plan.

Another analogy I was thinking about is, essentially this government is banking on the new-car smell, on making the odour of the last eight or 10 years of neglect kind of go away and hoping that with a new mandate we won't suffer from buyer's remorse. But that's just not acceptable.

I wanted to start off by talking a little bit about northwestern Ontario and how this throne speech really affects our area. Truth be told, there's not a lot in this throne speech that really offers very much for those of us living in the northwest. There's not a lot in this speech that offers much for anyone in Ontario, but for those of us in the north who are used to fighting for table scraps from the province of Ontario, there's literally nothing. Other than suggesting that northern and rural voices will be heard, the north is only mentioned twice, and both times it was only mentioned in passing—

Interjection: That's more than agriculture.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Yes, that's true. And both times, it was lumped in with just about every other area of this province.

To be honest, we had higher expectations, especially because while the new Premier was campaigning, there was a lot of talk about northern Ontario, about understanding our issues and really raising expectations that there would be some movement. This Premier does claim to be, as I said, in tune with northern voices, but she also claims to be in tune with rural voices, southern voices, urban voices. Let's just put it this way: If you have a voice, the Premier claims to be in tune with it. To me, that's suggesting that the government continues to feel that a one-size-fits-all policy really does fit all, and that's simply not the case. There are many different regions in Ontario today, and unfortunately, we're not all being treated equally. This is a real problem, especially in the northwest.

You can't run a government based on a "we can win without ..." approach and cater only to narrow interests that have enough power to re-elect you time and time again. That's really the government that we've had for the last eight years, and it simply hasn't worked. Good government looks beyond those narrow interests and governs for the whole province. It shows leadership, and it goes in a direction that suits all of those whom it serves. But we haven't had that type of leadership in Ontario for decades, and it's literally tearing this province apart.

The first step is to give those who are feeling disenfranchised a voice, to look at the system and to see the source of the problems. If we do that in Ontario, we see that the problem really is the electoral system: the idea of

representation by population with no attempt to compensate for regional cleavages or difference. It's very unjust to have one riding that can be, for instance, more than 350,000 square kilometres, with more than 70 municipal councils and First Nations, where another riding can be only a few city blocks or a small portion of one municipality.

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In the throne speech, the government does say that they will work to eliminate issues like the gas plant cancellation by doing more advance consultation, which is a nice idea, but the better way to ensure that hundreds of millions of dollars aren't wasted on narrow partisan interests is to create a system where the government cannot be so focused on one small area of the province. Five ridings: That really could be the balance of power.

We have a system that encourages catering to narrow regional interests. Oftentimes, that leads to one part of the province imposing its will on another part—areas where they don't live, areas where they don't work, areas where they probably will never visit—because they have louder voices, because they have better resources and because the electoral system discriminates based on population. This isn't just the case for northwestern Ontario; it's the case for northeastern Ontario, central Ontario, rural Ontario—we're all trapped in a relationship with Toronto, Mississauga and the rest of the GTA, in the northwest, and most of us would like out of this relationship. We'd like autonomy, but we don't have the clout or the power to be in control of our own destiny.

By contrast, in my region what most of us would really like to do is join Manitoba. If we were to do that, we could expect to have five or seven ridings that would have a significant amount of influence on the legislative agenda. We would also have a province that would represent our needs more closely. Of course, that's contrasting to what we have now, which is one riding. What happens is, when we only have, basically, one riding to represent the diverse issues and concerns that we have, we have bills like the Far North Act and the Species at Risk Act, where there are some narrow interests that are influencing the agenda. We need some balance.

If you break it down even further, there are rural areas that find themselves lumped in with large urban ridings and they're just not given the population. We see that also in the north, where there are communities like Atikokan, Red Rock, Nipigon and Terrace Bay, and they're lumped in with larger centres like Thunder Bay, so there are even some of those challenges. What I'm saying, just to be clear, is that what we need to do is if we can't make changes to the electoral system, what we can do is make changes to the Legislature.

One of the best things that we could do is to create a northern committee, where we could have those voices that are brought forward and we could have legislation that impacts certain areas. We could start with the north; we could maybe have other committees that represent other areas of the province and they could, as my colleague says, kind of do a road test: see how the proposed

legislation would affect these areas of the province. That's something that would be inexpensive, it's something that we could do to achieve some immediate solutions and it's one that I strongly would encourage the Premier to go ahead with. It's just not acceptable for the Premier to decide to, instead of doing something that would represent the democratic will of northern Ontario, set up a very exclusive committee made up of only a couple of people belonging to one particular political party. That goes completely against the spirit of the northern committee, which would have representatives from all political stripes who would be involved.

I'm not sure if we're still going one more minute. One more minute? Okay.

Again, we have an opportunity for change. The Premier has done a lot to raise the expectations of people in northern Ontario, but there hasn't been very much that's been delivered. Really, after all of the conversations and the relationships—there's been a lot of talk of these two concepts, and after all these conversations that the Premier has had with northern Ontario, we had really hoped that we would see some of our priorities make their way into some of the government's priorities, and we really haven't seen that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River, and I'll remind her that she has the floor when the debate resumes.

Debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm delighted to welcome to the Legislature today Mrs. Natalie Giordano and page Alexander's sister—that's his mum—Anjelica Giordano, to enjoy an opportunity to hear what's going to happen in question period today. Thank you very much for joining us.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to introduce Susan Violin, who is the mother of Charlie Violin. Congratulations on Charlie's appointment and welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome two political science students from the University of Toronto. Colin Campbell is visiting here today by way of Don Valley East and Amani Rauff is here by way of Mississauga–Streetsville. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Good morning, I'm always pleased to introduce people who come and visit from the Windsor-Essex region. Today we have Tom Touralias, who is the director of engineering and infrastructure with the town of Lakeshore, who, of course, has been here in the last couple of days for the ROMA/OGRA conference, so some of you may have met with him in the last couple of days. Tom, welcome.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of Daniel Forestell, from Blessed Sacrament Catholic School in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence. His family is visiting from north Toronto to see their son in action; Lisa Shrenk-Forestell, Paul Forestell and Daniel's brother Matthew and sister Sarah are all visiting the Legislature from north Toronto. Welcome.

Hon. David Zimmer: I want to acknowledge one of the Legislature's new pages, Stephanie Tom, who is from my riding of Willowdale, and to welcome her family, who have braved the weather to visit us here at the Legislature. Stephanie's parents, Christopher and Julie Tom, are here in the members' gallery. Joining them are Evelyn Tom, Stephanie Chen-Wong, and Stephanie's grandparents George and Susan Wong, both respected elders in the Wong Family Association.

Hon. John Milloy: I know members will want to join me in welcoming former page Mary Stuart and her mother, Christine Purdon, who are visiting from the great riding of Kitchener Centre today.

Hon. Liz Sandals: About to join us—I don't think they're here quite yet—are four representatives from the Ontario Student Trustees' Association with us this morning. They're Jacob Pullia, Noah Parker, Hiram Zafari and Kourosh Houshmand.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I want to call your attention to a memo that Ken Coran, the head of the OSSTF, sent out to his membership on February 24, particularly page 4. Mr. Coran indicates that you have a central table that is going to work to utilize the Ontario Labour Relations Act process “that allows mid-term amendments to collective agreements.”

Can you please tell us what Mr. Coran means by utilizing “mid-term amendments to collective agreements”?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to commend the student trustees who came in to meet with me and the Minister of Education this morning to talk about the extracurriculars that are coming back in their schools and the schools that they're hearing from and students. I made it very clear that when I was privileged to begin to be the Premier that I would be reaching out to the leadership, that I would be asking them to come in to talk to us about how we could move forward, how we can put in place a better process going forward and make sure that our students have the supports that they need in their schools.

The fact that OSSTF has been willing to engage with us, that they're going to have an ongoing conversation with us, the fact that they understand that there is no more money to put into the system at this point is a very positive step forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think, Speaker, it should give us pause that the Premier didn't even attempt to answer my very direct and simple question. I'm concerned that it goes beyond simply reaching out. I'm worried that the Premier is handing over the keys to the education system to the teacher union bosses. I think there's a good basis for this.

When you were education minister, you gave the teachers a 10.4% salary increase and 12.5% to the secondary panel in 2008, at a time when we were in a deep recession. We were \$20 billion in debt and many families—the 85% not on the government payroll—had pay losses, pay freezes or lost their jobs. Instead of being chagrined about that, you seemed to celebrate that.

Let me put the question again. Mr. Coran basically is referencing the ability to open up the current agreement to seek improvements from the teacher union perspective. Since he can't do that on his own, the Premier or her education minister must have given an indication you're open to that. Premier, will you close the door on this or are you open to changing the collective agreement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear, Mr. Speaker, that there is no more money to put into these contracts. I've been very clear about that, and the leadership of OSSTF understands that and has been willing to engage in a conversation with us.

I've also been clear that there needs to be a new collective bargaining process in place. There needs to be a process that recognizes the provincial level, recognizes the local level, and that that needs to be formalized.

There were other issues, Mr. Speaker, that OSSTF had identified. These are not—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —money to the system and we have said that we would engage in a conversation with them about those issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is that we need—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First of all, time's up. Second of all, right after I speak, you just carry on as if I didn't even say anything, so I would appreciate at least acknowledgment for a few seconds.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. I listened very closely to the Premier's response and my concerns have become stronger. You're parsing words here. You did not say no. You have left the door open, clearly, to revisiting the collective agreement. I hope that you will take this opportunity to actually shut this down once and for all and say that's off the table. You haven't done so to date.

Other concerns I have on Mr. Coran's letter: He talks about the consequences of taking on the teachers' union, and then he lists a number of the results of his actions. Specifically, he claims and boasts that he stole the ability

of the Liberals to form a majority government; he boasted he influenced Dalton McGuinty's decision to resign his premiership; he boasted he kept Laurel Broten from seeking the leadership of her party; and he boasted they forced the repeal of Bill 115 when the Liberals fully intended to keep it on the books for three years.

The union boss is practically chortling. This kind of political arrogance by the union leaders, I think, has no part in the education system in the province of Ontario. Why do you want to give even more power to the unions?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's interesting. I actually wouldn't expect the Leader of the Opposition, on this particular issue—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would not actually expect the Leader of the Opposition to understand why we think it's important for the government to be able to work in partnership with the people who work in our schools, because my experience of the party opposite is that they really don't believe in or support publicly funded education.

One of the reasons that many of us got involved in provincial politics was because, under that government, the previous government, there was a relationship in tatters between the provincial government and the education sector.

We believe in publicly funded education, Mr. Speaker. We are going to work in partnership with the education sector. That is absolutely part of our DNA as Liberals. We're going to continue to do that, and that is in the best interests of the students in our schools. I would expect the Leader of the Opposition to at least support that.

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TEACHERS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to call the Premier's attention to a second rather odious document, and that's the ETFO provincial takeover bulletin in the name of another one of the Premier's personal friends and allies, Sam Hammond. Mr. Hammond says on page 6 of the memo that teachers "deemed to be in non-support during a job action may be subject to disciplinary procedures that include the possibility of monetary fines of up to \$500 per day." The Premier is aware that they have also talked about naming and shaming teachers who defy the wishes of the union bosses.

I want to give the Premier the opportunity to divorce herself from these types of tactics by the unions. Will you stand in your place, Premier, as members of the PC caucus do, and condemn the fines that unions have threatened on teachers—

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to have a conversation with one of the organizations, the Leader of the Opposition can do that. He can talk to ETFO, he can talk to OSSTF about their internal politics. What I think is important, Mr. Speaker, is that we recognize that the teachers in our schools, the support staff in our schools, deserve our respect. They deserve a government that is willing to work with them—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Chatham, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —to make sure that the students—and the students are here—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Students deserve a government that will work for them.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's right—and the student trustees—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much to the member from Nepean–Carleton, because the student trustees who are here today, who represent students across the province, Mr. Speaker, came in to talk to us today about the reality that in their schools, extracurriculars are coming back. They are concerned that in some places they're not and they wanted to talk with us about how to celebrate what's coming back and encourage teachers to continue and resume those activities. It's a very good-news story, Mr. Speaker, for the students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess there's one thing the Premier and I agree on; the Premier and I agree that there is an imbalance in the power between the union leaders and front-line teachers, principals and parents. The problem is that the Premier thinks we need to give more authority to the union leadership. We stand with the classroom teachers. We stand with the students. We stand with the parents and the taxpayers who fund the system.

Some have said that the teacher-union bosses have no greater ally than Kathleen Wynne; they've had no greater ally in the Premier's chair in their history. I want to know where your loyalties actually lie. How can you actually not respond to my questions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —Sam Hammond? How can you not condemn the notion of fining a teacher who wants to stay after school to help out a special-needs kid learn the opportunity to read? How can you not condemn that? Whose side are you on?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, my allegiance and my loyalty lies with the students; it lies with the kids

in our schools who deserve to have the most supportive, the most enriched environment possible.

My other loyalty lies with civil society. The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition completely negates, by his attack on organized labour, by his attack and his characterization of people who have come together to improve working conditions—he denies the gains that have been made over hundreds of years: safety; working conditions; a guarantee that we will have safe places to work all across all sectors, not just in education but across all sectors. He denies the gains that have been made by organized labour. I reject that notion categorically, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The question, Speaker, that I have for the Premier is a question of where her loyalties truly lie. When we see this type of union political arrogance displayed by Mr. Hammond, by Mr. Coran, the union bosses, I would expect a Premier who wants to stand up for students to condemn those tactics—they are odious tactics—and to stand up for teachers—and unions.

Premier, they positively boast—and mock your former education minister and what they did to her career. I wonder where your loyalties lie when you simply accept that and not stand up for one of your colleagues within cabinet.

Premier, my final question—my dad was a principal, and he was a damn good principal. He had the ability to decide the teachers that would be in the classroom, to decide to reward those teachers and decide who would be hired out of those for long-term leave.

Why are you stripping that power away from principals to decide who the best teachers are? Why are you handing that power instead to the union activists? I think principals should make those decisions.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I don't know how old the dad of the Leader of the Opposition is, but his dad would have been part of a federation if he was a principal before Mike Harris was the Premier. So he was part of that organized labour organization that created the working conditions, that created the supports, for students in our schools.

Mr. Speaker, my loyalty, our loyalty, lies with the students in the classroom. We want to make sure that government is working in partnership with the education sector, with school boards, with teachers, with support staff, to make sure that students have the supports they need so they can succeed—and part of that is having extracurriculars. That's why it was so important that we engage with the leadership—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and make sure that we can re-establish that respectful conversation, so that we can have some success going forward. That's what has happened. I would expect them to be celebrating.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. As the Premier knows, I've put forward some concrete proposals to get some results in this session. I'm wondering whether the Premier will commit to making life more affordable by giving the Financial Services Commission a mandate to reduce auto insurance rates in this province by 15%.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll have the Minister of Finance speak to the specifics, but I have been very clear that this is one of the issues that I think we can work together on, because we have recommendations from the anti-fraud task force. I've been clear that I'm interested in having those implemented. I'm also interested, if there's money to be saved by the implementation of those recommendations, that we sit down with the industry, we make sure that those savings are passed on to the premium holders. We agree that there's work to be done in the auto insurance industry, and I think it's something that we can work on together.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In 2010, the Liberal government changed the rules around auto insurance benefits. As a result, insurance companies were able to save \$2 billion a year already, but drivers saw their premiums rise in this province. Now we're being told that stopping fraud is the answer to getting rates down. Does the Premier really believe that putting more money in insurance companies' pockets, with no strings attached, is going to make insurance more affordable for the drivers of the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. Let's be clear: We are in the midst of trying to renegotiate and understand how we can lower rates all around. We've already had a discussion about this in the last year; we've got a report before us to look at the root cause of those problems. We also recognize that auto rates went up 43% in the last three years that the Conservative government was in power, and they went up 26% when the NDP was in power.

In the last year, the rates actually went down by 0.26%. So we have made some headway, but more needs to be done. I recognize what you've asked us to do, and I'll work with you. I encourage that discussion so we can look for better ways to make it more affordable for all concerned.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Another round of "no strings attached" giveaways are not going to help drivers who are feeling the pinch. I need to know, straight out: Is the Premier going to defend the status quo that leaves everyday people in this province paying more and more for insurance every year, or is she ready to deliver some real, concrete results for drivers?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We aren't going to stay in the status quo; we recognize that we need to improve this. So

we are going to take every step necessary to do that. We'll work with you, and with all of you, to try to make it happen. We're working with the industry; we're having those discussions as well. We recognize that the commitment that we've made in their recommendations is to require the insurance to provide claimants a reason for denying the claim. We recognize that we need to increase the role of the claimants in those fraud-prevention activities, and we need to prohibit the overcharging of goods and services provided for accident victims.

Let's be clear: In Ontario, things are more expensive than they are in any other parts of Canada. Those are the issues that we've got to resolve as well, and we'll take those steps necessary.

I do appreciate the recommendations brought forward, but we can't make this a band-aid solution. We have to get at the causes of the issue so that we can resolve them and get over the systemic issue that's creating the problem.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On the 22nd of March, 2012, the then Minister of Transportation said about New Democrats' efforts to bring fairness to the auto insurance industry this: "What this bill does is it opens a dialogue. It starts a discussion about a badly understood area that I think we all need to know more about."

1050

We can discuss it, but at the end of the day, we know it costs insurance companies about \$226 less per person to insure a safe driver, but that hasn't stopped premiums from going up. Why does the Premier think it's more important to give auto insurance companies a no-strings-attached giveaway than it is to give safe drivers a break?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Finance has said we're not happy with the status quo. We know there's more that needs to be done.

I understand that the leader of the third party needs to get her issues on table, but we've said that we want to address this; we want to deal with this. We believe that there are changes that need to be made. We want to implement the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force, and as the Minister of Finance has said, we want to get to the root of the problem. We don't want to just band-aid it over; we want to make sure that we understand what's causing the rates to go up, what the issues are in the system, and work with the industry to make sure that those savings are passed along to the premium holders. I think that's the issue that the leader of the third party is addressing: How do we make sure that the premium holders see the benefit of the changes that are made in the system?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are ready for action that actually puts them first for a change. They saw the Liberal government take action in 2010 to save the auto insurance industry \$2 billion a year. That's \$226 the insurance companies are saving on each and every

driver in Ontario thanks to the largesse of the Liberal Party.

But Brian from the GTA knows what that means for everyday drivers. I'm going to quote from something he sent us: "Over the last three years, my insurance has gone up \$20 a month every year like clockwork."

Will the Premier agree that making auto insurance more affordable for drivers like Brian by reducing their rates by 15% this year is an achievable goal and that we'll see it in the budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: There has been a number of recommendations that have been made by the NDP. Certainly the private member's bill that has come forward has talked about some of the ideas and solutions, many of which, however, would create greater rates in the other parts of the province. We know that there has to be an understanding as to what's going to happen, and in some respects, we have to be more restrictive, especially with those who are drunk drivers and others. Some of the suggestions would actually reduce the rates for those who have violated the system. That can't happen. We don't want to then penalize those who do have a good rating. Those are things that we've got to resolve, and that has to take a bit more thought, so we need to have those discussions on an ongoing basis.

But, as I've said, we recognize—

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: And we'll work with you too. We are going to do what's necessary to make this work.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Linda from Brampton knows the real story. I'll quote from something she sent us—

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe the Liberals don't like to listen to the people of Ontario, but New Democrats certainly do.

"I'm 48 years of age. I have been driving since I was 16. I have a clean record—no accidents—ever...."

"My insurance has just increased to \$3,800 a year. This is outrageous.

"My wages are not increasing at such a rate."

I'm sure Linda agrees with everyone in this Legislature that we need to crack down on fraud. I think everybody agrees about that. But the Liberal government has already given auto insurance companies \$2 billion a year in savings.

Will the Premier finally commit to saving drivers 15% on their insurance rates this year?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As I've already explained, our rates actually went down last year, not to the extent that we would like and certainly not at 15%. But we also have to recognize that we need to do even better for the long term, and some of the suggestions being made, unfortunately, are going to actually increase rates for other parts

of Ontario. We've got to be fair right across the province—but that's what's going to happen.

To all members: We understand the proposal being put forward. We are looking at ways in which we can reduce the rates even further, but we can't make it just arbitrary. We have to make sure it makes sense for the long term, and that's what we'll do. We'll review it, and we'll work in conjunction with all parties.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Premier: Premier, I listened intently to your responses to my leader, Tim Hudak, who was firmly standing behind students in this chamber, asking whether or not you would condemn a memorandum by Sam Hammond of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, who threatened to name and shame, sanction and fine members who decided they would put students first and continue on with extracurriculars. I was shocked by your stunning silence.

We also have mentioned several times in this chamber a memo that was leaked to us on Sunday from OSSTF that took credit for a number of things, including the resignation of Dalton McGuinty, the demotion of Laurel Broten and the NDP win in Kitchener–Waterloo. Things have changed, Premier, after they gave you a \$10,000 donation to your campaign. The question we have before us today is: Why won't you put students first? Why are you standing behind these union leaders? What did you promise them in exchange for that money?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not appropriate. I ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually think the question that is before us is: Why isn't everyone in this House supporting the notion that students should have their extracurriculars back? Why isn't the member opposite pleased that the OFSAA swim meet is going to be held? Why isn't the member opposite pleased that in schools around the province, teachers are working with students and giving them permission slips so that they can take part in extracurriculars? Why isn't the member opposite pleased that as of Monday, there were extracurriculars coming back into schools? That's what the student trustees talked to us about this morning. Why isn't the party opposite very pleased that government is working in partnership with the education sector so that students can have their extracurriculars?

I am committed to making sure that that partnership works in the best interest of the education sector—teachers, support staff and students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's very clear that this Premier thinks it's okay for union leaders to sanction their members for helping students—and withholding extracurriculars. That Premier knows full well that not all extracurriculars will be restored. She knows that they're not

there in elementary schools at the moment. She also knows that her friend Ken Coran cannot guarantee that all of his teachers will be giving extracurricular activities again. We also know that this could happen in the future if there is further labour disruption and those union leaders get angry at either this government or another one.

So I ask her: Why did she stand there yesterday, firmly behind the union bosses, thumbing her nose at Ontario students, when all we want for our kids is the best education possible, a full education for our students? Why does she stand behind—

Interjections.

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

I will repeat my charge from yesterday, and that is: We race to the top and not to the bottom. I do realize that emotions are involved when we talk about these kinds of things, but I would also challenge us to continue to treat each other with the utmost respect.

I will not tolerate, when I do get quiet, people starting it all over again immediately after I finish speaking.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No matter the decibel level, no matter the attack, no matter the rhetoric, I know that it's my responsibility to work with my colleagues, to work with the Minister of Education, to make sure that we have the best working relationship possible with the education sector. There is no doubt in my mind—I believe it absolutely, viscerally—that if we are going to continue to have the best education system in the English-speaking world, if our students are going to continue to graduate from high school and go on to university, to college, to trades, if we're going to have that economic growth that we need, if we're going to have the jobs that we need, we've got to have that partnership with the education sector. It's all interconnected. That's why it's very important that we have extracurriculars in our schools and we continue to work with the education sector.

1100

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. More than a year after the crisis at Ornge emerged, Ontarians are still wondering: How come it went so wrong?

Yesterday, the air ambulance bill was reintroduced, and it gives the government greater power, such as the ability to appoint a supervisor. But the reality is that the government ignored problems for years, in spite of whistle-blowers and in spite of warnings. You did not use the power you already had.

Can the Premier explain to Ontarians, after hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted, after the ministers failed in her basic responsibility to provide oversight over Ornge, why would anyone believe that her government would take action this time around?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are taking action. I think everyone in the Legislature agrees that the leadership at Ornge let the people of Ontario down, that what happened there was unacceptable, and we've heard the Minister of Health speak to that many, many times.

The legislation that is being introduced addresses those issues and puts more oversight in place and tightens up the monitoring of the organization. That's exactly what a responsible government does, Mr. Speaker: It learns from situations, puts in place the remedies for those issues, and works to make sure that they never, ever happen again. That's what that legislation is about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ontarians are once again told that they should trust the government to do the right thing, even though with Ornge this government has consistently failed to do so.

In the so-called new era that is upon us of full accountability and transparency measures, all of them should be on the table. Yet Ornge won't be subject to Ombudsman oversight and it cannot be called to a government committee. Some would say that there are loopholes big enough to fly a helicopter through in this bill.

If the Premier is serious about getting Ornge back on track, if she's serious about rebuilding the confidence in our air ambulance service, she will commit to full transparency and accountability, and that means allowing Ombudsman oversight and committee access.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As a result of much of the discussion that has happened in this House on this issue, there were changes made to the legislation. The legislation will allow the appointment of special investigators or a supervisor when it's in the public interest to do so; appoint members to Ornge's board of directors; prescribe terms of the performance agreement; provide whistle-blowing protection for staff who disclose information to an inspector; and also subject Ornge to freedom-of-information requests, which I think is something that the member opposite had looked for.

There has been an impact that the member opposite has had on this legislation. I think that is a good indicator of the government learning from a situation that should not have taken place and working to make sure it doesn't happen again. We thank the member opposite for input into that legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question? The member from Scarborough—Rouge River.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm quite aware of what my responsibilities are.

The member took his seat, so I will recognize the member from Nipissing.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday, we delved into the Oakville gas plant

documents, code-named Project Vapour. As a cabinet member, you had these documents back in 2011, so let's look a little deeper into the pages and let's see what you can recall.

This one, entitled Confidential Advice to the Cabinet, should help ring a bell. It goes into great detail for you about Project Vapour and even offers a sample news release with a particular spin, which I suppose you agreed to.

Premier, will you acknowledge you were quite familiar with Oakville's Project Vapour back in 2011?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the government House leader.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the member from Northumberland–Quinte West are warned.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the honourable member knows that the issue of documents and document disclosure is a topic that is being looked at by a committee of the Legislature.

It's interesting that the honourable member talks about press releases. I'd like to share a press release with him and the rest of the Legislature. Saturday, September 24, 2011, just before the 2011 election, a statement by Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate Geoff Janoscik on the Loreland Avenue power plant press conference: "Unlike the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, the only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to elect a Tim Hudak Ontario PC government. A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant."

Again, Mr. Speaker, I bring this forward because we're looking forward to the committee to hear about the policy analysis and the costing that was done by the Progressive Conservatives, and we look forward to all their documents coming forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Premier: On September 25, you stood in this House and said all of the documents have been released or the documents are available. However, it's clear you knew of the existence of Project Vapour documents over a year earlier. Premier, you're saying one thing, but the absolute and complete opposite of that is proven here to be accurate. I realize your advisers are telling you to keep quiet about Oakville, but that's not good enough for Ontarians.

Premier, will you strike the select committee you've already agreed to in writing so we can finally get to the truth from you?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, there is a committee of the Legislature which is looking into the document issue. The Premier has indicated her co-operation; our government has indicated their overall co-operation. But, again, I've brought to the House press releases, news articles, quotations and speeches. We've gone to Twitterverse; we've gone to YouTube. All we've found over and over again is the opposition of the Progressive Conservative Party to both these plants and how they would cancel them if they won the election.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we're looking forward to hearing from experts that they consulted, to seeing the documents they bring forward of what I imagine was a very detailed policy analysis and costing, as they have put so much weight on this issue.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Taxi drivers in Hamilton have lost their taxi insurer, causing unprecedented insurance rate increases. Some rates have gone from \$5,000 last year to \$18,000 this year with no change in the driver's record. Many have to park their taxis and their licences, leaving Hamilton with a significant loss of available taxi service.

Will the Premier require the Minister of Finance to direct the Financial Services Commission of Ontario to launch an investigation into why affordable insurance is not available for these struggling people?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. Again, I'll look into it, because if that's the case and if people are being put out of a job—and I don't appreciate or understand how it is that there are no taxis in Hamilton; my impression is that there are. So I have to understand more specifically what's causing this to take place, and, yes, I commit to looking into it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, this is yet another example of an auto insurance system that just isn't working for people or drivers. These are women and men who are working hard every day just to get by. For many of them, \$18,000 a year in new auto insurance premiums literally wipes them out.

Speaker, is the Premier—the Premier—ready to admit that this is a system that isn't working, and will she direct the Minister of Finance to ensure some real relief for these taxi drivers, who are in serious danger of losing their livelihoods?

Hon. Charles Sousa: My impression is it's not something that's exclusive to Hamilton; it's probably right across the urban centres of Ontario. There are issues, and I have spoken to a number of limousine and taxi companies. They recognize the input costs are at times prohibitive. That's one of the reasons that we're looking at auto insurance and finding ways to make them more competitive. Yet again, this is not something that is only exclusive to just the taxi drivers; it's actually something that has issues throughout. But I am looking into it and, as I said, I will commit to delving into your particular issue specifically.

1110

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question today is for the Minister of Education.

As we all know, today is Pink Shirt Day, and I'm very pleased the members of the Legislature are wearing pink to support a national anti-bullying initiative started in Nova Scotia after a grade 9 student was bullied in his school for wearing pink. Young people across Canada are wearing pink today to draw attention to the health effects of bullying.

According to a 2011 report by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, nearly one in three Ontario students report being bullied at school. These instances of bullying come with harmful effects. Our students feel isolated and are afraid to come to school. When students do not feel safe in school, they will not perform well. I know that it is important for all members in the House that we work towards eliminating bullying in our schools.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Please inform this House about what the government is doing to address bullying in our schools.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for the question and for her advocacy on behalf of the students in her constituency. I'd like to thank all the members—from all three parties, I would like to note—who are wearing pink today in recognition of Pink Shirt Day, because it is important that we all take a stand and say that we will not accept bullying in our schools and we will not tolerate it in our society. I'm so glad that students in Ontario are taking a stand today against bullying. All across Ontario, there are kids wearing pink.

All of our children deserve to learn in a safe, accepting and inclusive environment, and that's what I want for my grandchildren. They should not be afraid to go into the classroom, and that's why we have got the Accepting Schools Act against bullying.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Soo Wong: Initiatives like Pink Shirt Day show that our young people want to stand up to bullying. I know that the students are also doing the same in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt. But we know that bullying does not only happen in our classrooms; it occurs on the Internet, on websites like Facebook and Twitter. We also know that there have been tragic incidents of young people taking their lives because of bullying they have experienced in the classroom and online.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please inform this House of what our government is doing on combating bullying outside the classroom?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We know that bullying doesn't stop outside the walls of the school. What often happens at home at night can be just as damaging. That's why, for the first time, we've recognized cyberbullying in legislation. In our schools, if a principal believes that actions that occurred online had a negative impact on the school climate, the principal has the legislative authority to take action.

Within the Accepting Schools Act, we include cyberbullying explicitly as part of the definition of bullying. That allows the principal to deal with those things that take place outside of the school, but that's not all we're

doing to help our students. We've provided bullying-prevention training for up to 25,000 teachers and for 7,500 principals and vice-principals. We're also working with the Kids Help Phone people to have a service available 24-7 for our students.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. On September 25 last year, you stood in this House and, in defending the indefensible, made a shocking statement about the gas plant scandal. You said, "To my mind, we're dealing with a situation of manufactured discontent; that the opposition is deciding to create and fabricate." In other words, you blamed us. Well, let's look at what has happened since then: The former Premier and his energy minister have both resigned and now we're on our third round of document releases, despite assurances, including your own, that we had them all the first time.

After all of that, do you still believe that this \$1.3-billion scandal, which has outraged Ontarians, was still made up by us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I can only repeat for the honourable member that, on the issue of the production of documents—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order. Last warning.

Hon. John Milloy: On the production of documents, Mr. Speaker, there is a standing committee of the Legislature that, I believe, will begin its work into looking at it tomorrow, and they will have a chance to examine all the issues and call the witnesses they want coming forward.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's a little unclear what the opposition wants on this. First, we offer a standing committee; they say they don't want it. Then the member from Cambridge says that he doesn't want a public inquiry because it's too expensive, and then the member from North Bay holds a press conference saying they want a public inquiry. During the whole case, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. When I was sitting, I told the member from Leeds–Grenville that it was his last warning. I did not imply that it was a warning—but now he has one.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: As I say, Mr. Speaker, the member from Cambridge says a public inquiry is too expensive; the member from Nipissing says that he wants a public inquiry. We offer them a select committee, they say they want a select committee, and then they vote against it by going forward with a mean and vindictive motion.

While all of this is going on, we have the Leader of the Opposition standing up and pledging to vote against a budget that hasn't even been written yet.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's time the official opposition figured out what they need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Premier, I can't believe that on Pink Shirt Day, you referred this question to the biggest bully who has been bullying us since the last election—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I find that unacceptable. Withdraw.

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdrawn.

Premier, I still don't think you're taking this seriously. I want to remind you that we are asking for a select committee on Project Vapour or whatever code name you people are calling it this week. This \$1.3-billion scandal is the biggest in Ontario history. In the midst of a tight election campaign, you and your party decided to save a handful of Liberal seats, sacrificing a billion dollars of taxpayers' money.

You know what happened, because you co-chaired the campaign. So I'm asking you, will you admit today that you were wrong when you helped make that decision during the campaign? You were wrong in September when you blamed the opposition and you're wrong by refusing—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it was a tight election campaign. That's why the Mississauga South PC candidate engaged in robocalls. Again, let me remind you: "Hi there. This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I'm against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built.... Our team has been out knocking on doors every single evening for several months, talking about the power plant and making sure that we defeat the Liberals in this riding and put an end to their bad decisions."

As the Leader of the Opposition said, Mr. Speaker, if they had been elected, the power plant would have been "done, done, done."

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Families in London have been hit hard by manufacturing job losses. They saw jobs disappear overnight when Caterpillar pulled up stakes and now they're seeing it with Diamond Aircraft. The latest layoff announcement puts over 200 more families out in the cold in that community.

Can the Premier please explain to these workers why her government threw \$10 million at a foreign-owned company without ironclad job guarantees?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question coming from the leader of the third party. Of course, as she

alluded to, this government first and foremost is concerned for the workers and their families who have been affected by this layoff. It's clear: We all know and are sensitive to the fact that losing a job is never easy, particularly under these circumstances. Too many families in this province are still struggling, so there's a lot of work to do.

This reminds us of the work that this government is committed to, to keeping Ontario's economy vibrant and strong and, as was mentioned in the throne speech, economic growth and job creation is one of the top priorities. Its investments continue, and certainly, as I mentioned yesterday as well, with opportunities like the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund, we will continue to pursue opportunities. But this is never good news for the province.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the reality is that the workers in the manufacturing sector of this province are actually looking for a job strategy that works. I think everybody realizes that we can't save every job, but when people see companies handed public money, only to turn around and then lay off workers, they want some real answers. When will this government—

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The previous economic development and trade minister is having a hard time with this one, Speaker. Nonetheless, these people actually want some answers.

When will this government take our advice about actually incentivizing job creation and tying investment dollars to job guarantees in this province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's important to recognize that since the bottom of the recession in June 2009, this province and this government have created, together with the private sector, nearly 400,000 net new jobs.

I should point out that our commitment to the manufacturing and advanced manufacturing sector is strong. In fact, since the recession, Ontario has created nearly 32,000 new manufacturing jobs. This is such an important sector to the Ontario economy; it's the bedrock of our economy. Nearly 700,000 people are employed in it. But the news recently has been good. The jobs are coming back. In the first 10 months of 2012 alone, the manufacturing average employment increased by nearly 8,000 jobs, and our commitment through my ministry and through this government to continue to invest in our manufacturing sector remains strong, and we're beginning to see those results.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In Scarborough Southwest, there's quite a bit of co-operative housing. As I'm sure you are aware, currently, co-operative housing tenants and providers must take any disputes they may have through the legal system and cannot take

advantage of the less costly Landlord and Tenant Board, as is the case with most residential landlords and tenants. Additional legal fees associated with going through the court system can cost as much as \$5,000 per dispute and can be a lot for co-operative housing providers to take on.

I know that there has previously been legislation introduced in this House that would have worked to amend these issues. Mr. Speaker, could the minister please tell us what our government is doing now to ensure that a fairer system is in place to benefit our non-profit housing providers?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member for his question, and I want to say that our government certainly understands the very important role that co-op housing providers play in providing affordable housing in Ontario.

We also know that the current process for resolving co-op tenure disputes can be time-consuming and expensive for both the co-op housing providers as well as their members, which is why I'm pleased to inform the member in the House today that this afternoon I will be reintroducing the legislation that will amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act. If passed, this would allow co-ops to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve certain disputes, including persistent late payment of rent, illegal behaviour and willful damage.

Our co-op housing providers have told us that these proposed reforms are a high priority. They'd save them time and money and would relieve our courts of hearing approximately 350 co-op eviction cases per year, allowing them to devote those resources to other purposes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Minister. It is good to hear that our government is working to ease some of the burden that is facing our non-profit housing providers.

Minister, you mentioned that the proposed changes are important to our co-operative housing sector. I'm certain that they are, but could you please inform the House and my residents in Scarborough Southwest what discussions have gone on with the co-operative housing sector with regard to the proposed changes?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Going back to 2009, the ministry has been conducting substantial consultations with those in the co-operative housing sector and with the stakeholders. As many of us know, the co-op housing sector—in particular, Harvey Cooper, whom we all know and love, has been very vocal in his support for pushing for the proposed changes, and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, which represents the vast majority of over 550 non-profit co-ops in Ontario, is supportive of the proposals.

It's worth noting that the last time we introduced this legislation, we received support from my opposition colleagues across the aisle. I hope we can depend on them again to support this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continuing to work with our co-operative housing stakeholders and all mem-

bers to ensure a strong, viable co-operative housing sector in Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you have gone to great lengths to deflect and avoid talking about your role in the decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. Now, here's what we know: Just days before the 2011 election, the Liberal campaign team, of which you are co-chair, cancelled the Mississauga gas plant. We know that the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Duncan, admitted at committee that the decision was politically motivated, to save at-risk Liberal seats in Mississauga. We know that by your own numbers, the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga plants will cost at least \$230 million, while energy analysts say it will run as high as \$1.3 billion.

As the new Premier, you promised complete accountability on this scandal, including a select committee to investigate. How can you, in good conscience, stand here and not keep your promise to establish a select committee immediately?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, in 2011, three political parties made commitments in the election campaign that they would move the gas plants in both Oakville and Mississauga. We were fortunate enough to get elected and we did what we promised; we did what the other two parties promised: We relocated the gas plants.

We put the question of costs to the Ontario Power Authority. The Ontario Power Authority provided us with the documentation and the calculation of the cost. We made that information, which we received from the Ontario Power Authority, available to the opposition and the public. It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, you are off to a very rocky start. I don't think this is the way you planned your first few weeks. You could have prevented this by coming clean, by showing accountability, by showing respect and by being transparent. You made a commitment to the people of Ontario, and that commitment evaporated quicker than a June snow.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that the public's confidence is restored. That will not happen as long as you continue to claim that you have nothing to hide, while at the same time blocking a select committee that would get to the bottom of this scandal.

Will you finally put the public interest ahead of the interests of yourself and your party, do the right thing, and establish this select committee so it can get to the bottom of your scandal?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the opposition loves it when the Auditor General comes to this place with a report on a particular area of activity of the government. They will have the opportunity to see the report within a short number of weeks from the Auditor General. The Auditor General has the power to ask questions of anybody under oath. The Auditor General has access to every piece of paper in every ministry. He will report.

In addition to that, the other side, the opposition, voted to have a committee, the justice committee, look into all the document-related issues. They will have an opportunity, starting tomorrow and next week, to ask all the questions of anybody they want, under oath. When will they take yes for an answer?

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last March, the government, through its then Minister of Finance, committed to give Trillium benefit recipients the option of receiving the benefit as a lump sum or in monthly installments. This would give flexibility to seniors and families trying to make ends meet. Why is it that a year later, this government has failed to put in place this promised change?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. This is an issue. We did make that commitment that we would allow the public to have the option of receiving a lump sum payment or receiving it in advance by way of monthly payments. We've allowed, under the regulations and we actually increased the threshold, to enable that lump sum payment. More needs to be done in order for us to accommodate that request, and I'm looking into doing just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Next month people will be filing their income tax and it will be too late. When the government says they're committed to do it, we need to know when.

The government admitted that giving people choice helps lower-income Ontarians. Some families prefer the regularity of a monthly payment. Others, especially seniors, prefer a lump sum to help pay property taxes or other expenses. The government could have had the change in place and should have had the change in place by now. When will the government finally make good on this promise? You can't do it this year. Will you have it for next year?

1130

Hon. Charles Sousa: I agree, and I'm going to do everything I can to try to actually accelerate the process, if possible.

I know we're dealing with the federal, because of the tax issues. That's what's creating some of the delay. We're trying to find an innovative way by increasing the threshold to enable that choice to be made earlier than later.

But keep in mind—and to those who are watching—right now you're getting the monies upfront. I understand that people would prefer to have it by way of a lump sum payment. I want to make that option available to them. I'll work with both of you, from both sides, to try to put something—even if we can this year—so that we can accommodate that request.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, one of our responsibilities as a government and as custodian of our province's natural resources wealth is to pass its diversity on to the generations that follow us. This means taking proactive measures to preserve species of animals and plants whose continued existence would otherwise be threatened by human activity in Ontario.

This government updated the Endangered Species Act in 2007 for the first time in more than 35 years. The Endangered Species Act is critical to supporting the recovery of many species across the province that might otherwise die off forever and to protect Ontario's rich biodiversity.

Minister, please update the House about the status of the Endangered Species Act and its importance to protecting species at risk in the province of Ontario.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I want to just take a minute and thank the hard-working member from Mississauga–Streetsville for raising this very important issue. I was also surprised to hear the leader of the official opposition claim that Ontario is doing too much to protect species at risk across the province.

Our government's Endangered Species Act is a landmark piece of legislation and a leader in North America in the area of species and habitat protection. The act balances protections for species at risk in Ontario while continuing to promote economic development, sustainable agriculture and job creation in the province of Ontario.

The goal of the ESA is to promote responsible development that allows job creation and growth to move forward while ensuring the proper precautions are taken to support the survival of at-risk species and their habitats. The ESA is about balancing our economic interests and Ontario's environmental well-being. Protecting species at risk is a non-partisan issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, during the past five years since the implementation of the updated Endangered Species Act—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, please keep that somewhere else.

Mr. Bob Delaney:—governments, industries, conservation organizations and individuals have grown their body of expertise. They've identified challenges and opportunities for improving Ontario's ability to protect species of plants and wildlife—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General. The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Your ministry has recognized this and established a special panel to provide recommendations on how to improve the Endangered Species Act. How was this panel established—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. As some of my predecessors said, take it outside. It's very frustrating, particularly when somebody is that far away.

Please complete.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. Let's finish the question.

Minister, how was this panel established, what is the status of its work and how might its recommendations improve the Endangered Species Act?

Hon. David Orazietti: Thanks again to the member for the question. As he mentioned, our government established a special panel to provide recommendations on how to improve the ESA. The panel was made up of a very good cross-section of stakeholders. For the benefit of the members opposite, it included the following: the Ontario Forest Industries Association; the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association; the Ontario Waterpower Association; the Mazanaw-Lanark Forest company; as well as the Wildlands League, the Ontario infrastructure organization, the Ontario Home Builders' Association, the Ivey Foundation and the Savanta environmental consulting organization. So as you can see, there has been a very good cross-section of individuals making recommendations—29 recommendations, in fact—reaching consensus on a very important issue. Our priority continues—

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

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, you come to your position when Ontario faces an unprecedented fiscal mess, created by your party. Total expenditures are the highest they've ever been, interest payments cost \$11 billion a year and credit agencies have us on watch. All of this discourages investment, and every day of inaction risks prolonging our job crisis. Bottom line: We need to rein in spending. With 55 cents of every dollar spent on public sector wages, the PC Party has sensibly proposed an across-the-board public sector wage freeze to save taxpayers \$2 billion. The PC plan is clear.

When referring to your plan, you say, "I am encouraging that our discussions going forward will result in zero." Saying the word "encouraging" is the weakest excuse for a plan I've ever heard.

My question is: Finance Minister, will you support the PC proposal for a public sector across-the-board wage freeze and actually have a plan to rein in spending?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: There are a couple of things to put into perspective. We have now reduced our spending dramatically. We already have our deficit attack; it has been going down. We're making every effort necessary to continue to address our deficit as per our economic plan, but we've got to ensure that we also grow our economy.

But let's take into consideration what you're asking. You're asking for the result of what comes to a zero-zero wage freeze. We're getting that result, and we're doing it effectively. Even arbitrated deals are coming on at zero-zero, and that's what matters more. What matters is that we provide confidence in the system and that we continue to grow our economy while addressing our economic deficit, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

I'll take this quick moment to remind all of you that there is an event going on at noon hour for Special Olympian Diamond Jubilee Medals being distributed. All of the members who have members receiving medals have been notified.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I would like to take this opportunity to introduce some very special guests with us today. We have, from the Ontario branch of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, Dale Reagan, managing director; Harvey Cooper, manager of government relations; Diane Miles, manager of co-op services; Simone Swail, program manager, special initiatives; Judy Shaw, program manager of co-op services; and, from the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, Mike Chopowick, manager of policy. Welcome.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have great pride to introduce Brian Snyder from my riding, who is here to collect the Queen's Jubilee Medal today. I want to congratulate him on the win. He's in the west gallery.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd like to introduce Ron Johnson, chair of the board of governors of the College of Trades and former PC MPP for a riding very familiar to you, Mr. Speaker; also Bob Guthrie, registrar and chief executive officer for the college, and Tim Armstrong, who I don't think is here yet. Oh, here he is now. He's just having a seat. He's chair of the Ontario College of Trades appointments council. They're very hard-working people on behalf of the skilled trades.

Mr. Steve Clark: I also want to welcome our guests today, but I also want to make a special reference to some guests who are many times in our galleries, and those are the nine individuals from the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme, or OLIP. Quite often they're here in the Legislature. I think that on behalf of

opposition and government backbench MPPs, we want to thank them for participating in that program.

Ms. Soo Wong: Very shortly, some of my visitors are coming to visit us. Jessica Farias from the Mennonite New Life Centre, Scarborough campus, will be visiting us, along with new seniors in my riding coming to join us shortly.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to take a moment to introduce Sam Bokma from my constituency in Barrie. She does a great job serving the residents of Barrie, and I'm very proud to have her as part of my team. Welcome, Sam.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL BLIND CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Toby Barrett: It's with pride that I report to members of this House that Team Canada now hails from the town of Simcoe. After three years of working together towards the goal of winning championships, Jim Simmons, Donna Hawkins, Mike Vrooman and Gary Saxon laid claim to the national team moniker, bringing home the National Blind Curling Championship in Ottawa earlier this month.

This accomplishment follows the Simcoe rink's successful run for the all-Ontario title a year ago. And it's not easy, Speaker. Teams from all corners gave all they could to compete for, first, provincial and then national bragging rights.

In the Ottawa series, after seven rounds of competition, it was a semi-final win over New Brunswick that led the Simcoe curlers to the final against the 2012 Team Canada champions out of Kitchener. Eight ends later, the Simcoe representatives stood victorious 7-3.

As well, Speaker, Mr. Vrooman was named a second team all-star for the tournament, while Mr. Simmons was named second team skip. Mr. Saxon was named the first team lead, while Miss Hawkins was named to the first team in the vice position.

My only concern, Speaker: that the Simcoe rink has enough of that ice magic to defend their provincial honours for the 2013 Ontario Blind Curling Championships, coming up in the town of Simcoe March 15 to 17.

MARION BRYDEN

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to inform the House of the passing of Marion Bryden, a former MPP. Marion Bryden died on the 12th of February of this year.

Marion was born in Winnipeg and had a very distinguished career prior to coming to this House. She was one of the first people hired by the NDP government of Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan, and it was a hard time for her to get the job, because at that point she was a married woman and there was a policy in Saskatchewan

that no married woman could work in the civil service. Tommy Douglas had to go to bat and say that he was hiring her because she was the most qualified person and that he insisted on having a qualified woman to do the job that she did.

She was a researcher in economics. She worked for the Saskatchewan government for a number of years before coming back to Toronto, where she worked as a researcher and a budget forecaster for a couple of places, including the Canadian Tax Foundation. When she was there, she authored two books on tax policy which are, in some ways, still being used today. She worked, along with her husband, Ken—who was also, at one time, a member—to form the NDP from the CCF in 1961.

In 1967, she came to this place to work for the NDP as the research director on economic policy, and from 1975 to 1990, she was a member in this Legislature, through five elections and five Parliaments. In 1975, when she was elected, she was one of only seven women in this House. She had a record of being here for 15 years and, until that time, she had the longest service of any woman in this Legislature; 15 years was the record at that point. She was a critic for treasury, economics, revenue, the environment, women's issues, colleges and universities, and intergovernmental affairs.

She was loved, I think, by everyone, but more importantly, she loved this Legislature and the people who work here. She is truly missed by the people of Beaches–East York and by the many women for whom she helped to pave the way.

MARLENE STEWART STREIT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: On February 6 of this year, I attended the investiture ceremony for a resident of my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham: Marlene Stewart Streit, who was awarded the Order of Ontario for excellence in golf. Ms. Streit is Canada's most successful female amateur golfer and the first Canadian inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame. She is the only golfer to have won the Australian, British, American and Canadian women's amateur competitions. She became an icon for young Canadian female golfers when she created the Marlene Streit Awards Fund, which is used to pay the travel costs for promising junior golfers.

Her life has taken extraordinary turns. Born in Alberta in 1934, her family farmed through years of locust infestations and sandstorms before moving to Fonthill, Ontario. At age 12, Marlene caddied at Lookout Point golf club to earn extra money. Two years later, she started playing, and at age 17 she won her first Canadian championship.

Surviving a plane crash in the 1950s, she helped lead other passengers to safety. Married with two daughters, she has continued to play through the ensuing decades and even won the US Senior Women's Amateur contest in 2003.

Bright, bubbly and energetic, Marlene tweeted recently that she'll be thrilled to be back at Lookout Point

for this year's Senior PGA tournament. It is an honour to recognize Marlene's determination, dedication and accomplishments with the Order of Ontario.

BEN SMITH

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would like to take this opportunity to recognize one of my constituents, Ben Smith from Brock township. Ben is a well-respected business owner and a self-proclaimed old-school pharmacist. Since he opened Ben's Pharmacy in Cannington in 1982, Ben has gone on to open a dozen pharmacies around Ontario. He is a living example of a small-business success story. At the age of 70, he still works the front counter to personally meet the needs of his customers and hosts an annual customer-appreciation golf tournament.

Ben has been a long-time contributor to his community. He has donated funds to community causes, sponsored local minor sports organizations and community events and has provided scholarships for kids in local public schools. His community recently honoured Ben's effort by awarding him a Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal.

However, Ben's accomplishments are also of a professional nature. He is the president-elect of the American College of Apothecaries and will be inducted for a two-year term next February at their annual meeting in California. This is a rare honour, for a Canadian pharmacist to achieve this role from his peers. I would like to commend Ben for all that he has contributed to his local community and to his profession, and to congratulate him.

1510

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House, I rose on a question in regard to the condition of roads across Ontario when it comes to the conditions of highways this winter. What is really, really interesting is the response that I got from the minister, saying he hadn't heard about anything because nobody had told him that the roads were in such a bad state of repair. I've got to say that I was taken a little bit aback, because I would think that the minister had been briefed on the condition of highways, because clearly there has been a change in the condition of our highways as a result of the actions of this government.

But what is even more surprising is that as he went out into the scrums, the minister said, "Well, it was all global warming"—that was the problem, and we should blame global warming and not the Liberal government for having messed up the maintenance of our highways.

Listen, we're in this mess for a very simple reason. When the Liberal government accelerated the privatization that was started by the Conservatives, the Liberals decided to maintain a standard that in fact is lesser than what MTO used to do before, because we all know that even though there was a certain standard to be main-

tained, often MTO used to plow beyond the standard that was established by the Ministry of Transportation itself.

Now that they've got contractors, they say, "Here's the standard, and you're not going to go over it because we ain't gonna pay you for it." As a result, the roads are in much worse condition. What's even worse, they've essentially privatized the patrolling of highways so that those people who actually do the dispatching as to when salt, sand and other has to be done—it is now being done by the contractors and not by ministry staff.

HEART MONTH

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: February is Heart Month in Canada. Today, heart disease and stroke takes one life every seven minutes, and 90% of Canadians have at least one risk factor. No one is safe from heart disease or stroke conditions that can be devastating, not only to individuals but entire families.

There is much we can do to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Ontarians have the power to lead a healthy lifestyle by addressing the key controllable risk factors: physical inactivity, poor diet and tobacco use.

Thanks to the generosity of Ontarians and the compassion of volunteers, the Heart and Stroke Foundation is able to continue making a real difference in reducing death and disability from heart disease and stroke, and I'm proud of our government's commitment to healthy living and chronic disease prevention as we move forward with our action plan for health care. As part of this, we are aggressively taking on the challenge to reduce childhood obesity by 20% over five years with our Healthy Kids panel. We've already implemented programs to address obesity, including EatRight Ontario and the Healthy Schools initiative, and we've committed to strengthening our Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy to have the lowest smoking rates in Canada.

Speaker, we also need to do our part in our ridings by informing our constituents about the importance of healthy living all year round.

HYDRO OPERATIONS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The council of the city of North Bay is concerned by recommendations contained within the recently released local distribution company review panel report and the potential impact on North Bay Hydro. They're specifically concerned about the call for the creation of a northeast regional distributor that would be responsible for providing hydro to customers in a large area, including the current North Bay Hydro users. On January 21, North Bay council passed resolution 2013-40, which resolved that "the city of North Bay is not in support of amalgamating local hydro utilities, and petition the Premier of the province of Ontario and Minister of Energy once the new cabinet has been announced, to meet with representatives of the impacted municipalities."

Speaker, our caucus believes and has stated in my energy white paper that consolidations of LDCs in

Ontario should be voluntary and encouraged through incentives. I hope the new minister will honour the city of North Bay's request to meet with municipalities who may be impacted.

JAYESH'S LAW

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm here today to—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Talk about the megacity.

Mr. Mike Colle: I wish—the megacity.

I'm talking about something that's very sad, actually. A 44-year-old man who worked as a gas station attendant in my riding, Jayesh Prajapati, was dragged to his death by a gas-and-dash criminal who essentially killed a man who was working for \$10 an hour. I found out subsequently that over 10,000 of these gas-and-dashes occur every year in our province where people trying to make a living have to go to work pumping gas and risk their lives because there are no protections for these gas station workers.

I've introduced a law for the second time called Jayesh's Law, Bill 12, which will hopefully put a stop to this kind of criminality that occurs right across this province on a daily basis with very few consequences. Very few of these criminals who commit these acts ever go to trial, ever see any jail time.

This act will be an attempt to also support the many police services in Toronto, in York region and in Hamilton who want to see this kind of gas theft stopped, because it goes on in all of our communities without any accountability. It's something that endangers not only gas station operators; it endangers patrons and endangers police officers.

I hope that all members will consider this legislation as a way of dealing with this criminal activity which has been tolerated too long.

MARY VERVOORT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today and acknowledge an exceptionally dedicated community leader in Dufferin-Caledon.

As the executive director of Choices Youth Shelter, Mary Vervoort has made significant contributions to the well-being of many homeless youth in our community. Since it opened its doors in 2000, Mary has been a key employee at Choices Youth Shelter. With her help, this grassroots organization has grown from a discussion about the rise of homeless youth in society to a full-time physical shelter with programs that continually challenge conventional thinking and meet the needs of youth in our community.

Choices is a very unique shelter and has had tremendous community support in achieving its goals. Since its creation, Choices has helped approximately 1,800 homeless and at-risk youth in our community. Recently, Choices celebrated its latest expansion when it opened a new transitional home with the help of many community organizations, businesses and residents who generously

supported it. This support included a \$50,000 grant from the 2012 Ruth Atkinson Hindmarsh Award.

Mary is the first one to acknowledge that Choices exists because of the board of directors, volunteers and many other community contributors. However, Mary herself has made a real difference and was recognized for her hard work with the new transitional home, Mary's Place, being named in her honour.

Mary is the perfect example of how someone can help a community organization meet challenges by fulfilling a need while also helping improve the lives of others. And so on behalf of the residents of Dufferin-Caledon and the Ontario Legislature, congratulations, Mary. Keep up the great work.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Far be it from me to miss an opportunity as Speaker to introduce a former member, and I probably would pay for it if I didn't. Anyway, as the former member of Parliament for the riding of Brantford in the 36th Parliament, Mr. Ron Johnson is here with us today. Welcome.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Fife assumes ballot item number 5 and Mr. Mantha assumes ballot item number 12.

REQUEST TO THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a request by the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Mr. McNaughton, to Lynn Morrison, the Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to section 31 of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member for Scarborough Centre, Mr. Duguid, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

Reports by committees. Reports by committees?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I almost forgot, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: We're losing here today, for some reason.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly pursuant to standing order 111(b).

Interjections.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Dunlop presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief—

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I actually deeply appreciate the fact that we're having jocularity today, as opposed to the other reason why somebody doesn't hear me.

Mr. Dunlop presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, thank you.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to send everybody a copy of this tape.

Pursuant to standing order 111(b), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO FORESTRY INDUSTRY REVITALIZATION ACT (HEIGHT OF WOOD FRAME BUILDINGS), 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA REVITALISATION DE L'INDUSTRIE FORESTIÈRE DE L'ONTARIO (HAUTEUR DES BÂTIMENTS À OSSATURE DE BOIS)

Mr. Fedeli moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 with respect to the height of wood frame buildings / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment en ce qui a trait à la hauteur des bâtiments à ossature de bois.

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. Victor Fedeli: Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I'd love to make a short statement, Speaker.

The Ontario Forestry Industry Revitalization Act, 2013, would amend the Ontario building code to allow for wood frame construction to be used in mid-rise buildings up to six storeys instead of the current four storeys. There's a real opportunity here to increase the use of wood harvested in northern Ontario for residential construction and provide a significant boost to the forestry industry, which supports some 200,000 jobs and more than 100 forest-dependent communities.

Not only will it help create jobs and growth in northern communities, it will also help southern Ontario meet targets to reduce urban sprawl and reduce construction costs. Wood frame construction can reduce the carbon footprint and increase the energy efficiency of mid-rise buildings.

NON-PROFIT HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Mrs. Jeffrey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, 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 14, 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): 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?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make my statement during ministry statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Before I begin, I'd just like to acknowledge some of the ministers who preceded me and worked over the years on similar legislation to that being introduced here today, including Premier Wynne, as well as the member for Etobicoke Centre. I just wanted to thank them for their efforts which helped pave the way for this legislation.

Today, I'm pleased to reintroduce proposed legislation that would, if passed, bring greater efficiency, accessibility and transparency to the resolution of co-op tenure disputes. The current process for terminating occupancy agreements in co-ops is unquestionably complex, costly and time-consuming. This is true for both non-profit housing providers and their members.

The amendments I am introducing today have the support of the Co-operative Housing Federation, or CHF. Our government recognizes and appreciates the dedicated advocacy of the CHF, and we share the federation's commitment to maintaining a strong co-operative housing sector.

Non-profit co-op housing has played a vital role in our affordable housing system for over 40 years. In Ontario, there are around 550 non-profit housing co-ops. These co-ops provide affordable housing for 44,000 households, which represent about 125,000 Ontarians, including some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Currently, tenure disputes in co-op housing are governed by the Co-operative Corporations Act. Under this act, co-ops must go through what is often a lengthy and costly process in the courts to evict a resident. Today, we are proposing to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, and the Co-operative Corporations Act to move most co-op tenure disputes from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Landlord and Tenant Board is the body established under the Residential Tenancies Act, or RTA, to resolve rental housing disputes. As an independent agency, the Landlord and Tenant Board provides Ontarians with timely access to specialized, expert and effective dispute resolution. Tenants and landlords have convenient access to the board's offices across the province to resolve their matters. Under the proposed legislation, co-ops would apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board to resolve tenure disputes when they are based on grounds currently provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act.

The proposed legislation is the result of significant consultation with the co-op housing sector over the past four years. Mr. Speaker, if passed, this legislation would afford co-op providers and members most of the same protections, benefits and responsibilities that are granted to landlords and tenants facing tenure disputes under the Residential Tenancies Act.

Evictions based on grounds outside the Residential Tenancies Act would continue to be handled through the internal co-op process and the courts. This is important because co-ops are governed democratically and may have bylaws that outline other reasons for eviction that are not provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act.

The proposed legislation would make tenure dispute resolution processes more efficient and reduce the financial burden on co-ops to have their disputes resolved. By going to the Landlord and Tenant Board, co-ops and their members would have access to mediation services to help them resolve their disputes.

In addition, co-op members would be able to access the Tenant Duty Counsel Program, which is funded by Legal Aid Ontario and delivered by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, ACTO. This will help low- and modest-income members by providing them with improved and more affordable access to justice.

Our government is fully aware of the importance of the co-op housing sector. The sector is a key partner in supporting the availability of affordable and safe housing for families throughout Ontario. These are the people for whom our government is taking strong action today. Our proposal would help support co-op providers and the families and children who call co-ops their home.

The proposed legislation would also permit the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive or defer fees for low-income individuals, and would bring consistency to how these types of cases are treated at other Ontario tribunals and in the courts. For instance, a fee waiver program was implemented in Ontario courts back in 2005, and similar provisions exist in the legislation of two other Ontario

tribunals: the Ontario Municipal Board and the Assessment Review Board.

Our government recognizes the need for affordable housing and its role in supporting the growth and health of communities across Ontario. This is why we developed the long-term affordable housing strategy, the first of its kind in Ontario.

1530

A housing sector that offers diverse choices for Ontarians is not complete without a healthy co-op sector. That is why today we're taking action and proposing this legislation. I urge all members to once again support this bill. Thank you.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Hon. Brad Duguid: Today I'd like to address one of the most significant initiatives undertaken in skilled trades in Ontario for generations: the Ontario College of Trades.

In 2009, our government took the bold move to establish this regulatory body, the first of its kind in North America, as a way of ensuring a strong future for the trades, a sector that is a key part of the foundation of our economy. Today I'm pleased to confirm that this April, the College of Trades will officially open its doors and begin accepting members.

Ontario already has 44 similar regulatory bodies for other important sectors. The College of Trades will help to ensure that when the people of Ontario need the services of tradespeople, they get the skilled, well-trained—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: —and accountable workers they expect and the quality services that they deserve. The college will provide an independent and neutral body for consumers to go to with a complaint if those services are not up to par. If you believe in consumer protection, then you should be supportive of the new College of Trades.

As well, the college will protect the people who work in those fields from the underground economy. We have a responsibility to protect the public and a responsibility to protect our skilled tradespeople who are qualified and abide by the law. To those opposed to the creation of the College of Trades, I ask why you would so readily dismiss our responsibility to protect consumers and protect those important workers. Why do Ontario's skilled tradespeople not deserve the same respect as other professions, like lawyers, teachers, accountants, doctors, nurses, foresters, real estate agents, social workers and architects, just to name some who have similar bodies?

The skilled trades are the backbone of Ontario's economy. They are construction workers who ensure that the buildings we live and work in are constructed properly. They are auto mechanics who ensure that our cars are safe and able to protect our families on the roads. They are electricians who provide us with the safe and

reliable power we need in our homes and our offices. They are hairstylists and chefs who the public must have confidence in.

Ontario's skilled tradespeople comprise dozens of occupations and thousands of workers that we all rely on every day to keep our economy strong. That is why the College of Trades is so important. Without these workers, our economy simply could not function.

The College of Trades will put decision-making power in the hands of those who do the work and know the business. Those opposed would rather have that decision-making power in the hands of lobbyists, politicians and bureaucrats. Our government disagrees with that.

The college gives a voice to all key players, including employers, employees, union, non-union, tradespersons, apprentices, journeypersons and the public. These are the professionals who should decide what training and certification standards should be. They are the ones who have a direct stake in the quality and credibility of their industry.

When the college begins taking members on April 8, it will have enhanced enforcement capabilities that will ensure professionalism and high quality. It will provide a public register to ensure that the tradespeople you hire are in good standing so that you know, when you hire a tradesperson, that he or she is qualified to do the job. It will provide a way for consumers to file complaints, with a transparent process that can result in action being taken.

When the college is fully operational, it will help raise awareness of the career opportunities that the trades provide. It will lift up the value and credibility of the trades as an attractive career option. We need high school students to consider the trades first, not as a fallback to university or college, but as a career path that they can be proud of. We also need more women in the skilled trades. For far too long, we've not provided the encouragement, opportunities and support they need to enter and thrive in the industry. The new College of Trades can do this.

In 2007, we responded to concerns about the state of the skilled trades. We asked Tim Armstrong, who's here today—a respected lawyer and former deputy minister with knowledge of the sector—to thoroughly examine them. He recommended creating a college of trades, stating that it was crucial to the success of skilled trades in Ontario. The sector applauded Mr. Armstrong's report and in particular the call for the college.

Mr. Speaker, recent criticism has called the registration fees to be collected by the college a tax. Let me be clear: Not one cent of the registration fees collected by the College of Trades will go to the government. The college's membership fees—and that's what they are, membership fees—which are actually the lowest of any of the 44 regulatory bodies in Ontario, will offer far more in return.

We need to stand behind Ontario's skilled tradespeople and take politics out of it. We need to let this vital sector find its own voice while protecting the public interest and growing our economy. Mr. Speaker, the

College of Trades represents a bold step forward for our province.

At the same time, let us be clear and realistic. This is a first, so I call on all stakeholders and my colleagues here today to be constructive and to be patient as the College of Trades emerges as a strong champion of this vital sector. Our skilled tradespeople deserve the respect that this college will bring them, and they deserve the respect and support of all parties in this Legislature and all Canadians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not going to take much time. I want to give the member for Simcoe North as much time as possible to make his response, but I do thank the minister for reintroducing this bill.

I know that Premier Wynne, just after the House prorogued, did commit to reintroducing the previous bill, and I look forward to hearing the minister's changes that she has made, because there are some changes made to this bill.

But just in closing, I want to thank Harvey Cooper and the co-op housing federation for their tenacity and their patience in this bill, in a number of incarnations, being reintroduced in the Legislature. I think that Mr. Chopowick from the Federation of Rental-housing Providers was hiding there around the corner; I could just see him a little bit at the start of the session. I thank all of those who put their work into providing housing for our most vulnerable, and I look forward to my hour of response to the minister's lead.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Now I understand why they gave this gentleman the minister's position on this College of Trades. Look, the PC Party of the province of Ontario adamantly opposes the College of Trades. It's that simple. No offence to you fellows up in the audience; I know you are doing your very best, but you're on a losing trip here.

First of all, the whole name of the College of Trades is very confusing, because people out there in the industry think it's actually training people, and it's doing nothing like that. All it is is a new tax for people. That's what it really is.

I think of all the things they've done with the College of Trades—and I know you're really new to the file, because I can tell you I've forgotten more than you know about it, okay? I can tell you this has been a communications disaster. All you've done—a quick prop—that's a postcard that was sent out in December. Some of the tradespeople are getting that today—not all of them. That's the latest form. You can't even get your mailing right. Not everybody has it. Maybe we'll use your

mailing procedure from now on to get to the College of Trades.

The people who are going to be getting a 600% increase in their fees are all the journeypeople today and, of course, the apprentices who never received a fee before. They're going to be charged \$60, so a new trade tax is what it really is.

What is it doing? Well, they're going to send out the invoices. They're sending out the invoice to those people who have a journeyman's licence. What they really want is to compulsorily certify all of the other trades in Ontario—everything, all the other trades. They're going to have trades cops and the whole thing.

Now, the reality is we had no way of communicating this, so I actually went on the road. I've been to over a hundred towns and communities in Ontario this year, and I can't find hardly anybody who likes the College of Trades other than—

Interjection: Those folks up there.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop:—those guys in the back row, the business managers for the big trades unions, and of course the Working Families Coalition. They love it.

Interjection: Pat Dillon.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Pat Dillon and the boys—they love it.

Who opposes the Colleges of Trades? Pretty well everybody: first of all, the PC Party of Ontario; second of all, the Ontario Construction Employers Coalition—

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Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Go ahead and heckle me all you want. You have no idea what you're talking about.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: The reality is, Mr. Speaker, as tradespeople find out about this, this is becoming a disaster for them, and they are trying to get this thing out in front. But they're not telling everybody that it's a 600% increase in the fees. It's a new trades tax, plain and simple. You get nothing for your money on this.

What we've done is we've started a thing called the "Stop the Trades Tax Pledge." We're asking all MPPs to sign this pledge—and candidates—no matter what political party you're from. We've got a number of our people already. It's open to former MPPs as well, if they want to sign it. Former MPPs are welcome to sign it, Mr. Johnson.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, this is a disaster. We're going to fight this all the way. And guess what? After the next election, when Tim Hudak is the next Premier of Ontario and the Progressive Conservative Party forms the government of Ontario, we will abolish the Ontario College of Trades. You can mark our words on that. It will happen. We will do it for sure.

Thank you very much. Sorry I had to be so rough on you, guys. Thanks very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I move to responses, I do want to remind members that on a few occasions I could have stopped. I wanted to let you go. We do not use props to hold up and to expose—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I forgot, sir. Sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to be serious and you're not letting me be.

But anyway, I want to remind all members that we do not use props at all when we're doing responses and comments in the House, and I ask all members to be respectful of each other.

I also want to remind you of one other thing that continues to bother me: making personal comments to people in the House. That's not an appropriate thing to do.

We will continue with responses.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm pleased to respond to the ministerial statement and introduction of the bill to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act. I thank the minister for bringing it forward so quickly.

I also want to acknowledge that Harvey Cooper and his staff are here once again, and I want to welcome them back to the Legislature.

We, the NDP, welcome this bill. It has been a long time coming—almost 10 years, actually, since the federation first brought it forward for some action. We almost got there in the last session but for prorogation. We welcome many more bills on housing over the term of this session because we're here to get positive results for Ontarians.

We support the co-operative housing movement and we support the changes that they actually want to the legislation. It has the potential to make life easier both for the tenants and for the co-ops. It has the ability to actually reduce costs for the co-ops as well as for its members.

There is an amendment to this current bill, and we think that that is a good thing as well. It's going to actually give tenants the same opportunity that they would have had in the court system if they're from a low-income family so that they're not burdened with those additional expenses, so it is going to make it more affordable for people to actually go through these processes.

Still, it's hard to cheer for a bill when there are so many outstanding issues on housing in this province. We are in a housing crisis. Too many families are stuck on waiting lists—170,000 people at last count—and many people are paying rents in excess of 50% of their income. More than one in five families pays more than 50%. There are 400,000 people using food banks in the province of Ontario, and many tenants are living in substandard housing, so there's a need for more bills around those issues as well. We need to have many more co-ops built, though, here in the province of Ontario, because co-ops build community and they build relationships.

So although it's hard to get excited about this bill, I look forward to debating it. I hope we don't need to debate it ad nauseam, though.

Thank you for the opportunity.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I'd like to respond to the minister's statement on the College of Trades.

The NDP supported the legislation establishing a regulatory college designed to modernize the province's apprenticeship and skilled trades system. It was our hope that the college would also encourage more people to work in the trades and help the system better serve employers, skilled trades, apprenticeships and consumers.

Among the many duties of the college outlined in the original legislation, one was to review compulsory trades applications, review apprenticeship ratios, enforcement of apprenticeship standards and discipline. From the beginning, there were to be two classes of college memberships. These were explicitly described in the original bill: journeypersons, and persons who employ journeypersons or who sponsor or employ apprentices. The process for annual membership fees was developed in the year leading up to the college's launch.

It was always a concern of ours that it would not be clear to the tradespeople what the province's apprentices and journeypersons would get for their membership fee in the college. It was our hope that the college would implement an aggressive communication plan to ensure that the province's tradespeople understood the very valuable role that the college could play for them and the value of their membership in the college. Unfortunately, it is not clear to us that the college has effectively communicated the important role it could and should play in promoting the trades in Ontario. We hope that that will change soon.

That said, Ontario New Democrats continue to support the valuable work the college is doing in reviewing the compulsory trades apprenticeship ratios, and look forward to further reports on these and other vital apprenticeship issues.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure again to maintain the important role of representing the constituents in the riding of Durham and to present one of the first petitions. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"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

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment" itself; 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"—like the Drive Clean act—"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."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents Frank Agueci, Rob McJannett, Rob Purdey and Peter Barber, all collectors of vintage cars.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a petition here that was given to me by Jeff Mole, who is a community power consultant for Trillium Energy Alliance. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario"—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I heard that, Mr. Bradley.

"Whereas the Ontario Electricity System Operator is poised to procure electricity generation valued at hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming months and years; and

"Whereas community enterprises for electricity generation are democratically controlled legal entities established for the purpose of mobilizing communities and financial resources to consider local electricity generation opportunities with a view to providing benefits to the community and Ontario as a whole; and

"Whereas the commercialization of our natural resources, grid capacity and power purchase capacity can impair Ontarians' ability to mitigate the impacts of clean energy products; and

"Whereas community enterprises provide for local control over environmental assessment processes; and

"Whereas community enterprises can develop sensible proposals and become self-sustaining without the need for more government or government subsidies by generating and selling electricity on a not-for-profit basis; and

"Whereas the proposed renewable energy on crown land policy may encourage and prioritize community economic benefits"—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We're having a lot of fun, eh?—"from water power development and other clean energy projects;

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

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a community energy act to help facilitate

the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purposes of developing community enterprises for electricity generation.”

This petition comes from the St. Catharines area.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping;”—imagine that—“and

“Whereas the real reason for the high price of gas is gas companies are putting pressure to allow for the pipeline from Alberta to Texas; and

“Whereas the” McGuinty-Wynne “government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

“Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario’s drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

“Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario.”

I affix my signature in full support.

GREENWATER PARK

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

“Whereas the present government of Ontario should reverse the closure of Greenwater provincial park in Cochrane, Ontario;

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

“That the government of Ontario reverse the closure of Greenwater provincial park, to allow the park to remain fully operational and open enabling people from all over to enjoy camping and visiting on its grounds as of the spring of 2013.”

I fully agree with this petition and add my signature.

ONTARIO HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government has announced plans to change a number of Ontario health insurance plan (OHIP) services; and

“Whereas these changes are the result of a provincial debt crisis created by nine years of out-of-control government spending; and

“Whereas these changes will affect the ophthalmology, cardiology, and radiology services that are currently crucial to many Ontarians’ quality of life;

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

“That the McGuinty government release its patient health impact study on the recently announced Ontario health insurance plan changes or, if such a study has not been conducted, that one is immediately undertaken and made public.”

It’s signed by a number of my constituents in Wellington–Halton Hills.

WIND TURBINES

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

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

“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects, we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines; and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning;

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

“That the Ontario government place a moratorium on the approval of any wind energy projects and a moratorium on the construction of industrial wind projects until further studies of the potential adverse health effects of industrial wind turbines, their effect on the environment, the potential devaluation of residential property are completed; and that any industrial wind projects not currently connected to the grid be cancelled.”

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

PROVINCIAL PARKS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here from the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, NOMA, which reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources has announced the end of overnight camping in 10 provincial parks in northern Ontario (Caliper Lake, Fushimi Lake, Greenwater, Ivanhoe Lake, Mississagi, Obatanga, Rene Brunelle, Springwater, The Shoals, and Tidewater); and

“Whereas the decision will result in job losses for northern Ontarians and negatively impact tourism and northern Ontario’s way of life; and

“Whereas local stakeholders and municipalities have not been consulted on these closures and have been

denied the opportunity to make these parks more sustainable;

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

“To immediately suspend plans to cancel overnight camping at the 10 provincial parks named above; and

“To consult with local municipalities, stakeholders and regional economic development organizations regarding the long-term viability of preserving northern Ontario’s ... parks.”

I support this and will give this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Randy Hillier: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s newly created Ontario College of Trades is planning to hit hard-working tradespeople with membership fees that, if the college has its way, will add up to \$84 million a year; and

“Whereas the Ontario College of Trades has no clear benefit and no accountability as tradespeople already pay for licences and countless other fees to government; and

“Whereas Ontario has struggled for years to attract people to skilled trades and the planned tax grab will kill jobs, and drive people out of trades;

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

“To stop the job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately.”

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

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

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

“Whereas the WSIB has mandated that effective January 1, 2013, all independent contractors and small business owners operating in the construction industry must have WSIB coverage;

“Whereas many of these business owners have their own private workplace insurance that in most cases is more affordable, more efficient and provides more extensive coverage;

“Whereas mandatory WSIB premiums add significant costs to small businesses and adversely affects their growth prospects and in some case their solvency;

“Whereas the government provided minimum notice about the change to businesses with WSIB sending out an official letter dated November 25, 2012;

“Whereas at a time when Ontario is facing a jobs crisis with 600,000 people unemployed, the government and its agencies should not be discouraging private sector job creation and growth by levying additional, unnecessary costs;

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

“To direct the Minister of Labour to issue an order in council eliminating the requirement that mandates compulsory WSIB coverage on all independent contractors and small business owners in the construction industry.”

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature.

ELECTRICITY GENERATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition signed by people from all over Ontario, including people from Oakville. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Electricity System Operator is poised to procure electricity generation valued at hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming months and years; and

“Whereas community enterprises for electricity generation are democratically controlled legal entities established for the purpose of mobilizing communities and financial resources to consider local electricity generation opportunities with a view to providing benefits to the community and Ontario as a whole; and

“Whereas the commercialization of our natural resources, grid capacity and power purchase capacity can impair Ontarians’ ability to mitigate the impacts of clean energy products; and

“Whereas community enterprises provide for local control over environmental assessment processes; and

“Whereas community enterprises can develop sensible proposals and become self-sustaining without the need for more government or government subsidies by generating and selling electricity on a not-for-profit basis; and

“Whereas the proposed renewable energy on crown land policy may encourage and prioritize community economic benefits from water power development and other clean energy projects;

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

“That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a community energy act to help facilitate the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purposes of developing community enterprises for electricity generation.”

I support this petition.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

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

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s newly created Ontario College of Trades is planning to hit hard-working tradespeople with membership fees that, if the college has its way, will add up to \$84 million a year; and

“Whereas the Ontario College of Trades has no clear benefit and no accountability as tradespeople already pay for licences and countless other fees to government; and

“Whereas Ontario has struggled for years to attract people to skilled trades and the planned tax grab will kill jobs, and drive people out of trades;

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

“To stop the job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately.”

Thank you.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

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

“Whereas Ontario’s tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

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“Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

“Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

“Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty government”—Wynne government—“only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

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

“To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into the skilled trades.”

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition that was intended for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and was sent to me by the members of OPT at Maplehurst Correctional Complex. Since we’re almost out of time, I’ll just say that the basic message that they’ve asked us to do is to keep our hands off their pension.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Mr. Bradley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa–Orléans.

It’s an honour for me to rise in the Legislature today to begin second reading of the new Ontario government’s proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. I’ll be sharing my time, as I indicated, with my parliamentary assistant, Phil McNeely, the member for Ottawa–Orléans, whom I want to thank for all his work in helping bring forward this bill.

The Great Lakes, I think we would agree, are a true global treasure, containing nearly 20% of the earth’s fresh surface water. That’s actually an astounding figure. When you think of the entire earth and all the fresh water that’s there, we have access to 20%.

The lakes support a diverse array of plants and animals with rich ecosystems that are unique in the world. They provide us with water to drink and with food to eat. Their beautiful waters, beaches, and campgrounds attract residents and visitors from outside our province to their shores.

Many of the members of this Legislature represent constituencies that either abut the Great Lakes or abut tributaries which go into the Great Lakes. I know that all members of the Legislature are interested in this particular subject and this particular legislation, but some even more so because of the direct impact on their constituencies. I see the member for Leamington here today, who has addressed an issue that occurred near his constituency; he and I worked together on it and the matter was ultimately resolved, but I know he has a great interest, as so many do. The member for Oshawa, who’s here today, would have a great interest; any one of us would.

They provide, as well, spiritual sustenance to First Nations peoples and others who enjoy the outdoors and connecting with nature. Further, the basin is really a historic location where Métis identity emerged in Ontario.

The lakes power our homes and factories. They irrigate our farms. They help transport our goods to markets throughout North America and abroad. I can tell you again, as one of those individuals who resides in a community that’s on the Great Lakes, as the Speaker does—by the way, I want to mention that one of the projects that we are involved with in cleaning up some historic problems in the Great Lakes involves Hamilton Harbour. I know that the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is very supportive of seeing the investment by the provincial government of \$46 million, and by the federal government and by the local community.

The Great Lakes are vital to the quality of life and prosperity of the people of Ontario. We’ve already done much to protect the Great Lakes, and water quality has improved over the past few decades. Discharges of pollutants such as PCBs and mercury have been significantly reduced. Smaller inland lakes within the basin are recovering from the impacts of acid rain, but this great treasure is still at risk.

There are strong indications that Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron are in fact in decline. Scientists are warning us that the Great Lakes are at what they refer to

as a tipping point. Climate change, an increasing population, growing demand for water, more stormwater and sewage going into the lakes, and rising levels of nuisance and toxic algae and pollutants are degrading the lakes.

Loss of natural habitat such as wetlands, and the influx of invasive species, such as zebra and quagga mussels and the round goby, are causing declines in the population of fish and other species native to the Great Lakes and threatening the health of our entire ecosystems.

I should mention here that when we talk about the fish, there are commercial fishers, as we call them now, and there are people who are sport fishers. There's a lot of great fish to enjoy from the lakes. Those of us who are close to Lake Erie recognize that the Lake Erie perch are particularly popular. You can try to get into a restaurant—some of the places along Lake Erie—and it's mighty hard to get in, because the locals and people who come from afar are enjoying the fish on that occasion. They are at risk as we see these invasive species coming in. I know both the sports fisher-persons and those men and women who are involved in commercial fishing want to ensure that this is preserved.

Concerns are increasing over newer chemicals, such as flame retardants, pesticides and pharmaceuticals from urban, industrial and agricultural sources. As stewards of this precious resource, it is our duty to protect the Great Lakes and ensure that they remain drinkable, swimmable and fishable for today and, indeed, for generations to come.

Ontario has been hard at work with many partners over the last 40 years—and I say over the last 40 years—to protect the Great Lakes. We've had some notable successes. Highly polluted hot spots have been cleaned up in Collingwood Harbour, and Severn Sound on Georgian Bay, and Wheatley Harbour on Lake Erie. Levels of toxic chemicals which were harming fish and wildlife have been reduced. Populations of bald eagles, lake trout and other species are rebounding after years in decline.

We are fortunate in Ontario to have leading legislation that covers specific areas, such as protecting drinking water and promoting water innovation, conservation and sustainability, but new challenges are overwhelming the old solutions. The health of the Great Lakes requires a targeted approach and renewed commitment to protecting these waters.

The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is a key element of our vision for sustaining, restoring and protecting Lakes Superior, Huron, Erie and Ontario, their connecting rivers, the St. Lawrence River, the Ottawa River, surrounding watersheds and groundwater. And I'm sure our American friends would apply that to Lake Michigan as well.

The people of Ontario understand the need for, and importance of, collective action to find solutions to the challenges that are facing the Great Lakes. This was made clear last year when I listened to municipal leaders, First Nations and Métis leadership, and community representatives, environmental groups, representatives

from agriculture, industry and the tourism sectors and scientists.

Over the last summer, ministry staff also travelled around Ontario, to Thunder Bay, Windsor, Cambridge, Guelph, Goderich and Little Current, to get further input on what we should do to safeguard the Great Lakes. Ministry staff met with stakeholders and with First Nations and Métis communities and leadership to gain their perspective and their advice.

When we introduced the legislation last year, we heard people speak clearly about the need for legislation to protect the Great Lakes. I want to thank all the people from across Ontario, from a wide range of sectors, who have commented and who have taken part in the public engagement and consultation process. We look forward to continuing to work with all interested parties as this bill moves forward.

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I want to say that the discussions we had, the dialogue we had, was extremely valuable to me as the minister and to our ministry staff. There were different perspectives depending on where you were, but there was a commonality of interest in protecting the Great Lakes.

My ministry will consider all comments received on the previous proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, 2012, and on Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, alongside all comments received on the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2013, as the proposed act moves forward through the legislative process.

The proposed act builds on engagement with a wide variety of Great Lakes experts, First Nations and Métis communities and Great Lakes stakeholders, and there are many of those around the province. The bill builds on this engagement as well as on the feedback received since the release of Ontario's Draft Great Lakes Strategy and introduction of the predecessor to this legislation, Bill 100, in June 2012.

The Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund was launched last year to an overwhelming response from grassroots groups looking to take action to protect and restore their corner of the Great Lakes. The fund is now helping 80 different communities and environmental organizations, First Nations and Métis communities or other organizations tackle small projects to improve the quality of the Great Lakes.

For example, the Friends of Medway Creek and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority were awarded a grant to plant native trees and shrubs on the creek bank to help reduce erosion and improve water quality and fish habitat in Medway Creek, which ultimately flows into the Great Lakes. If I'm not wrong, and I could be corrected, I think it's Jeff Yurek's—I know I'm not supposed to use names, but his particular constituency, because I spoke to a teacher who was involved with the students at that time who lived close to Jeff, and I know Jeff has a strong concern about and affinity for the Great Lakes.

Another small grant is helping Ontario streams protect and restore Atlantic salmon on the Credit and Humber

River watersheds by improving access to spawning habitats, stocking rivers with salmon and promoting community stewardship. And the 9th Pickering Scouts are using their grant to remove garbage from streams and marshes, educating youth on the value and need for preserving Ontario watersheds. People know what they would like to fix on the shorelines and stream banks of their own hometowns.

It is also important to remember that the Great Lakes are a resource shared between the people and communities of Ontario as well as our neighbours in the United States. Again, I was struck when I met, particularly in Thunder Bay, with some of the people from environmental and natural organizations up there, who worked hand in hand with their American friends and colleagues, who both had an affinity for the Great Lakes and the desire to always improve and protect those Great Lakes. So it was people to people in that case, just as we have governments to governments, national governments and then the state and provincial governments and organizations. They're people to people in the case that I'm recalling here at this time.

Our US partners are already moving ahead through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which has seen an investment of \$1 billion over the past three years to address key issues on the Great Lakes. I think they have recognized they've had some major challenges. The national government in the United States has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to this, and we're delighted to see it because we also benefit from the impact of those kinds of investments and that kind of care and concern. We need to do our part and continue to be good stewards of this shared resource.

If passed by this Legislature, the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act would provide a comprehensive suite of tools to address the combined stresses on the Great Lakes at a regional level. These tools would strengthen our collective efforts to restore and protect wetlands, beaches and shorelines, as well as natural habitats and ecosystems. The proposed act would engage partners and enable action.

If passed, the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act would create a forum for collaboration among Great Lakes partners where priorities for the lakes would be identified and initiatives would be discussed.

The Great Lakes Guardians' Council would include provincial ministers with responsibilities related to the lakes, along with municipal representatives, First Nations and Métis community representatives and others. Other partners could include environmental groups, industry, farmers, recreation and tourism sectors and the science community. During discussions with stakeholders and aboriginal peoples, we heard that working together is essential to making the most progress with the available resources that we have at this time. To be clear, the council is not a new agency, but a forum for coordination.

The proposed act would provide the Minister of the Environment, in consultation with other Great Lakes

ministers, the authority to set specific or general targets at the local, coastal or watershed scale. The ability to set targets would help all partners work toward common outcomes and help Ontario build on its efforts to manage the cumulative impacts of activities around the Great Lakes basin. These targets would be based on the best available science, and be decided upon through collaboration and consultation. Potential targets that people have suggested to us include keeping beaches clean and open for people to enjoy, lowering phosphorus levels to combat algae, and reducing harmful pollutants.

The proposed act would allow for phased, targeted action by developing geographically focused initiatives, which would allow for specific approaches to address the unique issues facing priority areas around the lakes.

Shorelines, where water meets land, are particularly vulnerable parts of the ecosystem. Natural shorelines and coastal wetlands are essential for the health of the Great Lakes, a lesson we have learned well from our continuing work with the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. I want to say how successful that's been, and I want to commend all of those who have been part of that exercise: people in the area, specifically, and others who have contributed. That's been highly successful, because we know—particularly for those who enjoy it for recreational purposes—Lake Simcoe is a great asset to this province. Those who fish, both in winter and in summer, enjoy it very much. The locals certainly contributed to this, but so many people were part of that collaboration.

So the proposed act, then, would also provide additional tools to support implementation of interjurisdictional agreements, such as a new Canada-Ontario agreement on the Great Lakes. It would also enshrine Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy in law as a living document that is reviewed every six years to coordinate action and advance Great Lakes priorities.

Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy was finalized in December 2012. Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy is our road map for action for protecting and restoring the ecological health of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin through six Great Lakes goals, which are consistent with the purpose of the proposed act. These are: engaging and empowering communities; protecting water for human and ecological health; improving wetlands, beaches, shorelines and coastal areas; protecting habitats and species; enhancing understanding and adaptation; and ensuring environmentally sustainable economic opportunities and innovation.

Achieving healthy Great Lakes will require efforts from all of us, but given their importance to our economy and quality of life, investment in the Great Lakes makes sense. My parliamentary assistant will be speaking to this point in more detail shortly. For example, investing in actions to prevent high levels of nutrients from entering the Great Lakes can be expected to yield a return of \$2 for every dollar invested.

Ontario, I should say—and I think all members of the Legislature can take satisfaction in this—has a 40-year history of actions on protecting and restoring the Great

Lakes. This is the necessary next step in a series of actions taken by many Ontario governments.

I want to highlight the important work of both opposition parties when they formed the government of this province. A Conservative government signed the first Canada-Ontario agreement on the Great Lakes back in 1971, with a focus on controlling phosphorus and sewage treatment in the lower Great Lakes.

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As environment minister in 1985, I had the pleasure of introducing the Municipal-Industrial Strategy for Abatement, called MISA, which targeted direct discharges into our waterways.

Under the NDP government, Collingwood Harbour was the first area of concern in Canada or the US to be declared restored and delisted.

This commitment from all parties represented in this Legislature highlights a central truth about the Great Lakes: No matter where we sit in this House, no matter where we live in this province, we all understand the importance of this immense freshwater resource.

We're all in this together. We all benefit from healthy Great Lakes. Clean water, resilient ecosystems and a strong Great Lakes economic base will help us continue to build an Ontario that is one of the best places in the world to live, work and play.

We all know we must do the right thing for future generations of Ontarians and work together to leave the lakes in better condition than we found them. I know from their actions that all parties here have a strong belief in the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes. This proposed act is the next logical step. It's a continuation of the work that all parties have taken on. So today I encourage all members of the House to continue that commitment to the Great Lakes and join with vast numbers of passionate and committed individuals.

I can recall, in my previous time as Minister of the Environment from 1985 to 1990, and more latterly in the last couple of years or close to two years, the level of commitment that has come from individuals within legislative bodies.

I had the opportunity to meet with American legislators both at the national level and at the state level, particularly back when we were dealing with the issue of acid rain. Those who represent the more inland lakes would recognize the importance of dealing with the issue of acid rain. It took a lot of determination, and it took coordination between the two countries. Our national government of the day worked with the provincial government of the day. Tom McMillan was the minister at that particular time, in the government of Prime Minister Mulroney. I had the opportunity to work with him, and Premier Peterson with Prime Minister Mulroney, at that particular time.

Acid rain was having a devastating effect. Again, those who represent areas where fishing and the importance of trees—for instance, sap coming out of the trees, maple syrup and so on—recognized that we were being impacted drastically by acid rain, which is sulphur

dioxide coming down in liquid form. Some of our lakes were actually dying at that time.

One of our allies, interestingly enough, were our American friends, who come north in the summer particularly, and sometimes in the winter, to enjoy what we have to offer in places such as Muskoka, which is well known. Many of them have their cottages there or along Lake Erie and many places in the province. They in turn were putting pressure on their people back in the United States to come together to deal with this issue of acid rain.

Pretty drastic action was taken. There were those who were doubters at that time, who said, "Well, you know, there's not the scientific evidence, there's not the technical ability and there's not the money to deal with this issue." We found again that, working together, we were able to do so. There were some pretty onerous regulations put on the major emitters of sulphur dioxide at that time, and initially they were not amused by it. But I'm pleased to say that they came around, and many of those who actually had to make the changes contemplated and required in those regulations were later bragging it up for the work they had done, and they are to be commended for that.

I see similar things happening today, and I see a grand coalition of members of this Legislature for once—on one issue, at least—and of people across this province. I urge all of you who are members of this House to give it careful consideration. We will appreciate your input. But let us all support the proposed legislation and be true guardians of this priceless legacy, our Great Lakes. Future generations will thank us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, Minister. The parliamentary assistant, the member from Ottawa-Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Today is anti-bullying day, of course, and I'm wearing pink. I tried to find some clothing that had a little bit of pink in it.

I'm very pleased today to speak on this bill. It's an honour for me to have this opportunity to join the environment minister, Jim Bradley, in supporting the new Ontario government's proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

As you've just heard from the minister, the proposed act would, if passed, help ensure that our treasured Great Lakes remain drinkable, swimmable and fishable. The proposed act would cover the entire Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin, including the Ottawa River.

I grew up on a farm on the Ottawa River. I was surprised, when this legislation came up, that it does include the full watershed of the Ottawa River, which includes La Verendrye park, I believe, right up to Renfrew and further up. There's great fishing up in La Verendrye park. That area drains into the Ottawa River and is part of this act.

The health of these waters ultimately affects the overall health and resilience of our Great Lakes, as we all share the benefits they provide.

Minister Bradley has spoken about the need for the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. He has listened to people all around the province—from municipalities, First Nations, Métis leaders, to our scientists, our environmental groups, to representatives from the agricultural sector and other industries, and recreational groups, as well as people in many different communities. We will continue to engage, consult and listen as we move forward with this important work.

Minister Bradley spoke of the importance of working with all of our partners in a collaborative, co-operative way to ensure the great legacy the Great Lakes provides is protected and sustained for all to enjoy. In a world of dwindling water resources, we share in the responsibility to respect and protect and restore this global treasure. As the minister said, nearly 20% of the fresh surface water of the planet is in our Great Lakes. I'd like to take the time today to discuss the importance of the proposed act in relation to the many ways the Great Lakes are essential to the well-being of Ontario families.

The Great Lakes are truly the waters of life to us in Ontario, providing drinking water to more than 80% of our population. In fact, close to 98% of our population lives in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin. That's amazing—98%. At the same time, the lakes are the great engines that power our strength and success. The Great Lakes basin is the location of almost 40% of the country's entire economic activity. From steel and cement manufacturing to car parts and precision ball bearings, Ontario manufacturers depend on the high quality of the Great Lakes waters.

Around 95% of Ontario's agricultural land is in the Great Lakes basin. The land of the Great Lakes basin supports our farms and farmers and our thriving agricultural and food industry, helping to grow our crops and process food products. The agri-industry contributes \$33 billion a year to Ontario's gross domestic product and provides jobs for 700,000 people. Clean and reliable Great Lakes water is also essential for many aspects of the agri-food sector, including food and beverage processing, the second-largest manufacturing employer in Ontario. There are around 3,000 food-processing firms in the province, generating close to 100,000 jobs and contributing \$10 billion to Ontario's gross domestic product.

Shipping through the Great Lakes also helps generate wealth, creates employment and supports other industries with raw materials and products shipped to and from markets throughout Ontario, Canada and around the world. This shipping corridor is vital to heavy industries located on Ontario waterways, which in turn feed the province's manufacturing base and our broader economy. The shipping industry itself contributes \$200 million in provincial gross domestic product annually, but it generates more wealth and employment by supporting other industrial activities in Ontario.

In 2007, 43 million metric tonnes of cargo—mostly grain, iron ore, coal, steel and other bulk commodities—with a value of over \$7 billion, moved through the Great

Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway. This important transportation artery links the Great Lakes region to producers and consumers around the world.

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Hydroelectric power from the Great Lakes has fuelled Ontario's economic growth since the beginning of the 20th century. The Great Lakes waters keep the lights on across Ontario, helping to generate more than 80% of our electricity.

Of course, our fisheries, tourism and recreation all depend on the health of the Great Lakes and their ecosystems.

Water is the heart and soul of Ontario's tourism industry, from Niagara Falls to the Thousand Islands, from Wasaga Beach to the rocky shores of Lake Superior. Great Lakes beaches, wetlands, marinas and waterfronts attract residents and tourists from around the world. People are drawn to the lakes for swimming, fishing, boating, hiking, birdwatching, camping, picnicking, spending time at the cottage and simply connecting with nature and waiting for a perfect sunset. In 2010, Ontario had more than 73 million tourist visits in the Great Lakes region, injecting \$12.3 billion into our economy.

Beginning with the first aboriginal peoples, fishing has always played an important role in Ontario's heritage and culture. The commercial fishery on the Great Lakes contributes \$234 million to the province's economy every year. Recreational fishing has an even greater economic impact. I was surprised 15 years ago when I caught about a 10-pound trout in sight of the CN Tower, right out in this Great Lake.

Lake Superior yields trophy-size brook trout. Georgian Bay on Lake Huron and Long Point Bay on Lake Erie offer superb bass fishing. Lake Erie and the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario produce big walleye. Lake Huron and Lake Ontario offer spectacular trophy salmon fishing. More than one million people a year go fishing in Ontario.

I have to say that as a young person on that farm along the Ottawa River, the spring always meant that the barbottes were out, and we could catch a good feed of fish every day that way. My mother knew how to cook—we called them mud pout or barbottes. "Barbotte" was the French word. They were an excellent eating fish from the Ottawa River.

Many of those people are fishing on the Great Lakes and their tributaries. Recreational fishers in the Great Lakes contribute more than \$600 million to Ontario's economy each year.

As these examples illustrate, the Great Lakes contribute billions of dollars to Ontario's economy and create jobs for the people of Ontario in many different ways and in many different sectors. From the earliest days of our province, they have been the strong foundation of our growth and success. They provide Ontario with a significant economic advantage and a competitive edge. We need to ensure that they continue to provide a strong and stable foundation for future generations.

A recent Ontario study has shown that we can expect real economic returns when we invest in actions that keep the Great Lakes healthy and sustainable. The study shows, for example, that we can expect an economic return of up to \$2 for every dollar invested in green infrastructure and other actions to prevent high levels of nutrients from entering the lakes. When it comes to protecting wetlands around the lakes, we can expect an economic return of up to \$35 for every dollar invested.

The study found that the most cost-effective investment in the Great Lakes is in preventing problems before they happen. For example, if we invest in preventing Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes, the short- and long-term economic benefits heavily outweigh the costs of dealing with the fallout from such an invasion.

As a member of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, I've been to Chicago twice for conferences, and also Washington one time, and this issue is always at the top of the list, but the solutions are still waiting.

This is consistent with findings of similar studies in the United States conducted by the Brookings Institution.

The study also shows that we can expect significant economic return—up to \$2 for every dollar invested in green infrastructure. Green infrastructure or landscape-based practices offer alternative ways to process and reuse rain and stormwater. Not only does this prevent excess nutrients from going into the lakes and creating algae problems, it also saves money, reducing infrastructure costs while providing greener spaces and cleaner air.

We are listening to what the experts are telling us, both about the economic benefits of investing in Great Lakes protection efforts and about the cumulative pressures that are affecting the health and resiliency of the Great Lakes today.

There are more challenges on the horizon. Ontario's future population growth is expected to be concentrated around the Great Lakes. With an annual growth rate of 6%, ours is the fastest-growing population around the Great Lakes region. While this growth can bring economic benefits, it can also add more stress to the ecosystem. More people settling around the lakes brings a demand for more water and increases the possibility of more storm water carrying phosphorus and contaminants into the Great Lakes.

Our changing climate is likely to make these problems worse and put even greater demands on our water and waste water infrastructure. Growth that is not properly managed can lead to the loss of important habitats, such as wetlands and beaches. The loss of fish and wildlife habitats not only affects the overall ecosystem health, it can cost us commercial and sport-fishing opportunities, and other opportunities for health, recreation and tourism.

The populations of some Great Lakes species have declined to the point where they are now at risk. The threat of invasive species such as Asian carp could devastate our ecosystems and fisheries. Our scientists are

seeing the effects of climate change on the Great Lakes. Less ice cover, more open water, more evaporation, bigger storms, changing water levels and high summer water temperatures pose risks for Great Lakes communities and ecosystems. Issues such as chemicals of emerging concern, changing water levels and algae are all coming to the forefront.

On Lake Erie, the fall of 2011 saw record levels of potentially toxic blue-green algae. Other parts of the lakes, such as the Bay of Quinte, are also experiencing similar problems. Some of Ontario's most beautiful Great Lakes beaches are not only affected by excess algae, but also excessive bacteria levels, particularly after heavy rains.

Good science, research and monitoring partnerships will also help support our Great Lakes work by providing the knowledge and data to help identify issues, set priorities, establish Great Lakes targets and guide effective restoration and protection initiatives.

We've been taking action in tangible ways and the proposed act builds on the existing work that has been going on for many years. In communities across Ontario, we have worked with local groups, industries and other partners to restore degraded areas, tackle shoreline problems, clean up priority watersheds and reduce harmful pollutants. We know the Great Lakes are important to the people of Ontario and that communities across this province are ready to work with us to tackle their Great Lakes priorities.

What we need now are the tools that the proposed act would provide. We need to bring together many different partners to take the next necessary steps to build on good work that is taking place around the province. The challenges we are facing can and must be addressed. Science is providing us a clear picture of the needs of the Great Lakes. None of the challenges we are facing offer up simple solutions but we have seen good progress made and we intend to build on that progress through on-the-ground efforts such as a Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund. We have seen people of all ages and backgrounds step forward to take action in their corner of the Great Lakes. This fund is providing real opportunities for grassroots action and involvement.

We're also continuing to work with our partners at the federal level as we work to negotiate a new Canada-Ontario agreement on the Great Lakes. Important partnerships are happening at the municipal level as communities continue their great work on delivering on remedial action plans for areas of concern, improving their waste water and storm water management, conserving water and taking care of beaches around the Great Lakes.

What we need now are the tools the proposed act would provide. We need to bring together many different partners to take the next steps to build on the good work that is taking place around the provinces. The challenge we are facing can and must be addressed.

Together, as partners who share this precious legacy, we can move forward on actions that will ensure clean,

healthy and resilient Great Lakes. The province's Great Lakes initiative aims to arm Ontario, top to bottom, with new tools and resources to support a renewed effort to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, if passed, would be a key part of Ontario's strategy to ensure our lakes stay drinkable, swimmable and fishable. It would provide the government with new tools to set targets and take cleanup actions where they are needed most. It would establish a council to allow provincial Great Lakes priorities and funding to bring key partners and leaders together.

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It is time for renewed action to restore and protect the Great Lakes, to keep them a ready storehouse of vital resources for our future. I encourage all members of the House to support the vision of a healthy Great Lakes for a stronger Ontario and to support the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to respond to the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

I thank the minister for his remarks, and the member previous, Ottawa–Orléans. I will tell the viewers at home they can take their sunglasses off. I, too, am wearing pink today in support of anti-bullying. Mr. McNeely clearly has a much brighter shirt than I, but I appreciate him for supporting anti-bullying.

As he had just mentioned, he attended a conference just recently on the Great Lakes in Chicago, and I too had the opportunity to attend that conference. I enjoyed the time that we had, as legislators, talking about the issues that are important to Great Lakes states and Great Lakes provinces, so thank you for that.

I've spoken a number of times in this House about how the Liberal government tends to rush its bills through the Legislature with little forethought or consultation. I'm sure many of you on this side have spoken about the same things.

Interjection: You're doing a comment, Mike.

Mr. Michael Harris: Oh, okay.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: It's okay. Just keep going.

Mr. Michael Harris: I've got plenty more to say eventually on this, as I'm sure we'll get to in the next round of discussion. And thank you, Speaker, for reminding me I've just got two minutes. I'll be up for an hour, and we'll hear plenty more of this to come. I look forward to communicating our stance and some of the concerns that we have with this piece of legislation, as I get that opportunity to speak for an hour on this proposed piece of legislation.

I did want to get that out of the way first, that I had an opportunity to spend some time with Mr. McNeely, talking about the Great Lakes and some of the items that are of concern to it. Thanks, obviously, to the minister for allowing me that first two minutes. I'll look forward to him being here as he listens intently to my one hour on the issue.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm happy to see the minister re-introduce this bill, and I look forward to having a full complement of time speaking to it, because it is a very big issue for the residents and a lot of the constituents that I have in Algoma–Manitoulin, and in particular along Manitoulin Island, along the North Shore. A lot of them have some grave concerns in regard to certain aspects of the inaction, or no concrete plan, as far as what is happening, particularly with the water levels. How it's affecting them with their households is really of concern to me.

I just wanted to read a particular invitation from the meetings. I look forward to hearing the minister elaborate a little bit more on the representative and interest groups from municipalities, and that municipalities and some of the stakeholders will be invited.

Under the IJC report that had come out over the course of last summer, I would really, in particular, extend a big invitation, or suggest to the minister that he really look at the First Nations from the area of Manitoulin Island and make sure that they're included—and also particularly the women that are there. The First Nation ladies have a particular interest when it comes to the protection of our waters. Their input, to be honest with you, was completely ignored during the time of the IJC report.

I look forward to having these discussions in regard to not limiting it just to what is in this act but also opening it up to a bigger problem, which is the levels that are going on with our water and how those levels are having a drastic impact not only on the economy but on the entire biodiversity of our Great Lakes.

I'm looking forward to having further debate about this, and I thank you for bringing this again.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm delighted to join the debate. I want to compliment the member from Ottawa–Orléans and of course the minister for their comments and bringing forward this bill.

In what seems like a previous lifetime now as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I was privileged to be part of a couple of consultations with our ag food community with respect to water and water management. It's clear, particularly in an era where we're seeing climate change having such a dramatic impact on agricultural economies, for us to focus yet anew on the preciousness of water and the importance of stewarding the sources of water that we have.

There's a group of scientists in the United States who self-describe themselves as "The doomers." There are 10 of them who inform us that the drought that hit the southern United States last year was the worst in, I think, 104 years, and they predict that it will be the wettest year of the next seven. So that sends a signal to us as to just how important water management, water conservation and the need to, as they say, be good stewards of our water is.

We are blessed indeed to have sustainable water sources here. There are many places I've travelled in the world, Mr. Speaker, where people go to war over water, and it is a resource that's even more precious than gold.

So I'm pleased the minister has brought this legislation back, and I look forward to ultimately having broad-based support across the House for the initiatives that he has carefully outlined in his bill.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to put my two cents in to the introductory speech brought on by the Minister of Environment, and I congratulate him on mentioning my riding; it is the best riding there is in Ontario, and I'm proud to be a strong part of it.

This bill—I'd like to get further discussion on it. I want to ensure that there's no duplication going on of rules and regulations we already have. There's no use to pile on more regulatory burden on any community or business or person when there's no need for it. So I'd like to have a further discussion to ensure that this act will take care of the regulatory burden that we don't want to compound it.

I'd also like to see great discussion on water levels. I travel to the St. Clair River from time to time, and I notice it's getting lower and lower and lower. We want to ensure that we do have the proper protections in place for our water sources as it is a vital part of life. A water a day is good for your soul, I always say.

We want to ensure, though, that we work and collaborate with one another and have proper consultation so that if we do come up with an act that is to protect the Great Lakes, there's no duplication involved and it's fair to all concerned.

Just before I sit down, a little bit of news here for the Legislature: My daughter placed first again at the St. Thomas Rotary Music Festival today. So it's two days in a row. She's a beautiful singer, nine years old—we hope to have her here singing O Canada someday for everybody.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of the Environment has two minutes to respond.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I must mention to the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London—offer congratulations from myself and I'm sure all members of the Legislature on his daughter's success. Obviously the daughter has inherited from her mother some great musical talent, and we appreciate that.

I want to assure my friend, the Conservative critic, that one doesn't have to take the full hour. Notice that, so that you can get on earlier, my parliamentary assistant and I took a little less time so that you would be in prime time, if we can put it that way. So don't feel that you necessarily have to take the entire hour.

I do appreciate your comment, both you and your colleague, about wanting a full canvass of the issues. That's why we have the debate; that's good. I'm looking forward to that, and the committee time that we'll spend

on this. We've had some great consultation taking place; I've really been impressed. The member for Algoma–Manitoulin mentioned First Nations individuals, and I must say that my discussions with them and dialogue we engaged in were very valuable. What you really find out is their great affinity and reverence for water—probably much greater than the general population's. I found it very, very helpful to have their input.

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I want to say to the Minister of Community and Social Services that I appreciate his comments as well. He also represents an area that, as I mentioned earlier, would receive an investment of \$46 million from the government of Ontario, matched by the government of Canada and matched by the local people in the Hamilton area. Hamilton harbour is an area of great concern and has been for some time. We have an example of three entities working together to improve the Great Lakes.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: Again, it's a pleasure to respond to the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. As I stated back in the first two minutes, I have actually had an opportunity a number of times in this House to speak about how this Liberal government really tends to rush its bills through the Legislature with little forethought or consultation. In fact, I myself introduced, in my first opportunity as a private member to introduce a piece of legislation, the Transparency in Government Bills Act, during the last session, really as a way to stop this disturbing trend and protect taxpayers from bad government policy. Still, as I stand here right now, I have to admit that I'm a little surprised by just how quickly the Minister of the Environment has raced to begin debating this government's proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, or Bill 6.

I do appreciate, though, that ministry officials have contacted my office to set up a briefing to go over any changes that have been made to the bill. As you'll recall, Bill 100, the Great Lakes Protection Act, was introduced in the last session. But unfortunately, it was so good that the government decided to prorogue and kill that legislative agenda, and so we're back here with Bill 6 ready to go.

I will say, though, that it's unfortunate that that meeting is next week, and I didn't have the opportunity to meet with them prior to today to go over some of the changes from Bill 100 to Bill 6. Thankfully, though, I completed an extensive consultation on this particular piece of legislation the last time the government introduced it, as I was saying, last year. In fact, last year I met with aboriginal groups, conservation authorities, environmental organizations, farmers, home builders, industry representatives, local governments, businesses in the clean water sector and our Environmental Commissioner, Mr. Miller. I'm sure you've all had the opportunity to meet and dialogue with him. I have noted all their concerns and comments on this particular bill, which has suddenly become the government's first priority.

Now, as I would hope members of the government would remember, a throne speech is to outline the agenda or the priorities of the government. I feel it's a great opportunity to go back. I had an opportunity to speak to the throne speech just the other day, but I feel it's important to go back to that.

You know, I felt the day of the throne speech was truly a moment of truth for Ontario. The speech from the throne presented an opportunity for this government—what in fact is called the new government—to make the necessary and urgent decisions to put Ontario on the right track.

We of course all want a better Ontario. We had hoped to see reduced spending and a plan to create jobs. It would have been better for Ontario if the Premier used this as a time and opportunity to reverse the track that Ontario is on. Instead, however, she treated it as a time to entrench the Dalton McGuinty agenda that has led Ontario down a path of bigger deficits, more debt and more Ontarians without a good-paying job. You know, anyone who has ever been faced with a crisis or emergency will tell you that being cautious, being incremental will not save you and that the only way forward is to move quickly, confidently and boldly in a direction that you know is right. However, unfortunately, we did not hear that from the Premier during her remarks. In fact, I will say, though, that we did get to hear that the following day when our leader, Tim Hudak, and the Ontario PC Party rose to speak about our plan to end the over-spending and grow the economy. I will just highlight quickly, for those who were here and those who may not have been here, some of those issues.

We talked about reforming our outdated labour laws—I know my colleague from Lanark will, in the coming weeks and months, be speaking about just how we're going to do that, and I thank him for his efforts on that file—lowering taxes to expand economic activity and get our economy driving again; establishing affordable energy as a cornerstone of economic growth; creating more skilled trades jobs by modernizing the apprenticeship system—today we heard our member from Simcoe talk about how we would go about doing that, including the abolishment of the College of Trades, which is simply no more than a tax on our hard-working tradespeople here in Ontario—and creating more job opportunities for our youth and graduates of our schools, colleges and universities, because we all know the best thing we can give our young people is an opportunity and a good job to provide a great base for their families.

Ontarians need to see a serious plan from their government that presents a clear and credible way to reduce the size and cost of government. Unfortunately, that was not addressed in the throne speech. I will say, though, that there was one gentleman who wasn't able to make it. He has since left the Legislature and has moved into the private sector. I would like to quote him because he admitted that the interest payments on the province's overall debt are in fact a ticking time bomb and that, clearly, they needed to reduce spending and tackle the

deficit. That was the Liberal Party's own former finance minister, Dwight Duncan, who said that: that it is a ticking, ticking time bomb.

Just getting back to the bill and the throne speech, we actually didn't even hear mention of the Great Lakes in the speech from the throne. That's interesting. What's more, there were no mentions of the environment, aside from two relatively brief and totally ambiguous statements. You would think that a government whose first order of business is to introduce a bill on the Great Lakes would mention it when setting out the government's agenda, or at least prioritize it the last time it was introduced. After being tabled in June last year, this bill sat for months until it was thrown out when the Liberals prorogued. I will remind Ontarians watching at home that that was a desperate, cynical move to shut down the finance committee's investigation into the Liberal government's politically motivated decision to cancel the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants simply to save a few Liberal seats.

Interjection: Right on Lake Ontario.

Mr. Michael Harris: Right on Lake Ontario, as one of my colleagues just mentioned.

When the kitchen got hot, when finally—as constituents come up to me each and every day, they say, “Continue to keep that government held to account. We want to know why, who and how much it has cost us as taxpayers to basically save Liberal seats in the last election.” Again, a cynical move, a political move made by the campaign team which involved, obviously, the new Premier as co-chair of the campaign, in an attempt to save Liberal seats right before—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): On a point of order, the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Speaker, can I just be sure that we're talking about Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act? I'd ask the speaker to speak to the bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, I would remind the member for Kitchener–Conestoga that it would be most appropriate if he would bring his comments back to making reference to Bill 6.

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Mr. Michael Harris: You know what? Bringing back those comments, when I outline about the power plants and the money that some say is up to \$1.3 billion, which is a heck of a lot of money—look what that money could have been used to do, when speaking about the environment and a variety of a lot of other things. I couldn't even imagine what \$1.3 billion would do to help protect and address the situation faced in the Great Lakes.

Just getting back to the fact that it seemed nowhere on the government's radar, yet it popped right up after the energy minister dropped a bombshell in the House last week when he in fact admitted that the government had wrongly claimed, on two different occasions, that all gas plant documents had been disclosed. We all know, of course, that that has been totally false. We've now had three different batches of documents released, and we know there are more still outstanding. The reason we

know this is that we still haven't seen any documents from the Premier's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, again, the speaker is talking about something which is not related to the subject matter of this debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would say again to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga that it would be most helpful if his comments related back to Bill 6, the bill that is before the House that we are currently debating.

Mr. Michael Harris: And I'm getting to that; I'm going to bring it back to that. But I think it's important really to know that we still haven't seen any of those documents from the energy minister or the Premier's office.

Then, in the midst of this controversy, in comes the Liberals' Great Lakes—wait for it—Great Lakes bill. In what would seem to be a desperate attempt to change the channel on scandal, mismanagement and failure, the Liberals now want to talk about protecting our Great Lakes, a subject they know everyone really can agree with, at least in principle.

But we all need to ask ourselves, is more legislation really needed to protect the Great Lakes? And if we determine that it's not necessary, we then need to ask if this bill is actually the product of a public relations campaign to placate certain groups and create a narrative of protecting the environment, when in reality it only serves to complicate and confuse the environmental processes that we and our partners already have in place. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you can see that I am leaning towards the latter. The reason for this is that on too many occasions we have seen the Liberals slap a fancy title on a bill which has a pleasant-sounding preamble, yet is full of new regulatory overlap, duplication and conflict. I guess the Liberals are hoping people don't make it past the introduction to actually read the contents of their bills.

Look, we all want to protect the Great Lakes. We all have a duty to be stewards of our earth, and we simply cannot pass the environmental problems we have today on to our children tomorrow, just like we can't pass years of reckless spending and government waste on to the next generation, which this government will do. You know what? It's a \$12-billion deficit, some \$275 billion worth of debt.

I said just the other day that they increased the size of cabinet by five to 27, but they forgot one of the most important ministries: They should have appointed a ministry of debt. You know what? It's the third-largest expenditure line item the province of Ontario has. Do you know how much clout that minister sitting at a cabinet table would have? Next to health and education, debt would in theory have the loudest voice.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Harris: What's one more, I suppose, and you never know. I think that possibly that may be

what one of the members from Scarborough is currently negotiating with, and who knows? She could come back as the minister of debt.

Individually, we need to take responsibility for our actions and understand the importance of our treasured resources that we have here in Ontario, like our Great Lakes. The Great Lakes play a major role in providing drinking water, shipping routes, and recreational activities like swimming, fishing or simply spending a day on the beach, which I know the minister will be looking forward to in the summertime, as I will. Just think that the Great Lakes are a direct source of drinking water for 33 million people, including about 10 million Canadians. Eighty per cent of Ontarians get their drinking water from the Great Lakes. These large bodies of fresh water also play a critical role in sustaining bi-national trade and economic activity here in Canada. In fact, the Great Lakes basin is home to 40% of Canada's economic activity and contributes \$180 billion to US-Canada trade.

The Great Lakes also support 25% of Canada's agricultural capacity—something I know the member for Oxford has spoken about at great length—45% of Canada's industrial capacity and inject \$12 billion into Ontario's tourism industry annually. Every year, more than 160 million metric tonnes of raw materials for manufacturing products and agricultural commodities are moved on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway; in fact, I had the opportunity to tour some of those sites as part of the general government committee on the review of the Aggregate Resources Act—on how materials like aggregates and cement are shipped using the Great Lakes by some of those companies here in Ontario.

Every year, more than 160 million metric tonnes—as I had said—are moved. This marine highway supports more than 100 ports and commercial docks located in Ontario, Quebec and eight Great Lakes states. The Great Lakes also support \$100 million in commercial fishing activity and \$350 million in recreational fishing activity. I'm sure many of our members enjoy getting out on a Sunday or a Saturday, casting a net and having a great old day in the sun. I'm not a big fish fan, but I enjoy fishing as a sport.

Clearly the importance of these valued resources cannot be overstated, but unfortunately it's not all a good-news story. The Great Lakes are facing a number of challenges as a result of urban encroachment, agricultural drainage, invasive species, toxic chemicals and a changing climate.

The continued introduction of aquatic invasive species is one of the most significant threats to biodiversity in the Great Lakes. Aquatic invasive species can degrade water quality by increasing turbidity, concentrating toxins, and altering nutrient and energy flows within the ecosystem. Zebra and quagga mussels are degrading water quality and increasing algae development and avian botulism.

Asian carp is an invasive species that is itching to enter into the Great Lakes, and this would be catastrophic. In fact, I was just reading an article the other day—

this is from December, from the Windsor Star, on how an Asian carp seizure at the Ambassador Bridge fined a company \$30,000; these eco-terrorists, as I like to call them, are a great threat to our Great Lakes. There had been traces, in fact, of Asian carp DNA found in Lake Michigan, and the live fish have turned up past the barriers created. These fish getting into our Great Lakes could possibly outnumber all native species. The economic impacts would be significant, too.

The Great Lakes are home to 130 endangered species, 30 million people, and a \$7-billion fishing industry. Asian carp have a history of threatening livelihoods as well as wildlife, which means we could see an encore of the same situation that happened in the Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois rivers here in Ontario. We must focus our attention on ensuring that these invasive species do not cross our borders.

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As Progressive Conservatives, we, in fact, will stand up to protect our Great Lakes and support their ecosystems by restricting dead and alive Asian carp from coming into our province and our waters. Currently, fish are being brought in on ice and seem dead, but once someone drops them in warm water, they come alive. This poses a huge risk to our native species and the toxicity of our Great Lakes. Aggressive steps have been taken to curtail them from entering our waterways or else these ecosystems and fishing businesses will be left with the price to pay.

Like people, a lake requires many nutrients in proper amounts to stay healthy. In the Great Lakes, phosphorus is the nutrient that has the most influence on the health of the ecosystems. Some areas of the Great Lakes have more phosphorus than they need to be healthy, and intervention is required to reduce phosphorus back to the appropriate levels.

When the balance is lost and phosphorus levels are too high, the excess phosphorus contributes to excess algal growth. Certain types of blue-green algae and other species may produce toxins that are harmful to both humans and wildlife.

Upgrades to municipal waste water treatment plants and limits on phosphorus levels in detergents started in the 1970s and were successful at reducing phosphorus levels, particularly in Lakes Ontario and Huron.

The accidental introduction of invasive zebra and quagga mussels to the Great Lakes, starting in the late 1980s, has dramatically changed how and where phosphorus is available for plant growth in the lakes. These mussels are efficient at filtering particulates and phosphorus out of water and converting phosphorus to a form that aquatic plants and algae can easily use to grow. In this way, nuisance aquatic plants and algae can thrive close to shore, where most of the mussels live.

Climate change impacts are observed in the Great Lakes basin as well. Some of the most evident impacts include warming temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, decreased ice coverage, and lower-than-average water levels. We need to engage real solutions to fight

climate change, like conserving energy, which would require us to use less power to heat our homes. You know that public buildings are some of the least energy-efficient buildings in Ontario. We must invest in public transit like subways, and encourage people to take the train into work.

Remediating the effects at the source of the problem is a concrete solution that would have a positive effect on the quality of our Great Lakes as well as on many other environmental issues.

We also need to work at preserving our green space, not just here in Toronto but across the countryside of our province of Ontario.

In fact, I had an opportunity to meet with some mayors and deputy mayors just yesterday at the ROMA conference, as well as some of my other colleagues. My colleagues from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Huron–Bruce, and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound were there, and the member from Durham also sat in on the meeting.

In order for them to support their economies, whether it be fishing or shipping industries, they are spending thousands of dollars on emergency recovery programs when they could have resolved their low water levels with a permit for dredging from the Ministry of Natural Resources. In fact, they talked about the red tape that is holding back our businesses, farmers and municipalities to prevent lower-than-normal water levels, and it's way too much and it's creating more negative effects than positive. To effectively clean up the Great Lakes, we must look at the root of the problem, not create more regulation that stifles businesses, farmers, municipalities and even more.

I would like to take some time to go over the governance structure we currently have in place to address the threats to our Great Lakes, and how Ontario, Quebec and the eight Great Lakes states have co-operated to tackle these problems over the years.

To deal with these challenges, the United States and Canada signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in 1972. I think the minister was just on his way, coming into the Legislature at that time—maybe five or seven years later. It was most recently updated in September when federal environment minister Peter Kent met with American officials to build on the last 40 years of binational co-operation to protect and remediate the Great Lakes. The agreement's goal is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Great Lakes basin ecosystem.

Under the agreement, the US and Canadian governments have identified the need to:

- clean up areas of concern in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin;

- develop a comprehensive lake-wide management plan to protect and remediate near-shore waters;

- reduce toxic chemicals in the Great Lakes, like mercury and PCBs;

- reduce nutrients like phosphorus that lead to the occurrence of algae blooms that degrade drinking water quality, impair fish spawning and adversely impact

commercial and recreational fishing, swimming, tourism and overall enjoyment of the Great Lakes;

- prevent discharges from shipping vessels, such as garbage, sewage, invasive species and other pollutants;

- stop the spread of invasive species by developing and implementing early detection and rapid response initiatives within two years;

- complete the development of and begin implementing lake-wide habitat and species protection, restoration and conservation strategies within two years;

- identify contaminants in groundwater discharge into the Great Lakes; and

- research the impacts of climate change.

This agreement also obliges Canada and the United States to address the use of specific toxic substances in the basin and to develop action plans for areas of concern, which are regions that have experienced significant environmental degradation over the years, such as beach closures, or a diminished ability to support aquatic life.

To oversee the development and implementation of these binational policy goals, the agreement has an oversight body, the International Joint Commission. The Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem, or COA for short, was negotiated to help Canada fulfill its obligations under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and has been renewed roughly every five years since 1972.

Now, I know Ontario is currently in negotiations with the federal government about a new memorandum of co-operation to achieve the goals laid out in the recently updated Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. I've heard the environment minister say many times that everyone has a part to play in protecting the Great Lakes. In the spirit of that co-operation, I hope my honourable colleague will give more notice and will actually work with the opposition parties in going over the new Canada-Ontario agreement this spring.

As part of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the International Joint Commission oversees the remediation of 15 areas of concern by ensuring that parties to the agreement have remedial action plans in place. Ontario is responsible for leading the remediation efforts in seven of Canada's 10 areas of concern. These include Nipigon Bay, Jackfish Bay, Peninsula Harbour, Spanish Harbour, Wheatley Harbour, the Niagara River and the Bay of Quinte. Through binational and federal-provincial negotiations, we've identified the areas we need to focus on to improve our environment and to ensure that Ontarians in these regions have access to safe, clean drinking water.

Ontario is also a member of the Great Lakes Charter, which is an agreement signed by Ontario, Quebec and eight of the Great Lakes states in 1985 to monitor issues related to water diversions in the Great Lakes basin. In 2001, the charter agreed to address bulk water exports and eventually produced two agreements in 2005: committing the members to ban new diversion and to use a consistent standard to review proposed uses of Great Lakes' water.

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With four of five Great Lakes within Ontario's boundaries and with a binational governance structure in place to protect and remediate these bodies of water, we clearly have a major role to play in this policy area, and we must continue to work with our federal government to meet our binational obligations.

But, for Ontario to do its part, we require the political will and a government that understands that the economy and the environment are not mutually exclusive. We need a government that offers a holistic approach on the Great Lakes that protects ecosystems but also develops sustainable infrastructure for tourism, water and waste water systems; a government that understands the important role the Great Lakes play in our manufacturing sector and broader economy; a government that understands that environmental efforts for remediation and improving water quality require an economic strategy that engages the clean-water technology sector and other innovative firms.

What we don't need is more delay, more review, more burdensome regulation and more needless bureaucracy. Take, for instance, some of Ontario's existing water legislation. We've got the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Conservation Authorities Act and the Planning Act, to name a few.

So, again, I come back to the fundamental question I raised earlier: Is there actually a need for more legislation, especially when there's so much potential for overlap, duplication and conflict? Once you ask this question, you will end up with even more. For instance, if there was a need, why wasn't this legislation tabled earlier? If this legislation actually contains a policy improvement, why have the Liberals sat on their hands for nearly a decade? And if Ontario was having difficulties meeting its obligations under COA, why didn't the Liberals introduce a bill in 2007, when the agreement was in fact last renewed?

I find it passing strange that after four decades of co-operation and work between Ontario, Quebec and the eight Great Lakes states, as well as both the American and Canadian governments, we would just suddenly, out of the blue, require more legal tools to protect the Great Lakes.

What's the true motivation of this bill? Does the Ministry of the Environment simply want to increase its regulatory powers? Does the government want to empower its friends and certain interest groups? Is it an excuse for Ontario's lack of leadership on the Great Lakes after nearly a decade? Or, you know, is it simply window dressing for a government that's falling apart at the seams as a result of more than a decade of scandal, mismanagement and waste?

I know I've only got 27 minutes left, but I could seriously go off on those three issues in themselves: Ornge, eHealth—something we just talked about yesterday in committee, eHealth and the documents that we had asked for; a bit of a Freudian slip from one of

their members yesterday, so we're not sure really where that's going, but we'll play that out as it comes—and extracurriculars, something that we talked greatly about yesterday.

When you talk about the Great Lakes, I know I've had many students in my office that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): As Acting Speaker, I'm compelled to remind the member for Kitchener–Conestoga to bring his remarks back to Bill 6. I would have to ask him to do so. Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Harris: You know what? I talked about scandal and mismanagement and waste. You can just imagine the amount of funds available to address some of the issues that our Great Lakes are experiencing right now.

As I mentioned earlier, I had a group of students in my office just the other day. We were talking about a variety of environmental issues, because students today, whether they're in public school, in their early years, or in high school, are very concerned about the environment. The Great Lakes are obviously a part of that concern, especially for schools that border the Great Lakes. You know what? They were in my office because it was after school, and their extracurriculars had been taken away from them. I had an opportunity quickly to address that yesterday, and I thank Lisa MacLeod, the member from Nepean–Carleton, I believe, who brought forward that necessary motion. It's really a shame that the NDP and the Liberals wouldn't stand with the students, and on the other hand they stood with the unions on this one.

I've had many students talk about the importance of extracurriculars, not just from sports, but even from an environmental club that would talk about Great Lakes' issues—but students who are working toward getting into college or university, they need that extra little bit of help in the morning or after school.

Again, I could go on on that scandal, mismanagement and waste, but I want to go back to the last point as to why, perhaps, I think this Great Lakes bill was brought forward. Could it be just smoke and mirrors to distract Ontarians from truly paying attention to the Liberal gas plant scandal, that cost taxpayers and potentially will cost them upwards of \$1.3 billion? I can't fathom what we could have used that money for—whether it's health care, education, protecting our environment, creating jobs etc.

Mr. Speaker, you can see this bill has plenty more questions than answers. So I briefly want to summarize the bill before looking at each section in detail. In this bill, the Liberals want to create another advisory board, but haven't specified its membership or explained how much it would cost. In fact, we heard my colleague today from Simcoe North, Mr. Garfield Dunlop, talk about another unnecessary board, the College of Trades, and that, if elected, a PC government would abolish it. It's simply an unnecessary level of bureaucracy that's now wanting to impose a trades tax on some of our hardest-working Ontarians.

They want to create a series of different regulations for numerous yet undetermined geographic areas, again without providing a price tag or detailing how this additional red tape would affect local governments, farmers and businesses. They want to create another regulator for Ontario's shorelines while giving no particular reason or estimated costs in this bill—Bill 6; that's what I'm talking about here. We could go on and probably talk 60 minutes on the College of Trades, but we're not. We're talking about Bill 6.

When asked about these issues, the Liberals have, in fact, refused to respond, leaving stakeholders who I've met with scratching their heads. Perhaps that's why last year the Liberals left the bill sitting for months. Once you read it, you immediately get the sense that it could barely even serve as a discussion paper. Some of its sections, especially the guardians' council, are more open-ended than a Liberal campaign promise.

At first it was difficult to determine if this lack of clarity was the result of Liberal obfuscation or simply incompetence, but it didn't take long for most observers to conclude that the Liberals had, yet again, failed to do their homework. Bill 6 is just a regulatory mess waiting to happen.

So I would like to take some time now to go through the bill. The stated purpose of the bill fits nicely into the Liberals' window-dressing strategy. I mean, who wouldn't want to protect and restore the Great Lakes? It all sounds good until you get to part II, and read about the Liberals' plan to create yet another advisory council to review, delay and advise instead of acting. Real action: something this party, under the leadership of Tim Hudak, has presented over the last four months, while this Liberal government prorogued Parliament in a cynical attempt to save Liberal seats and hide the truth from Ontarians, going back to the power plants.

This bill is nothing more than lofty statements followed by a potential web of bureaucracy that could soon form, if it were ever passed into law.

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As usual, there's no price tag attached to anything in this bill. The Liberals' proposed advisory council could cost millions to operate. The new regulatory areas that may be created as a result of the bill could cost local governments, farmers and businesses millions of dollars to comply with. The new shoreline regulations could end up generating millions of dollars in new revenue from fining violations, and the regulatory duplication among the Ministries of the Environment, Agriculture and Food—don't forget Food—Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Natural Resources could cost the government millions in operational inefficiencies. But we can't be sure. We just don't know. The Liberals have provided no details whatsoever. They just table a bill and ask Ontarians to hand over a blank cheque. We all know about that.

As a reminder, this troubling trend was precisely the reason I introduced my bill last year—last session—to force the government to table financial details in the

House with each and every one of its bills. But we all know what the Liberals did. They rejected the bill, claiming that due diligence is simply just a waste of time. Instead, the Liberals would prefer to table a bill, claiming it's all motherhood and apple pie with a side of ice cream, while downplaying the potential costs. But Ontarians deserve to know how much of their money the Liberals intend to spend, because at the end of the day, they're the ones who will be left to pick up the tab, just like in the case of Mississauga and Oakville: a cynical decision to save Liberal seats, and you get the bill for it.

You can't divorce the economy from the environment. As I say quite frequently, good environmental policy requires a proper cost-benefit analysis, something folks do each and every day, whether it's in their business or in their home. If you want to go and buy a new TV, no doubt you'll have to provide some sort of cost-benefit analysis to your spouse to ensure that that gets bought and put up on wall—something we do each and every day.

But that's exactly what the Liberals have done in yet another of their environmental bills. The words "job" or "jobs" don't even appear in the Liberals' proposed Great Lakes Protection Act, or shall I now say, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin. With little to no mention of the economy, the Liberals have basically told environmental companies that maintaining the health of the Great Lakes requires top-down government instead of a healthy, meaningful partnership with the private sector to develop innovative new technologies in order to remediate areas of concern and improve water quality, not to mention that there's no provision in Bill 6 that requires the government to consider the economic and social impacts of potential new regulations created under the proposed act.

I know the government has a token regulatory impact assessment policy that it rarely, if ever, uses. So, for the government to say that this policy should address regulatory concerns with Bill 6 is, in fact, laughable. The Liberals have an extremely poor track record of co-operatively working with local governments—as we have likely seen from the Green Energy act, to remind Ontarians—farmers and businesses to ensure that the laws and regulations they create are fair and balanced. We know that we simply can't trust the Liberals to actually evaluate the consequences of their decisions—only after the fact.

Then there's the Liberals' grand Great Lakes Strategy, which obviously could have been created without the bill before the House. But again, to give the impression that they're taking action, the Liberals have elevated a policy document to a matter of law. Unfortunately, this strategy fails to embrace a holistic view of the Great Lakes, like the one called the Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative, offered by the former PC government. This document was developed by the member for Halton as part of Ontario's Living Legacy, and a legacy it is. I've spoken to many conservation groups who have said that our party took bold action on this policy matter and really led

the way by providing a thoughtful, balanced direction for maintaining the health of our Great Lakes.

You see, we knew then, as we do now, that the environment and the economy are not mutually exclusive. That's why we had identified the need for coordination on the Great Lakes, to protect ecosystems while also developing sustainable infrastructure for tourism, water and waste water systems.

I would like to thank and commend the member for Halton for his leadership on this file.

If any of the members opposite, those new or old, would like a great read, stop by my office, 344, and I'll provide a copy of that document for you.

I want to get back to Bill 6, because I know that everyone on that side is listening attentively. I want to talk about the provision that would give the government the authority to establish new regulatory areas called geographically focused initiatives. As a way to give the appearance that the process will be driven from the bottom up, the Liberals are allowing public bodies to submit proposals for establishing a GFI.

Here is the first problem: Not everyone agrees with the Liberals' interpretation of what constitutes a public body. In the definition, the Liberals have included source water protection committees, which at times have been guided by partisan politics instead of sound science. Still, under Bill 6, source water protection committees will be able to submit proposals to establish GFIs, which may or may not correspond to one of Ontario's 19 different source water protection regions or areas.

The first problem with the GFI model, obviously, is that it will lead to numerous new regulations that will vary by region, which has already been the case under the source water protection act. Then these new regulations will create overlap, conflict and duplication with other regulations in other areas. This could soon create a regulatory web that the government would then have to expend valuable time, money and resources untangling, not to mention that the regulatory burden on new development will substantially increase, thereby creating new headaches for local governments already struggling to make ends meet. Municipalities rely on new property tax revenue and development charges to invest in improving roads, bridges and public facilities. But home builders and developers, who already deal with most of the red tape in the province, warn that the ever-increasing regulatory burden may cause them to cut costs and lay off workers. Just think: A developer in Lincoln, Ontario, for instance, may already have to comply with the town's official plan and zoning bylaws, the region of Niagara bylaws, the Planning Act, the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, the Greenbelt Act, the conservation authority regulations and source water protection regulations, and now the Liberals want to add yet another layer of red tape by creating a GFI.

The only comfort the Liberals have offered to businesses drowning in red tape is that the executive council will sort out the regulatory duplication at a later date. This is just another classic example of the Liberals'

philosophy: Legislate first and figure out the details later. Again, this philosophy rests on the implicit assumption that we can all trust the Liberals to live up to their word—I've got 11 minutes yet; we could probably go on for 60 just on that item alone. Well, I can say there are plenty of groups that won't fall for this ploy once again.

Neither will they fall for the Liberals' claim that this proposed act will favour local decision-making. Let's take a look at the facts. Under the proposed act, interested bodies must consult with the minister and receive cabinet approval at the proposal stage. Right from the start, the minister can influence the very conception of the proposal. Then the proposal has to be tabled at the guardians' council. We'll come back to the subject of the guardians' council in just a bit, but suffice it to say that this body will be just another board stacked with Liberals to make Liberal policy.

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But back to the process. If the guardians' council approves the proposal, it is then sent to cabinet for final approval. It is at this point that the Liberals say cabinet will sort out any regulatory conflict. Again, the final decision is completely left up to the government. At every stage from the conception of the proposal to its finalization, the Liberal government will control the process—frightening. The only crumb offered to municipalities is that they'll have the ability to submit a proposal for a new regulatory area. However, if they don't submit one, another public body, like a source water protection committee, for instance, may choose to go ahead without or with them. This is a perfect example of special-purpose groups superseding elected officials.

Let's say another public body did have a proposal approved by the Liberal government. According to Bill 6, if there are any instances of conflict, a designated policy within the GFI prevails over a municipality's official plan or zoning bylaws. That means if a new regulatory area is established, municipalities must amend their official plans and bylaws to conform with designated policies set out in an initiative.

These new regulatory areas would also tie the hands of local officials in the future. The bill states, "Municipalities and municipal planning authorities are prohibited from undertaking any public work or other undertaking and from passing any bylaw that conflicts with a designated policy set out in an initiative." This bill clearly takes more power away from the municipalities by placing it in the hands of the cabinet, but I have to say I'm not surprised.

The Liberal government also deprived municipalities of local decision-making to make their green energy social experiment a reality in the backyards of rural landowners. Then, as a meaningless gesture, the Premier offered to be the part-time Minister of Agriculture and Food, even though she's unable to answer the most basic questions involved in the file. This is a government that clearly doesn't care about the concerns of rural Ontario and does everything it can to centralize more and more power into the hands of Toronto-based Liberal policy-

makers. And now we have yet another piece of legislation before us in this House that trumps municipal plans and bylaws and forces local governments to work around new regulations in order to ensure their existing policies align with the Toronto-knows-best government of the Premier.

But Bill 6 doesn't just duplicate the efforts of conservation authorities and municipalities. It also duplicates the work done by Canada and the US under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and in turn the work done by the federal and provincial governments under the Canada-Ontario agreement.

At every turn along the way the Liberals attempt to reinvent the wheel. The first and most obvious example of this is that the Liberals want to create new geographic initiatives when we have already determined the areas of concern.

What has the McGuinty-Wynne government discovered that nobody caught for the last 40 years of Great Lakes protection? Well, if you ask that question, the answer would be, they just don't know. That's why the Liberals are proposing to create the Great Lakes Guardians' Council to determine what government priorities should be. You see, this is really where the whole thing gets quite ridiculous.

Let's go through the whole muddled argument again to see if we can make any sense of it. First, the Liberals say we need new legislation to protect and restore the Great Lakes, even though Canada and the US have been doing so for the last 40 years. The immediate question, as I stated before, becomes, then why on earth do we need new legislation? The Liberals' answer to this question is that we need to deal with today's priorities with new legal tools. When you ask them what their priorities are, they respond by saying, "We're creating another council to help us figure out what these priorities will be." Since there are already binational and federal-provincial structures in place to set those priorities, why doesn't the government take its cues from these forums? After all, the Great Lakes is a binational issue. That's why we have several different advisory boards already. We have the International Joint Commission; the Great Lakes Water Quality Board; the newly created Great Lakes Executive Committee, whose job it is to set priorities for protecting and remediating the Great Lakes; and we have the management committee of COA, which also sets priorities for maintaining the health of the Great Lakes. What purpose will yet another advisory board serve, especially one that has no representatives from the American or Canadian governments?

My guess is that the government wants to use this new advisory board as a political arm of the government to advance its agenda and empower its buddies while pretending to remain objective. Although there are token references to industry, agriculture and municipalities, the minister can appoint whomever he wants to the guardians' council. I would be quite interested to see the Liberals' roster of potential candidates. At the end of the day, objective advice on something as complex as

managing the Great Lakes is always a welcome thing, but that advice should be firmly based on science. With the unlimited and unrestrained power of the minister to appoint whomever he wants, it's hard to see how this council could be guided by anything other than politics. The Liberals still haven't said how much this council is going to cost. Ontarians deserve to know if they'll be forced to fork over millions of dollars to operate a new wing of the Liberal government.

I want to move on to the government's decision to triple up on shoreline regulations. Even though Ontario already has laws and regulations in place for the province's shorelines, that didn't stop the Liberals from pushing forward with a list of new powers in Bill 6 that would conflict with and supersede those outlined in the Conservation Authorities Act and Planning Act. Here's another classic example of legislative and regulatory duplication created by the Liberals. First of all, the Conservation Authorities Act already gives conservation authorities the power to regulate the development of shorelines with the approval of the Minister of Natural Resources. Then, the Planning Act gives municipalities the authority to prohibit development on its shorelines. Now the Minister of the Environment wants in on the action and it wants the power to collect fees for violations.

The jury is still out on which shorelines the minister will regulate. That decision is being left up to—you guessed it—the Liberals' guardians' council. Yet again, the Liberals are attempting to increase their powers despite increasing regulatory overlap between the Minister of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment. It would seem as though the Liberals want to centralize regulatory power under the Ministry of the Environment, and the Liberals may intend to have the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act subsume all other legislation or regulations that deal with the Great Lakes.

The most concerning of all provisions in this section of the bill is that the government would have the authority to appoint a public body to administer—which could be in addition to a conservation authority—to enforce and collect fees for new shoreline regulations. Clearly, this is an attempt by the government to raise new revenues to execute its plans under the Great Lakes Protection Act, and although this bill contains a provision to resolve duplication, the entire section on shoreline regulation contains massive regulatory conflict, duplication and overreach.

Homebuilders already cope with probably the most onerous regulatory burden in the province, dealing with regulations, laws and policy plans at the municipal, provincial and federal level, and now Bill 6 will simply add a level and one more layer to that.

To conclude: At no time have the Liberals offered a legitimate reason why the government needs to centralize regulatory power or needs to increase the size and cost of government by adding even more bureaucracy. I know members—at least the ones on this side of the House—will agree that no serious piece of legislation leaves so

many more important questions unanswered and has no price tag attached to it. What we don't need is more delay, more review, more burdensome regulation and more needless bureaucracy, something we've seen for the last 10 years that Ontarians, Ontario businesses, municipalities simply cannot afford. So I think it's more clear than ever that the government, in fact, doesn't lack those legal tools; it lacks the political leadership to actually get the job done.

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I hope the minister has noted the concerns that I have raised and will strongly consider them moving forward. As I've mentioned, this bill is simply an unnecessary duplication, a series of regulatory burdens that Ontarians simply can't afford.

That being said, I'll leave the last few seconds to just simply thank those who are watching at home for their time and wrap it up from there.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to be back. I'll be a bit—well, I've always been rusty, so I'll be a bit more rusty. I'd like to take this opportunity to add some comments to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga on the bill, the Great Lakes Protection Act, introduced by the Minister of the Environment.

Some of my residents, the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, will be surprised that they're actually even impacted by this bill—because Lake Timiskaming is the headwaters of the Ottawa River. Not all of my district is impacted, however, because, for some of you who may never have been up there, the northern watershed is in my riding. On the north of the northern watershed, the water goes to Hudson Bay.

One thing I think is, who wouldn't want to provide more protection for our waterways, for our environment? I don't think there's an argument about that at all. We're glad the minister introduced this act. We think this act deserves debate, but where we're concerned, especially from an agriculture perspective, is we think that legislation should be developed from the shore up, not from bureaucracy down.

I'm not opposed to discussing legislation; that's what we're here for. But we have to ensure that we're not just creating more legislation for the fact that we're sitting here and needing something to do—and I'm not saying we're doing that, but we have to make sure we're not. I'm not saying that. But we have to make sure that legislation that we create here works on the ground, works on the shoreline and works on the farms, because if it doesn't, we're wasting our time and taxpayers' money, and we're not helping our environment.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I always enjoy the speeches.

The hardest job in the world has got to be the environment critic for the Progressive Conservative Party, because you always have to take the anti-environment stand. The researchers who write all these are pretty

right-wing people, probably unlike the member for Kitchener, who I don't think is that far to the right.

I do see the influence of a fellow from eastern Ontario from the landowners' association on this speech, as well. So you've done a good job in penetrating the Progressive Conservative Party.

I look at it and say that I don't know where the speech went, because on one hand it said, "Do more," and on the other hand it said, "Do less." We think that there can be an awful lot that will be accomplished with this particular bill.

Also, I'm going to be very interested in hearing the New Democratic Party critic, because the last statement I heard made me a bit apprehensive. I hope that Ruth Grier is watching today—you would remember Ruth Grier—and Bud Wildman, to hear the present NDP position, at least this afternoon, on this bill. I'm sure the critic from downtown Toronto may have a bit of a different viewpoint.

I do want to say I commiserate with my friend the member for Kitchener, who is the critic, because time and time again he has to take the anti-environment stand.

There was widespread consultation. The Great Lakes mayors, who are really concerned about these matters, were consulted very extensively. They had considerable input. They were applauding this act being implemented. Certainly the environmental and naturalist groups around the province were absolutely delighted to see something that is going to protect the Great Lakes for future generations.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to just reaffirm and reiterate a little bit of what the member from Kitchener-Conestoga spoke about, and that is how fast this was brought forward and without any forethought and any real discussion and debate. That was borne out very clearly by the member from Ottawa-Orléans in his speech, where he mentioned that this bill would protect the watershed of the Ottawa River, including La Verendrye park and all these beautiful places. I'll have to inform this House that La Verendrye park is in Quebec, and this assembly does not have any jurisdiction over there.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This assembly does not have any jurisdiction there, and should this bill be brought forward, would be unconstitutional if it was to have, as the member from Ottawa-Orléans suggested.

Truly, even when the government members haven't read and don't understand either their geography or their legislation, there's a problem over there on the Liberal side, and we can help them out on both those ends, geography and legislation.

I think it's important as well, Speaker, that we recognize that although we hear all the platitudes of collaboration and compromise and singing Kumbaya with the throne speech and from the new Premier, the critic was not even given a briefing on this bill—not even given a

briefing ahead of time. Again, actions and words betray themselves and contradict themselves with this Liberal—now, I know the environment minister. I'm sure he has a big heart, but he does have to—maybe he's trying to get the e-testing scandal fixed up there to actually—

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the minister and the member from St. Catharines; the member from Kitchener-Conestoga—I know it's difficult to get up here and speak for an hour on this issue; the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane and from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

My riding actually borders on two Great Lakes, and I'm looking forward to the debate on this legislation. I don't know whether there's duplication or not. I don't know how our environmental critic is going to respond in his lead-in, but I'm sure we'll find that out very shortly.

I can tell you that, living in the Niagara region, we have many days where people can't use our beaches because the E. coli levels are so high. We have many days when we have to boil water because of the number of properties that—through, I would say, the failure of the Planning Act, in the early days provided for many, many properties on very small parcels of land. So it is an issue for the Niagara region.

I have attended a number of Great Lakes conferences in my years in municipal politics. I know that the mayors of the Great Lakes are certainly advocates of protecting and improving the water quality. I think that, for all Ontarians, we need to ensure that they have safe access to our beaches, to our water. As the member from Kitchener-Conestoga said, it is our drinking water in many of our municipalities, so we need to ensure that we have a safe, reliable source of water as well. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members from Timiskaming-Cochrane, of course the minister and member from St. Catharines, of course our member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, and, finally, the member for Welland, for their comments on this.

I think it's important just to recap again quickly to remind folks that the environment and the economy are not mutually exclusive. We talk about the regulatory overlap, the regulatory burden. What we don't need is more delay, more review and more burdensome regulations.

I talked about the developer in Lincoln, and I just want to reiterate that example because this truly sums up what this bill is all about. Just think what this developer in Lincoln, which is not too far away from the minister's riding, already has to comply with: the town's official plan and zoning bylaws, the region of Niagara's bylaws, the Planning Act, the Niagara Escarpment Planning and

Development Act, the Greenbelt Act, the conservation authority's regulations and the source water protection regulations. Now they want to add another layer of regulatory burden to that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The guardians.

Mr. Michael Harris: The guardian—the GFI.

So that somewhat sums it up. We've been here 10 years. This is simply an opportunity or a smokescreen to get everyone to talk and have a Kumbaya—you know what? Again, we've got a great track record. You look at

the Living Legacy, the track record the Ontario PCs have on the environment. What we don't want is a track record of more regulatory burden put on businesses, farmers and municipalities in the province of Ontario. Thank you for the opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
Vacant	Windsor–Tecumseh	

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Bill Mauro
Taras Natyshak, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
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Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Monte McNaughton
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Bas Balkissoon, Rick Bartolucci
Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Mike Colle, Rosario Marchese
Laurie Scott, Todd Smith
Jeff Yurek
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Joe Dickson, Jim McDonell
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Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
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Frank Klees, Jack MacLaren
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qadri
Jonah Schein
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Bas Balkissoon, Gilles Bisson
Steve Clark, Mike Colle
Garfield Dunlop, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Bill Mauro
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Toby Barrett, Dipika Damerla
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Jerry J. Ouellette, Shafiq Qadri
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Margaret R. Best, Vic Dhillon
Joe Dickson, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
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Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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