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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 5 March 2013

Mardi 5 mars 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 5 March 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 5 mars 2013

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT
(AIR AMBULANCES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES
(SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 28, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / Projet de loi 11, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to engage in this debate, notwithstanding the disappointment that we have in the content of this bill.

The Ornge air ambulance scandal is a textbook example of why people are cynical about politics, about politicians, about bureaucrats and the role of the private sector in delivering public services. In this one file, we have seen how a well-intentioned plan to divest the delivery of an essential health care service to an external non-profit corporation has resulted in the waste of millions of scarce health care dollars, put patients at risk, compromised the ability of dedicated front-line health care providers to carry out their responsibilities, undermined the viability of long-standing service providers and, frankly, ruined the lives of numerous individuals who got caught up in the vortex of this scandal.

Speaker, what concerns me most is that, after some 15 days over months of public hearings, some 57 witnesses and thousands of pages of documentary evidence which makes it clear that the very structure of Ornge is dysfunctional, that it lacks the professional aviation expertise at the most senior levels of the organization to manage and oversee an air ambulance operation and that there has been a serious failure on the part of the Ministry of Health to exercise oversight responsibilities, none of those issues are being addressed by this government.

Rather, what we have here in Bill 11 is a further attempt by this government to divert attention from its

failure to oversee this essential part of our health care service, to divert attention from the failure of this minister, the deputy minister and numerous bureaucrats who had clearly defined oversight responsibilities—from doing their job. To this point, no one has been held accountable—no one in this government. In fact, the minister responsible for oversight, who failed miserably, has now been promoted to the position of Deputy Premier. The deputy minister, Mr. Saäd Rafi, who had responsibility on the implementation side, got a raise.

I want to ask this question to the Premier, the new Premier, who has committed to doing things differently, to being accountable: How does she justify that not one individual in this government has been held accountable for their gross mismanagement and that, in fact, individuals within the ministry continue to go unscathed; no consequences for this lack of oversight?

Now we have before us Bill 11, resurrected from the death of Bill 50. Despite the fact that the minister had the benefit of extensive debate and input on Bill 50, the predecessor of Bill 11, and despite the fact that the opposition members provided some very clear observations about the failure of Bill 50 to address the issues of the lack of oversight and accountability, none of those changes were incorporated into Bill 11—none of them.

What does that tell us? It tells us that this government is either blind to the problems at Ornge, or they simply refuse to see them, or they're complicit—one of the three. And the more I observe this government, the more I have to conclude that they're complicit. What is it about this government that they fail to see?

I want to talk about the issue of accountability. Speaker, when Bill 50 was debated, we pointed out, as did members of the third party, that the accountability issues have not been addressed. The issue of whistle-blower protection was simply papered over. It's referenced but it has no substance.

At that time, during that debate, we called for transparency and for accountability, and we said to the government, "Look, if you're serious about wanting accountability"—and it's very clear that the government failed in its oversight responsibilities—"then let's give oversight responsibilities and authority to the Ombudsman so that at the very least, if the minister fails, if the deputy minister fails in oversight, we have an independent officer of this Legislature who can bring to the attention of Parliament what is really going on." When I first looked at Bill 11, I thought that would be the first change, the first amendment to this original Bill 50 that we would see, but it's not there. Someone else noticed that it's not there, and it happens to be the Ombudsman.

Speaker, I'm going to read into the record the Ombudsman's letter that is addressed to the Honourable Deb Matthews, dated March 1. The reason I read it into the record is because I think it's important that members of the government, who I believe want what all of us want, and that is appropriate oversight and accountability—I am concerned, however, that perhaps many members, because of how busy they are in their respective files, don't always get all of the information, and I know the public doesn't. So for that reason, I want to take the time now to read this letter into the record, as follows:

"I am writing further to the first reading of Bill 11, Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances).

"There is no doubt that any steps to increase the accountability of the air ambulance service is welcomed. Indeed, in the wake of the many stories of maladministration horrors that have plagued Ornge, sound public policy to bring proper oversight to this organization is still sorely needed.

"While moving in the right direction, measures such as the establishment of an Ornge patient advocate and Bill 11's creation of a new bureaucracy of 'special investigators' are insufficient to provide much-needed scrutiny, and continue to shield Ornge from Ombudsman oversight. My office remains unable to address any individual or systemic issues involving Ornge.

0910

"The Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario is a unique resource to support the Legislative Assembly in holding government accountable. It is there to allow the provincial Parliament to scrutinize government bodies. I cannot think of a more persuasive case for this than Ornge.

"'Special Investigators,' under Bill 11, would enjoy authority similar to that of my office when it investigates the more than 500 ministries, agencies, boards, commissions, tribunals and corporations that fall under our jurisdiction. But there is an important difference: The 'special investigators' would report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. They would not be independent of government. Far from being watchdogs, they would operate on a ministerial dog leash." Speaker, those are the words of our Ombudsman.

I continue:

"The newly created office of patient advocate has been positioned by the government as an additional oversight body that alleviates the need to extend Ombudsman oversight to Ornge. The Ombudsman is a fully independent officer of Parliament, established by statute with a mandate to investigate individual and systemic issues. By contrast, the patient advocate reports to an Ornge vice-president, not even to the board of directors. He or she resides within the bowels of the organization and cannot be expected to investigate any issue with institutional credibility. When this position was publicly advertised, the first line of the 'duties and responsibilities' in the job description noted that the incumbent would be required to '(I)nvestigate, resolve, document and report organization-specific patient and visitor compliments'"—Speaker, compliments—"and complaints." Needless to say, a

position that involves reporting compliments back to management ought not be confused with the role of the Ombudsman.

"The recent and proposed changes to Ornge are often put forward as responses to the Auditor General's March 2012 special report, Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services. Yet nowhere in his report did he recommend (a) a new bureaucracy of 'Special Investigators;' (b) the creation of a patient advocate residing deep within Ornge whose partial responsibilities include being a clearing house for 'compliments;' or (c) the maintenance of the status quo with respect to the exclusion of any role for the Ombudsman.

"Every year, our office responds to tens of thousands of complaints, consistently demonstrating its value to elected representatives and the public. As 'Ontario's watchdog,' we are the gold standard in keeping government maladministration at bay. It simply does not make sense to perpetuate our exclusion in a bill that purports to bring credible accountability to Ornge. I would respectfully request your support in bringing the necessary amendments to Bill 11 to ensure that it meets the purpose for which it was presented to the Legislative Assembly.

"Yours truly,

"André Marin

"Ombudsman"

Speaker, this letter says it all. I want to advise the minister that we're quite confident that the minister won't be bringing forward this amendment, but we will. As the official opposition, this will, in fact, be the first amendment that we will be proposing to this bill, because we have no confidence that this government has any intention of opening up Ornge to scrutiny, to transparency and to accountability. Our concern is that the track record of this government on other files gives us and, I believe, the public very little confidence that they have any intention of being transparent in their dealings. We will wait to see how this government responds to our amendments.

Once again, we have a commitment from a Premier that it's a new day in this place, a new day of co-operation. We'll see how substantive that is when we bring forward amendments to this bill and others. We'll see if in fact there is substance to the words that we hear from this Premier.

I want to talk about the issue of the credibility of this bill. We're told that we needed this bill because there was no ability on the part of this government to exercise its oversight. After numerous witnesses from the government, all we have to do is read Hansard and the record of testimony from bureaucrats within the ministry, who confirmed for us that the original performance agreement under which Ornge was operating had numerous points of authority and that the ministry could and, in fact, was mandated to perform oversight, but they failed to do so.

One of the most shocking testimonies that we had came from Mr. Malcolm Bates. When I asked this gentleman, who is the director of the emergency health services branch of the ministry—the emergency health services branch of the ministry is the branch that had specific

responsibility to oversee our air ambulance service. I'm going to read from Hansard an exchange between myself and Mr. Bates. Again, I think it puts into context why we have serious concern about the seriousness of this government to deal with the issue of accountability.

From Hansard, my question to Mr. Bates: "You've made reference to the performance agreement. I have read the original performance agreement...."

"Nowhere in that performance agreement that I can see, unless you can point me to it, does it in any way relieve the Ministry of Health, and specifically the emergency health services branch responsible for air ambulance or ambulance services in the province, of its oversight responsibilities. In fact, there are very specific references to reporting that's required, to oversight responsibilities."

The response from Mr. Malcolm Bates: "I agree that the Ministry of Health and the emergency health services branch have and had oversight responsibilities and that oversight responsibility was basically set in line by the Ambulance Act, by the performance agreement and by the transfer-of-payment accountability directive."

Speaker, this is not a third party who has a vested interest in condemning the Ministry of Health. This is the director of the emergency health services branch, who testified before our committee that they, in fact, had responsibility. The record is very clear that that responsibility was not exercised.

In fact, it gets worse. The fact of the matter is that the same Malcolm Bates testified that he was actually directed by an associate deputy minister not to exercise those responsibilities. He testified at our committee that he was directed to do whatever he was instructed to do by one Dr. Chris Mazza.

0920

Now what does that tell you about the state of our Ministry of Health? What does that tell you about the position that civil servants are put into when they're told expressly, "Stand down." They knew what their responsibilities were; they knew their responsibility was to hold Ornge accountable. They saw what was going on. We had testimony from employees of Ornge that there were regular meetings between Ornge and the Ministry of Health. We had testimony and thousands of pages of documentation that showed that Ornge was in fact reporting—not everything, but much—to the Ministry of Health, and yet nothing was done. Why?

Well, one reason is that those civil servants who wanted to do something about it were handcuffed by their superiors. I ask this question: Given the testimony that we have had, I was hoping that at some point I would see the minister stand up and say, "You know, we've heard enough. And by the way, here's what's happening, we're going to hold our deputy to account. Saäd Rafi, you didn't do your job, your job's over. We're paying you hundreds"—I say hundreds—"of thousands"—that's what the deputy minister of health is getting paid. He didn't do his job, and I believe that people in this province are cynical about what happens in government

because they see the same malpractice, they see the same failures of oversight and maladministration, and no one is held accountable.

Oh, the minister is very quick to throw Chris Mazza under the bus. The minister is very quick to agree that Chris Mazza should repay—and by the way, I agree with that. Chris Mazza made horrible mistakes—bad judgment. I think it's probably one of the grossest demonstrations of greed and betrayal of the public trust that this province has ever seen on the part of a professional. However, he's only one player. The reason that he was able to do what he did was because the Ministry of Health did not hold him accountable. At what point should they have taken steps? The minute they found out that there were some 17 corporations that became part of the business plan to do what? Deliver an air ambulance service that used to be run out of Sunnybrook emergency room. What's that all about? Who's responsible? Chris Mazza is paying a price, and rightfully so.

Speaker, there is one chair in this legislative chamber that at the end of the day has responsibility and should be held accountable for what took place at Ornge, and that's that chair there, occupied by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care—and now, thanks to the promotion offered her by our new Premier, the Deputy Premier. But that's not happening.

The second person who should be held accountable is Mr. Saäd Rafi, the Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Why is he able to simply go along as a senior bureaucrat in this government and have no consequences for his lack of oversight? And why is there not an internal investigation by this government, based on the evidence that we've had under oath about the fact that there were directions to civil servants to stand down and not to do their job?

And why is it, Speaker, that this minister and this Premier refuse to give oversight to the Ombudsman of this Legislature? I think anyone watching, anyone observing, anyone seeing what has taken place so far will understand there's a reason they don't want the Ombudsman to have access. There's far too much, far too much that they don't want either the Legislature or the public to find out.

But our responsibility is to continue, on behalf of the public, on behalf of taxpayers, to do what we can to shine the light on what I believe is a very, very serious betrayal of the public trust, and we'll continue to do that.

Public hearings into Ornge continue tomorrow. Speaker, I have asked that the first two witnesses that are called to the hearings are, first, the new CEO of Ornge, Dr. McCallum, who was the former chief coroner of the province—the reason I wanted to call Dr. McCallum as a witness is because I find incredibly disturbing the circumstances under which Dr. McCallum accepted his new responsibilities. You see, Dr. McCallum, as the chief coroner of this province, was the individual to whom I referred a number of cases of patients who died under questionable circumstances that involved Ornge air ambulance. I asked the coroner to investigate the role that

Ornge air ambulance may have played in contributing to the deaths of those patients. That same coroner, who was investigating Ornge, at some point entered into discussions about taking on a job, the senior role at Ornge.

I don't know about you, Speaker, but there are two questions that I have about that. First of all is the integrity and the judgment on the part of whoever—whether it was the Minister of Health; whether it was the Deputy Minister of Health; whether it was someone on the board of directors of Ornge, the new board—who took the initiative and approached the chief coroner, who was investigating them, about discussing a job, to come and work for them.

The second question I have is the judgment on the part of the chief coroner at the time for even entering into those discussions, knowing the professional responsibility that he had to the investigations that were going on.

You see, every time we turn around, every time a new file is opened on this Ornge air ambulance file, we have more reasons to question the credibility. We have fewer reasons to trust the Minister of Health and the board of directors, now the renewed board of directors. Something is terribly wrong here. We have to get to the bottom of it.

The next witness I have asked to be called is the commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police. The reason is that we know that the Ontario Provincial Police were called in to investigate, and we've heard nothing over the last number of months in terms of what's happening in that investigation. Now, I know that the commissioner can't answer specific questions, and we have no intention of in any way interfering with or compromising that investigation. But I do think this House and the public deserve to at least know the resources that are being applied to that investigation, given the multi-millions of dollars that have been wasted of taxpayer dollars. I think we have the right to know that this investigation is being taken very seriously by our Ontario Provincial Police.

0930

I also think we have a right to know whether the OPP has called in the RCMP to assist in this investigation and whether the FBI has been called in from the United States. The reason for that is that we also, based on sworn testimony, know that there were some very questionable financial transactions that were of an international nature. If, in fact, the FBI has not been called in, then I believe there is something wrong and there is something questionable about how this entire investigation is being handled. I personally referred a number of transcripts to the US Attorney General for this very reason.

Some \$6.7 million has exchanged hands, with no value, and we know that based on sworn testimony. Those funds were transferred from AgustaWestland. We also know that the parent company of AgustaWestland, Finmeccanica—that two senior people in that company are now facing criminal charges for fraud and bribery. What is of interest is the same deal that Agusta entered into is reflected in that deal with India. How many helicopters did AgustaWestland sell to Ornge? Twelve. How many helicopters were involved in the deal with India?

Twelve. If you look at the financial transactions, there are uncanny parallels.

Speaker, if criminal charges are not laid in this case, the public will be wondering who's falling down on the job and who is protecting their interests. This is a serious issue that can't be covered up with Bill 11.

I want to talk about the issue that I think is top of mind for many employees, many front-line staff of Ornge, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the first responders at Ornge, and I include the paramedics; I include the pilots; I include the dispatchers; and I include those in administration, the employees who, day to day, attempt to do the very best that they can to provide a professional service. Unfortunately, over the years, they have been hampered and undermined in their ability to do that because of the mismanagement and the greed of a few people at the top of that organization. But I want to thank those front-line staff for their dedication.

I want to thank those who had the courage over the last number of months to come forward and to share with us—some dared to do so in public testimony. One of those individuals, as we know from the record, was summarily dismissed within days of appearing before the committee.

The threats to employees that come forward are keeping many of those employees silent—they need their job—and so we've been calling for whistle-blower protection. Interestingly enough, we have some surface reference to whistle-blower protection here. I want to point something out to the minister, as I did in the last debate on this. She ignored it; she'll probably ignore it again. However, we're going to, once again, provide an amendment. We'll file an amendment to this bill that gives serious whistle-blower protection.

Section 7.7 of this proposed bill talks about whistle-blower protection, but you know what? It limits the whistle-blower protection to very few people. Who can you expose information to? Well, your superiors at Ornge. Oh, really? Well, it's the superiors at Ornge who were the problem.

How can that be taken seriously by anyone? Why would an employee not be protected if they were to bring their concerns to a member of the Legislature? What's wrong with that? Why is it, as the Ombudsman points out, that this all has to be contained within the corporate structure and, in his words, in "the bowels of the organization"? What is that all about?

We will be presenting amendments to give employees the confidence that, if there's something that is not right that they see first-hand that's keeping them from doing their job, that's threatening patient safety, they have the boldness and the confidence that they can come forward without repercussions and get it dealt with. That's simply reasonable.

I want to refer as well, Speaker, to the issue of liability of the board of directors. As I said earlier, Chris Mazza is in the crosshairs of this government. I think the reason, of course, is that that is a very convenient sacrificial lamb. "Let's focus on Chris Mazza. Let's be adamant"—and

the minister makes no bones about how outraged she is at Chris Mazza's actions and his greed.

I want to ask this: Where was the board of directors while all of this was going on? I went through expense reports yesterday. Every one of the expense reports that I saw had the name of the chair of the board on it. Mr. Beltzner signed off on all of them. I went over the loans—\$450,000, \$250,000—signed off by Mr. Beltzner, chair of the board. There's such a thing as fiduciary responsibility on the part of someone who takes on the responsibility as a director of a corporation, whether that be a not-for-profit or whether that be a for-profit corporation. I want to assure the people of this province that we will be pursuing those directors who also had a responsibility to step in and ensure that the taxpayers were protected.

Speaker, in closing, I just simply want to make this point. I believe that the divesting of delivery of health care services can in fact be done, and it can be done efficiently and responsibly through a non-governmental organization, but what has to be in place is proper oversight, accountability, transparency. Who is responsible at the end of the day to ensure that, whatever arrangement is agreed to, whatever the document is under which those services are performed, that service provider is held accountable? It is the government of the day, and the government of the day cannot paper over its lack of responsibility and its failure. That's what they're trying to do with this bill.

0940

There is nothing of substance in this bill that will prevent what took place at Ornge. What will prevent what took place at Ornge is responsible oversight. That was the charge of the Minister of Health, the Deputy Minister of Health and the bureaucrats within government, who now have a responsibility to take this seriously. We look forward, perhaps at some point, to the Minister of Health standing in her place and doing that. Perhaps at some point there will be evidence that the deputy minister, Mr. Saäd Rafi, admits that he failed in his job, and that there will be consequences for those who didn't.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member from Newmarket–Aurora going through the trials and tribulations that surrounded our air ambulance, our air ambulance that used to be the pride and joy of this province for the good work that they did.

Then, how bad it all went, to the point where, in March 2012, the Auditor General tabled a special report. The Ambulance Amendment Act was tabled the same day. That was the government's response to what had been in the Auditor General's report, but it was really the government's response to what had been on the front page of the paper since December 2011.

But make no mistake, the problems at Ornge were known months and years before this. You will all remember, if you follow this, that I was subbed in in 2008 in estimates by Howard Hampton, who was the leader of

the NDP at the time—2008, that's five years ago—because whistle-blowers had started to come to the NDP. They had started to go to the Liberals and to the PCs as well. They were trying to tell their story to whoever would listen. So I was subbed in in estimates, and my leader asked 60 questions specifically about Ornge in estimates. Madam Speaker, we never got one single answer. The bureaucrats never knew we had questions, and no answer was forthcoming. That was in 2008, and the story goes downhill from there.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Certainly, I'd like to make a few comments in regard to the remarks of the member from Newmarket–Aurora. First of all, I want to say on behalf of the government that we are clear—our Premier has been clear, and our Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has been clear—that we want to get to the bottom of the problems at Ornge.

We also, in terms of some of his remarks, are anxious to talk to Dr. McCallum. Our side at public accounts will certainly be in favour of calling him as a witness, as the member from Newmarket–Aurora has suggested.

I want to say that some sort of accusations of complicity that were made are baseless, are false and are totally denied by our government.

Turning to the provisions within Bill 11, the Ambulance Amendment Act, we feel that they are a very good response to the Auditor General's report of March 2012 in terms of the new performance agreement. I've examined the Auditor General's reports and his recommendations, and what we are now requiring from Ornge, and I think there is a very good fit.

In terms of the whistle-blower provisions, these are the same provisions currently in place in the long-term-care act of 2007. As we know, in our long-term-care homes we have a very vulnerable population, just as we have with the patients at Ornge. I think that there's a good parallel in adopting those particular provisions.

Another important aspect of Bill 11 is that through regulation we will be making records available through FOI requests. This is something that clearly is needed and we're happy to include it in the bill. Certainly as we go forward, I expect everyone—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to comment on my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora and his address this morning.

You know, you'd think that the government would finally try to get it right. They keep talking about, "We want to get to the bottom of this; we want to correct this." Yet, when the bill was before the last session of Parliament, under Bill 55, they refused to call it for debate for such a long period of time, until Dalton McGuinty rode off into the sunset and the bill died.

My colleague offered numerous suggestions as to how this bill could be strengthened and improved, not only here in the House but at the committee level as well,

where over 15 days of committee hearings and 57 witnesses, they found out much more about the terrible scandal at Ornge that this government had perpetrated, along with their cohort Chris Mazza.

I would suggest that if you really want to get to the bottom of this, take heed to what the member from Newmarket–Aurora is saying. He has been on top of this file from the get-go. He is the one that brought this issue to this Parliament. I have to ask myself, as many people across Ontario are asking, what would have happened if the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees, had not brought this issue before this Parliament? Would it have been another one of those eHealth messes that we didn't find out about for a few more years? At least pay heed to what he is telling you now. He's giving you the opportunity to make sure that we have the best piece of legislation possible to ensure that this doesn't happen again. Mind you, let me be very clear: The search for the truth on the Ornge scandal will continue. I know this government will continue to try to stand in the way, and they will try to protect their own turf, but with the member from Newmarket–Aurora leading the charge, we will get to the bottom of this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to actually weigh in on this very important issue. I think this morning the member from Nickel Belt has given us some important context for this conversation. This is a long-standing issue, where the public has been left out of the accountability formula for sure.

The member from Newmarket–Aurora raises some good issues around the whistle-blower protection. I want to be clear: Whistle-blowers are the front-line people in the field. They have the lived experience of the crisis that is Ornge. The pressure that is on these folks, who are delivering health care—the stress and the pressure on them to deliver goods to the public is profound. When they come to us, as legislators, and when they go to the public and say, “There are real issues. There is a crisis amongst our workers. The air ambulance attendants couldn't perform CPR in the designed air ambulances”—the public has no patience for it. They have no tolerance for it, and we need to do better. To not listen to the Ombudsman when he says that he needs oversight and to not take into account the weight of the responsibility that we have to ensure that true oversight is happening with Ornge is really a lack of potential for us as legislators.

We're going to stay on this file as well. The member from Nickel Belt has given us important context and history. There's still cause for concern, and so we're going to stay on this file as well. That's our job as the third party. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Newmarket–Aurora has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate my colleagues' comments.

I want to point something out: Bill 50, which was the identical bill that we're now debating, was tabled for first

reading on March 21, 2012. It sat in this House for seven months. The House leader did not call this bill. The record will show that he stood up time and time again to say, “Why will members of the opposition not pass this bill?” The reason we didn't pass the bill was, first of all, it's a faulty bill, but even so, with the government not calling it, it was never debated. Now we have the same document before us, and we have the same rhetoric coming from the government.

0950

Speaker, I first raised a question in the House here in April 2011 about Ornge and what was going on. I asked the Minister of Health to investigate. I asked the Minister of Finance to investigate. I asked the Premier to investigate. This is all a matter of record in Hansard. Every one of them defended Ornge and assured us all was well. The Minister of Finance said, “Everything is in order.” And here we are today and nothing has changed, except that we found out the truth, or at least some of it.

Now this same government continues to deflect responsibility. And until this government admits that they failed miserably, we'll continue our responsibility, as members of the official opposition, joined by members of the third party, to hold this government accountable. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It feels a little bit like déjà vu all over again. This bill has been tabled in this House before. As I mentioned, the Auditor General presented his report, a special report on investigations of value-for-money audits at Ornge, in March 2012. The same day, the Minister of Health responded with the Ambulance Amendment Act, the bill we are debating yet again this morning.

When she first presented the bill, we all understood that it was a bill that had been pulled together in haste. Ornge had made the headlines of the papers and the headlines of all of the media non-stop since December 2011. It had been a frenzy of information, all of them more damning, one more than the other, showing clearly that the government had not succeeded in its basic function of oversight of that organization. So the Ambulance Amendment Act was pulled together in haste and presented in front of the House.

Right away, we started to show flaws in the bill, but that's okay because that's the way the process works. You present it in first and second reading, then it goes to committee, and you get to basically make the bill stronger before it goes to third reading. But none of that happened, Madam Speaker. None of that happened. We were presented with a flawed bill back then, and we are presented again with the same flawed bill now.

I was more than willing to be patient and say, “Well, let the process unfold and we'll make the bill stronger” in 2012. We're now in March 2013, Madam Speaker. We were prorogued for over four months. What a good opportunity: If you really want to do something good, go back on those bills, make them stronger and fix the holes that we've already identified for you so that we can have

meaningful discussion moving forward. But none of that was done. The same flawed bill that was presented in haste to us in response to a media crisis is presented to us a year later.

The suggestions that were made by the official opposition and by the NDP are not reflected in the bill. I will give credit to the minister that—I was really insistent that Ornge be FOIable. That is, freedom of access of information should apply to Ornge, and we can see that this hopefully will get done through regulation. It has not happened yet, but we're hoping that it will happen. I will give her the benefit of the doubt on that one, because I always do.

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sometimes people question my judgment on that, but I like to stay positive.

So why was the bill flawed? Before I go into each and every one of the flaws in that bill, I'd like to give you the helicopter view of what it means. Basically, the ministry will tell you that they did not have the tools to deal with the crisis at Ornge, so what they are doing with the bill is giving themselves the tools. If you were to look at this and use a different language, the ministry used to have a little stick, and now they're giving themselves a really big stick to beat them if they ever need to.

The problem, Madam Speaker, was never the size of the stick that you can beat Ornge with; the problem was that they refused to act. It didn't matter how many whistle-blowers went to them. It didn't matter how many reports were submitted to them. It didn't matter where the money was going. They refused to act. They had measures and tools that they could have used. We had bureaucrats that came to us and said that they were willing to and had put forward steps to bring back Ornge, and they were told not to. So it's not because the stick was too small that they couldn't beat Ornge into submission; it was because they refused to use it.

Why? The jury is out on this. I certainly have my own personal opinion. They wanted this model. We've had air ambulance in Ontario since 1977. It is not a new service. I live in northern Ontario. I service a mainly rural area; I have 33 beautiful little communities in Nickel Belt. Most of them don't have ambulance services except for Ornge, except for air ambulance.

The service has been in place for many, many decades, but the Liberal government had this idea that they were going to privatize air ambulance. They were going to allow air ambulance to make money, to run like a business because, for some reason, running like a business is better than being accountable to the public. I don't know where those ideas come from, but it failed. It failed miserably. It failed in that it has shaken the confidence of every single Ontarian to the core.

When Ornge goes around with their little vans in my riding, you know what happens, Madam Speaker? People write messages on the sides of their helicopters—not the helicopters, sorry; on the side of the land ambulance that they use. I won't repeat the messages that are written on the sides, but they're not nice. The front-line workers are paying the price right now for errors that they did not do.

Those men and women continued through tough times to deliver as good a service as they could, when half of the fleet was not staffed, when the morale was below basement level and when they could see the corruption at the top. They tried so hard to tell everybody, "Look at what's happening at the top. This is wrong," and nobody would listen.

So now we have a service that nobody trusts anymore. In Nickel Belt, if you or your loved ones ever need an ambulance, there's a good chance that Ornge is going to be the one coming to rescue you. It used to be that we were proud of our air ambulance. Right now we're not. The confidence needs to be rebuilt.

Do you really think that by giving the Minister of Health a bigger stick, people in Nickel Belt and everywhere in Ontario where we depend on our air ambulance in times of need—do you really think this builds confidence? Absolutely not. They don't care about the size of the stick that the minister has because she had one before and she didn't use it. What they want is, they want to be included in this equation. They want to make sure that if they see something wrong, there will be a response; that if a whistle-blower comes forward, she or he won't lose their job, and it will be acted upon. They want to be included in this.

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How do you include people? The first way is, you listen to them. You listen to them. Who better to listen than our Ombudsman? Who do people naturally turn to when something goes wrong with the services of the provincial government? They phone the Ombudsman. This is what they're there for. This is what they're known for. So the Ombudsman gets the call, he gets the complaint, he hears the story, and his answer back is, "I'm sorry, I don't have jurisdiction." Do you really think that helps build the confidence back? Not at all.

How else can people get involved? Through freedom-of-access-to-information requests. If all of those whistle-blowers, everybody on the front lines and their families, who knew that things were wrong at the top had been able to file freedom-of-access—I can tell you that my party, the NDP, filed many freedom-of-access-to-information requests for Ornge, way back, from 2009, 2010, 2011. What kind of response did we get? I won't keep you in suspense or anything. Nada. We did not get any answers to our freedom-of-access-to-information requests. Although we knew something was going wrong, as we tried to find more proof—when you have seven whistle-blowers telling you the exact same story and they come from seven different parts of the province, you start to believe that there's probably some truth to that story. So when you start to dig in to see what's really happening, the Ombudsman can't help you because he doesn't have jurisdiction. The freedom-of-access-to-information request is useless, because we get no response.

Hey, estimates came up. "We'll ask our question through estimates. They have to give us answers when we file questions through estimates." That was met with nothing.

I haven't been a politician for that long; I've been a politician for five years. Whenever I participated in estimates, I always got answers. You don't always get them right there on the spot. The minister is there and all of the top bureaucrats are there, and they try their best to give you answers but sometimes they just don't know, but they go and they get you answers and they submit them to the Clerk, and they become part of the record and you have them in writing. You get answers because estimates is a serious process of this Legislative Assembly that allows us to look into how taxpayers' money is being spent.

How could it be that if you look around at all of the questions we've ever asked of the Minister of Health, not one estimates Ornge question was ever answered? Not one. Months went by. Years went by. It didn't matter what the Clerk did to try to get answers. It didn't matter what we did to try to get answers. Nothing came.

The Ombudsman is not allowed to look in. The freedom-of-access-to-information requests to try to see what's going on bring back nothing. We asked questions in estimates, and that brings back nothing.

There's also a committee process where an agency can be called in front of the Legislature to basically bring accountability, to answer questions. Ornge cannot be called in front of committee. Why? I don't know. What harm would there be in having Ornge added to the thousands of agencies, boards and commissions that can be called in front of the Legislative Assembly? I don't know. I asked for that. We all did because, remember, we want to bring that balance. We want to bring that balance that says, "We've been burned once, where the minister didn't act. Now we want to be part of the equation." "We" as in the capital. "We the people of Ontario want to be part of this equation." They also want to have a say. They want to be able to hold the government accountable and hold the different agencies, boards and commissions of this province accountable.

This is a process that doesn't cost anything. This is a precedent that exists for thousands of agencies of the Ministry of Health. This is something that, 12 months ago, we were asking for, and this is something that is not in the bill.

The bill will give the minister a great big stick, but it's the other side of the accountability ledger that hasn't moved. It is the side that is, to me, the most important. It is the side that will help the people of Ontario who depend on our air ambulance in their times of need. This is the side that would help us build confidence in that agency again, because right now, in the trust account, they are in overdraft. Nobody trusts them anymore.

You cannot put every flaw of Ornge on the front page of every Ontario paper for weeks and months—a year now—on end, because the story hasn't ended, and expect people to trust them. It's really too bad. No disrespect to all the good men and women who work day in and day out to make it work. It's through a change that this confidence account will rebuild trust, and trust is at the core of everything that the health care system does.

If you don't have confidence in your health care provider—it doesn't matter how good the care is—it's not going to work. It's not going to work because we are human beings, and health care is really a relationship between two people: the person who helps and the person in need. Once the trust is gone, it's really hard to have quality care.

This is the situation we find ourselves in right now. We find ourselves in a situation where the trust account for our air ambulance system has been completely depleted, and we have a minister whose idea of fixing it is to give herself a bigger stick. I have no problem with giving the minister some new powers to deal with Ornge.

I will go through the bill in more detail. Unfortunately, my one-hour lead will be cut in two. This is one of the shows where you'll want to tune in a little bit later because in a few seconds I'm going to be—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Do we get scenes from our next episode?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes. You can get tickets for prime seats for the next episode coming soon. I'm about to be off-air. But that doesn't take away the seriousness of what we're talking about.

I will go through the bill more or less clause by clause to show—some of the new powers of the minister, I have no problem with. They are powers that exist with many other transfer payment agencies of the Ministry of Health, and they have served the people of Ontario well when the minister chooses to use them. But there are other new powers in there that I don't think are for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

When my time comes again, I will go through step by step as to what is good in that bill, because there are some good things. I will show you what is not so good in that bill; that is basically a bill that was put together in haste, with cut and paste from other areas of the health care system that make very little sense for Ornge. Some of that bill is clearly ugly, not to mention the huge omissions in that bill. The huge omissions have to do with rebuilding the public trust in an agency that many of us depend on and giving us, as in the people of Ontario, an opportunity to be involved so that, if we see something wrong coming again, we know that we will be listened to, we know that we will be heard, and we know that something will happen, because last time it didn't.

1010

Ça me fait toujours plaisir de commencer les discussions sur un nouveau projet de loi. Le projet de loi pour les ambulances aériennes, ce n'est pas un projet de loi nouveau; c'est un projet de loi qui nous avait été présenté en mars 2012, il y a à peu près un an de ça. Il avait été présenté la même journée que le vérificateur général nous avait présenté son rapport, un rapport qui démontrait que les activités à Ornge n'étaient pas en ligne avec ce qui aurait dû être fait. Non seulement qu'elles n'étaient pas en ligne avec ce qui aurait dû être fait, mais on se doutait qu'il y avait également des éléments illégaux qui se passaient à Ornge.

Donc, le vérificateur général soumet son rapport, un rapport qui, vraiment, remet les pendules à l'heure. On ne

peut plus ignorer le fait que les choses vont mal à Ornge. La ministre de la Santé dépose le projet de loi, un projet de loi qui avait été mis ensemble un peu trop rapidement et qui avait des grosses lacunes. Donc, la première fois que le projet de loi a été présenté, on a démontré là où étaient les lacunes.

Vous allez tous vous souvenir que l'Assemblée législative a été prorogée. « Proroger » est un grand mot qui veut dire qu'on arrête tout ce qui se passe et qu'on efface tout ce qui se passe. Ça, c'est le « Magic Eraser » de M. Clean; on efface tout ce qui se passe. Donc, on a effacé tout le travail qui avait été fait.

Pour moi, ça aurait été le moment idéal pour retravailler le projet de loi. On savait qu'il y avait des lacunes. On savait que c'était un projet de loi qui avait été mis ensemble à la hâte. Profitons-en pour montrer quelque chose de meilleur.

Bien, on est maintenant en mars 2013. Ça fait un an de ça et la ministre de la Santé nous présente exactement le même projet de loi. Elle le sait très bien qu'il y a des lacunes dans son projet de loi parce que les membres du parti néo-démocrate et les membres de l'opposition officielle ont dit : « Écoute, il y a des bonnes choses dans ton projet de loi, mais il y en a également qui ont besoin d'être retravaillées. » Elle nous représente la même chose—identique; il n'y a pas un mot qui a été changé.

Bien, qu'est-ce que vous pensez, madame la Présidente? C'est sûr que les mêmes lacunes sont également là. Non seulement y avait-il des lacunes dans son projet de loi, mais il y a des parties de ce projet de loi qui ne sont pas acceptables parce que le projet de loi est vraiment fait pour donner plus d'outils, plus de mesures, à la ministre de la Santé pour faire son travail de surveiller Ornge. Certaines de ces mesures-là sont bonnes; ce sont des mesures qui existent ailleurs dans le système de la santé et qui servent bien les Ontariens et Ontariennes. Certaines autres de ces mesures, franchement, sont plutôt drastiques et n'ont pas vraiment leur place, mais elles ont quand même été gardées dans ce projet de loi—là pour des raisons qui m'échappent.

Donc, on se retrouve, un an plus tard, avec un projet de loi qui n'a pas été retravaillé. Moi je me dis : « Tu sais, les quatre mois de prorogation n'ont pas été bien utilisés. » Au moins, ça nous aurait donné une opportunité en or de présenter des projets de loi plus solides. Non, cette opportunité-là, on l'a laissée aller complètement. On nous représente exactement la même chose avec les mêmes lacunes, les mêmes défauts et le même manque de travail. Ça avait été fait vite; ça paraît. On va en vivre avec les conséquences.

De notre côté, ce qu'on aimerait vraiment voir dans le projet de loi, c'est un meilleur équilibre entre les nouvelles mesures et outils que la ministre de la Santé veut pour faire son travail de supervision d'Ornge. Mais, en même temps, on veut donner au public ontarien la chance d'être, lui aussi, entendu. La meilleure façon d'être entendu, tout le monde le sait, c'est d'appeler l'ombudsman. Aussitôt qu'il y a quelque chose qui se passe dans les programmes et services du gouvernement

provincial, la première chose que les gens ont tendance à faire, c'est d'appeler l'ombudsman.

Je vois que vous êtes prête à vous lever, madame. I'll let you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery, from the Brazilian state of Amapá, the governor, Mr. Camilo Capiberibe, and his council. We welcome him today.

The Minister of Finance on the introduction of guests.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Welcome.

Remarks in Portuguese.

My cousin, I should say, José Carlos Sousa is here as well. Thank you very much, all of you, for being here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate the Minister of Finance showing up the Speaker in another language.

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: As members probably know, students have come here from across the province to meet with us, their members of all parties, to discuss post-secondary issues and education. OUSA represents 155,000 students in Ontario. I'd like to welcome student leaders from Brock University, Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University at Oshawa, the University of Waterloo, Western University and the University of Windsor. Who knows; I may have left some out. Welcome to all the students, and I'm sure we're all looking forward to meeting with you today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I did yesterday, I will remind the members that when you're doing introductions—and I didn't hear any names—it's not a moment for statements; it's a moment to introduce our guests. I reminded someone else who was watching carefully that I gave you the same message.

Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: St. Paul's page Joshua Limpert is joined here today in the gallery by his mother, Ann Stewart; Brad Limpert, his father; and his brother Noah.

Hon. Reza Mordidi: It's my pleasure to introduce and welcome grade 10 students from Langstaff Secondary School in my riding of Richmond Hill. They're not in the gallery, but they are in the building, and we welcome them.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On February 20, 2013, the member for Prince Edward-Hastings, Mr. Smith, rose on a point of privilege concerning the government's incomplete production of documents relating

to its decision to cancel the construction of two power plants in 2010 and 2011.

According to the member, in the previous session, government members had made deliberately misleading statements about the extent of production, and the Minister of Energy had failed to produce all documents responsive to the order of the House. The government House leader, Mr. Milloy, and the member from Timmins–James Bay, Mr. Bisson, also spoke to the matter.

Having reviewed the notice provided by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, the written submissions of the government House leader and of the official opposition House leader, relevant Hansards from the current and previous sessions, and various parliamentary authorities, I am now prepared to rule on the matter.

Let me begin by providing some background. The member's point of privilege arises out of the government's initial non-production of all documents that were the subject of a May 16, 2012, order of the Standing Committee on Estimates, a September 13, 2012, Speaker's ruling to the effect that a prima facie case of privilege had been established with respect to the non-production, and an October 2 order of the House directing "the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to table immediately with the Clerk of the House all remaining documents ordered by the Standing Committee on Estimates on May 16, 2012."

As members are aware, many responsive documents were tabled on September 24 and October 12, and then more recently on February 21. The September 24 tabling, which was made in the aftermath of the September 13 Speaker's ruling, included a cover letter from the Minister of Energy to the effect that he had been "advised by ministry staff that the documents attached to this letter comprise all documents that are responsive to the committee's request regardless of privilege or confidentiality," as well as a cover letter from the chief executive officer of the Ontario Power Authority to the effect that "[t]hese documents comprise responsive material" related to the committee's May 16 requests.

In the first few days of the September 24 tabling, many government members indicated that the tabled documents constituted full production of the documents sought. However, these statements did not appear to be accurate because many more documents, including a cover letter from the Deputy Minister of Energy and another from the chief executive officer of the Ontario Power Authority, were tabled on October 12.

At the outset of the next sessional day, October 15, the Minister of Energy and the government House leader corrected their records concerning post-September 24 statements that they had made inside and outside the House to the effect that the September 24 tabling constituted full production.

On a point of privilege raised later the same day, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings alleged that statements many government members had made in the House after September 27 were misleading. According to the member, government members indicated to the House after September 27 that all documents responsive

to the May 16 request for documents by the Standing Committee on Estimates and the September 13 Speaker's ruling had been tabled on September 24 when, according to information contained in letters tabled on October 12, they purportedly knew by September 27 that this was not the case.

My ruling on this point of privilege was reserved, but the ruling was never made in the previous session because prorogation occurred the same day, hence the reason for the member rising on the point of privilege on February 20.

I first want to clarify that the September 13 ruling did not constitute an order to produce the documents in question. The Speaker has no authority to order production; only the House and its committees can do so. As already noted, the authority to order production was exercised in the previous session on May 16, in the case of the Standing Committee on Estimates, and on October 2, in the case of the House.

In written submissions on this point of privilege, the official opposition House leader points me to two rulings in the Canadian House of Commons by Speaker Milliken that he believes are instructive in the case at hand and supportive of the point of privilege raised by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

The most recent was made on March 9, 2011, and arose from a point of privilege raised as a result of a report by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. In that report, the committee noted that the Minister of International Cooperation, Bev Oda, made inconsistent statements in the House and in the committee concerning the funding of a foreign aid organization called Kairos. The crux of this ruling surrounded the fact that sufficiently different statements were made in two parliamentary venues, such that they caused confusion that had not been cleared up. In the face of these contradictory statements, which remained unrecconciled, Speaker Milliken found that sufficient doubt existed to warrant a finding of prima facie privilege in that case.

1040

I do not see this decision as being applicable to the point raised by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings because there has been no case made that confusingly contradictory statements have been made to this House.

The other Milliken ruling drawn to my attention was made on February 1, 2002, and concerned an allegation that then-National Defence Minister Art Eggleton had deliberately misled the House of Commons. This ruling has been referred to in this House before and was directly addressed by Speaker Carr in his June 17, 2002, ruling as follows:

"I see no precedential value to Speaker Milliken's ruling—within the ambit of parliamentary privilege—since, if the ruling is carefully read, it becomes apparent that a prima facie case of privilege was not explicitly found. Rather, Speaker Milliken seems to have stopped himself short in that regard and chose instead a novel approach, finding ultimately—without mentioning privil-

ege—that the matter deserved consideration by a committee, and inviting a motion to give effect to this result.

“I would generally be hesitant to appropriate for myself such an original, informal approach since the precedents, traditions and customs of this House around questions of privilege reveal a more definitive tendency. In my view, there are no shades of grey when it comes to parliamentary privilege, and I would not like to promote such a view by delivering a ruling that failed to address, squarely and solely on its procedural merits, the question raised.”

I concur with the view of Speaker Carr, and later that of Speaker Peters, who similarly rejected the precedential usefulness of this Milliken ruling on September 28, 2009.

In the point raised by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, the allegation is that misleading information was knowingly given to the House. As was indicated in various oral and written submissions on this matter, the criteria for determining whether a member has deliberately misled the House is described on pages 653 and 654 of the third edition of McGee’s *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* in the following terms:

“There are three elements to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt by reason of a statement that the member has made: The statement must, in fact, have been misleading; it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect; and, in making it, the member must have intended to mislead the House.”

These criteria are, by their very nature, not easily satisfied. As Speaker Carr indicated at page 102 of the journals for June 17, 2002:

“The threshold for finding a *prima facie* case of contempt against a member of the Legislature, on the basis of deliberately misleading the House, is therefore set quite high and is very uncommon. It must involve a proved finding of an overt attempt to intentionally mislead the Legislature. In the absence of an admission from the member accused of the conduct, or of tangible confirmation of the conduct, independently proved, a Speaker must assume that no honourable members would engage in such behaviour or that, at most, inconsistent statements were the result of inadvertence or honest mistake.”

I now turn to the application of the first criteria in the McGee test to what was said and done between September 24 and October 15. Were misleading statements made to the House? With respect to the September 24 tabling, the Minister of Energy indicated in his September 24 letter that he had been “advised by ministry staff” that the September 24 tabling constituted full production.

The Minister of Energy and the government House leader both subsequently used unequivocal language and described those documents as fully responsive to the orders for their production, as did various other government members. As we all know, that was not the case, so there can be no doubt that these statements were incorrect and thereby could have been misleading.

Did the members making the statements know at the time they were made that they were incorrect? The member for Prince Edward–Hastings says that, according to the information contained in the letters accompanying the October 12 tabling of documents, the government became aware of the existence of additional documents by September 27. However, a close reading of the letters suggests only that the government knew on that date that there was a possibility that there were additional responsive documents, and that, based on that possibility, a process was put in place to determine whether or not there actually were additional responsive documents.

After September 27, presumably equipped with the knowledge that the potential existed that there were further documents beyond those tabled on September 24, the unequivocal language ceased. In my mind, this represents a conscious effort to ensure that subsequent statements to the House were correct. There is no evidence before me that convinces me that the former Minister of Energy and other members of the government had any reason not to accept the information that they initially had that all of the documents had been tabled on September 24. Indeed, the letters tabled on September 24 confirm that this was the information they had been given. In my opinion, they had an honest belief that their resulting statements were true; both the Minister of Energy and the government House leader avowed this to the House on October 15. I have not been convinced that the second McGee criterion has been established.

While this sequence of events certainly demonstrates that some statements were incorrect when they were made, as I have said, I accept that they were believed to be true at the time, not made with the intention of misleading the House, and corrected at the earliest opportunity when it became clear they were incorrect. There is no evidence before me that would support a contrary opinion.

For these reasons, I find that a *prima facie* case of contempt on the basis that a member has deliberately misled the House has not been established.

In closing, I thank the member for Prince Edward–Hastings, the government House leader and the member for Timmins–James Bay for speaking to this matter, and the government House leader and the official opposition House leader for their written submissions.

The member for Prince Edward–Hastings on a point of order.

Mr. Todd Smith: I thank you very much for your ruling, sir.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ARBITRATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier—and let me say thank you, Speaker, for your considered ruling. I do want to say that, while two ministers—Minister Bentley and Minister Milloy—apologized to the

assembly, there remain 28 other Liberals who have not yet apologized to the assembly for giving information that was not in keeping with the facts, including the Premier herself. I hope that the Liberals will take the time today to apologize to all members with respect to gas plant documents that were buried.

To the Premier: When Ontario's economy is barely growing, Ontario's broken arbitration system is handing out agreements that are simply out of line with taxpayers' ability to pay and are causing municipalities to cut back on crucial front-line services. By way of example, an arbitrator recently gave Peterborough firefighters a 10.4% wage increase, while another one gave TTC workers a 6% increase that will cost \$100 million. Premier, what are you prepared to do to fix the broken arbitration system—including supporting our PC bill?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I also thank you for your ruling.

In the spring—in the budget—we actually proposed interest-based arbitration reforms. We put those in the budget last spring, and what those reforms would have done is that they would have increased accountability, transparency and the timeliness of the decisions. In fact, those are the kinds of changes that I know that municipalities were looking for.

I was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the time. I was meeting monthly with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; this was something that they were very concerned about. That's why we put them in the budget. It would have been fantastic if the opposition had supported those measures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Obviously, Speaker, it's a disappointing response by the Premier. There's that old expression: "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That's exactly what Dalton McGuinty used to say, sitting in the exact same spot. I thought this Premier was going to take a different path, but she seems determined to entrench the McGuinty agenda.

1050

What you said, Premier, is actually not in keeping with the facts. I'll remind you that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario said, with respect to those reforms, that they "stopped short of achieving a balanced system—one that is truly transparent and accountable—for all parties, including arbitrators, and particularly for taxpayers." I think they've called you out on this—that your reforms were not truly reforms—so, hopefully you'll move beyond saying something that's not, in fact, true.

Let me ask you in a different way: Premier, do you think that wage settlements for public sector unions that are running 50% to 80% ahead of inflation are fair to the 80% of taxpayers who are not on the public sector payroll? How do you reconcile that kind of differential?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In fact, the settlements that are coming in are running at 0.2% increases, and we've seen zero-zero in many, many of our sectors, so

we actually are seeing success in terms of the wage constraint that we said we were going to put in place.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that municipalities would have liked to see us go farther; I understand that. But the changes, the reforms that we put in the budget were clearly taking us in the direction that the municipalities wanted to see us go in, and they clearly were taking us in the direction that the party opposite wanted to see us go in, in terms of transparency, in terms of timeliness of decisions. That's why it was very, very surprising that the PCs joined with the NDP and pulled those measures out of the budget. It made no sense, since it was the direction that they were pushing us to go in.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's disappointing, Speaker, that every day this Premier seems to mouth the exact same words that Dalton McGuinty mouthed on these exact same issues. I thought she was trying to move beyond that, but she seems very much to have the same viewpoints as her predecessor.

The choice was clear. Municipalities opposed your bill; we did as well. You've chosen your path. You're on the side of public sector union bosses. We're on the side of taxpayers. We're on the side of municipalities. We're on the side of front-line services, on this side of the House.

I would like the Premier to know that Mr. Wilson, the member for Simcoe–Grey, will be introducing the Capacity to Pay Act, which is exactly what municipalities have asked for and exactly what Don Drummond, your hand-picked economist, had recommended. We stand behind Mr. Wilson's bill. Premier, will you do the right thing and stand up for taxpayers instead of union bosses and endorse Mr. Wilson's bill?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I am very, very proud of our government's record on supporting municipalities, working with municipalities, uploading the costs that were downloaded onto their tax base. That was far and away the clear issue when municipalities came to us and said, "We need relief on this."

They also said, "We need help on interest-based arbitration." We put measures into the budget that were designed to create timeliness, to create transparency. They were absolutely the direction that we needed to go in. After speaking in favour of that direction, after speaking in support of those changes, the party opposite worked with the NDP to remove those from the budget and it made absolutely no sense. It meant that we were not able to move ahead with those changes to the interest-based arbitration system that would have made it more transparent. That's the direction that we needed to go in.

ARBITRATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I'm not going to let you off the hook on this. You have made your

choice to line up with the government union bosses. We're going to stand for taxpayers, for front-line services, and if you won't show leadership, we will with Mr. Wilson's bill that will fix a broken arbitration system in our province.

I'll refer the Premier to chapter 15, page 372 of the Drummond commission recommendations. Mr. Drummond, who we all respect, I think did a very good job in giving a direction on how we can get out of this fiscal mess. Mr. Drummond, Speaker, recommended 13 specific changes to fix the arbitration system. Mr. Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey's bill incorporates all 13 of Mr. Drummond's recommendations. I'll ask the Premier, who, I would assume, has faith in Mr. Drummond: How many of Mr. Drummond's 13 recommendations are you prepared to accept?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We took direction from Don Drummond. He said that interest-based arbitration was a system that needed to be fixed. What was bewildering, Mr. Speaker, was that the party opposite wouldn't work with us and did not see that the changes that we had put in the budget bill actually would have made some reform to the interest-based arbitration system that would have helped.

The member opposite talks about front-line services. In terms of support for the people of Ontario in making sure that services are delivered, we know that uploading the costs from the municipal tax base, supporting municipalities in their ability to deliver services to their communities and making sure that those costs that were downloaded by the previous government are now being uploaded—that was the single most important thing we could do to make sure that those front-line services at the municipal level were delivered to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll remind the Premier: Of the reforms that Dalton McGuinty brought forward that you have embraced, you implemented fully one out of 13 of Mr. Drummond's recommendations. Even to the extent that you've watered down standards in our education system, surely one out of 13 is nowhere close to a passing grade. We believe that we should implement all 13 of Mr. Drummond's recommendations. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario agree with us, and we'll bring forward a bill to do so.

We're very concerned with the agreements that arbitrators are giving out. That means a reduction in front-line services. It means higher taxes for families, and we think fundamentally that these decisions need to reflect private sector realities: the ability of taxpayers and municipalities to pay these bills. If Don Drummond is with us, municipalities are with us and taxpayers are with us, Premier, why aren't you?

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I am very surprised by the line of questioning that we're getting from the official opposition, because I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance when Bill 55, the spring budget, was

being debated in the committee, and I was surprised, and so were the government members at that time, at how the opposition party, at that time, voted against those suggestions. They were coming straight from their platform in many instances, and they had no reasonable response as to why they were voting against those proposals that actually met what the Association of Municipalities of Ontario was asking for. They were really satisfying the needs of the opposition party.

We put proposals in place that brought timeliness to the interest arbitration process, that brought fairness and transparency. I ask the opposition party to support those changes so that we can provide a clear mechanism for our municipalities.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, Speaker: It certainly is disappointing to see maybe a different face in the chair but to hear Dalton McGuinty's voice over and over again here in the Legislature. I think people are looking for change.

Mayor Hazel McCallion, respected mayor of Mississauga, said the following: "It is reasonable that annual pay raises reflect the economic circumstances of the community they serve, and to be comparable to increases given to its other municipal employees."

We, on this side of the House, agree with Mayor McCallion in that. We agree with AMO. We agree with Don Drummond. Quite frankly, somebody has to stand up for taxpayers who are footing this bill.

I worry with this competition between Premier Wynne and the NDP to win the fealty of the public sector union bosses at any expense. You can't get blood from a stone. Will you stand up for taxpayers, Premier? Will you endorse the outstanding bill standing in Mr. Wilson's name to fix the broken arbitration system and protect public services?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think it's really important to look a little bit in detail as to the proposals that we brought forward that the opposition parties voted against. More specifically, Speaker, what we were requiring was for interest arbitrators, when requested by a party, to provide written reasons demonstrating that they have given proper consideration to the statutory criteria. We were also creating a deadline for the issuance of interest arbitration decisions. Lastly, we were establishing a clear consequence for matters that failed to meet this deadline. Cases not decided within that required timeframe would be automatically referred to the Ontario Labour Relations Board for resolution.

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Now, I've heard the Leader of the Opposition speak at AMO and other meetings, and that's exactly the kind of things he's been asking for, and we have actually provided for them in the amendments, but they voted against them.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Work together with us—
Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We've reverted to something I've been asking us to avoid, and that is when somebody is putting a question, I'm hearing noise coming from the very side that's putting the question, which prompts the other people to respond. And when somebody's giving the answer, I hear a response from the people who are giving the answer, to prompt them. If that stops, we can cut down on this and get more questions in, in realization that all we want to do is put the question and get an answer.

New question.

HOME CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't need the member from Renfrew commenting right when I finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to follow up with the Premier on some specific proposals on health care that I think we can achieve this year. I've been hearing that the government says that they like home care, and they plan to invest in it.

My question is a pretty simple one: Will the government actually commit to a five-day home care guarantee for Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm just delighted that the third party continues to come back to this question of how we can support more people in their homes, because that is where we have a great opportunity to provide care that people need, in the right environment, and that is in their home. So we are absolutely committed to investing more in the community sector, more in the home care sector.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have seen wait times come down—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —and I welcome the opportunity to work with the third party to make sure that we do get the right investments in our home care sector. We've made great progress. There is more to do, and I'm delighted that we have a partner with the NDP on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: Does the Premier believe that we need to fire nurses and close beds at hospitals in order to achieve a home care guarantee for the people of this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the member opposite, the leader of the third party, really does need to understand the transformation that is taking place in our health care system.

We simply must shift our health care spending. We're not in a world where we can see 6% to 7% annual increases in our health care budget. That is not our reality anymore. That's why we have to choose where we are going to spend our increases in health care spending, and we have decided, based on the advice of the entire health care sector, that where we have the greatest opportunity is in the home care sector.

Let me give some examples of the 4% community increase—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland. Bring it down.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —that is facilitated by taking a stronger line on hospitals. In Erie-St. Clair: over \$4.7 million to the CCAC to increase home care and reduce ALC rates. I've got other examples I'll be more than happy to share.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: When will the Premier move on cost-saving initiatives like a hard cap on CEO salaries in hospitals?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think that our hospital sector is doing very difficult and very good work as they go through their budgets, understanding that historic increases are not in their future.

We are investing more in the community. In Niagara, at the United Mennonite Home, we're increasing the number of personal support workers to provide overnight coverage for seniors living in supportive housing. In Brant, we're supporting the Ontario March of Dimes for a community-based falls-prevention exercise program for at-risk seniors in their homes. In the Canadian Association of Mental Health, Haldimand-Norfolk branch, we're providing nearly \$800,000 for mental health and addictions support. That includes a mobile crisis support, intensive case management, and counselling.

Speaker, we are investing more in the community to keep people out of hospital.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. I'm concerned that the Premier and the Minister of Health are giving Ontarians a false choice. The government is suggesting that Ontarians can have front-line care in hospitals or they can have home care.

New Democrats have a balanced approach that provides a five-day home care guarantee, without firing nurses and closing hospital beds.

Why is the government saying that Ontarians have to choose between home care and hospital beds but refusing to move on basic cost-saving measures like capping the hospital CEO salaries?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has given some very specific examples of investments that we are making in health care in various parts of the province. The reality is that we are increasing—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—funding to health care; we are increasing funding to hospitals—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will come to order. Second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: But we also have to make sure that the right care is being delivered to people in the right venue. That does not mean that we won't continue to make investments.

This morning, I joined the Minister of Health—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland, come to order: second time, maybe third.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—and the Minister of Research and Innovation at Sick Kids Hospital; we made an announcement about the Ontario Brain Institute, that we're going to continue to invest \$100 million over the next five years in the Ontario Brain Institute, to look at issues like depression and Alzheimer's. Those kinds of investments are going to make the health care system sustainable. They will save us money in the future and make people's lives better.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, here's what reality the people of this province are seeing: a government that says they're improving home care, but some people are waiting as long as 262 days to get the support they need; nurses being fired and beds being closed in hospitals in Windsor and in London, while the government refuses to cap CEO salaries in the hospital sector.

Does the Premier understand that people are tired of hearing promises of change—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath:—and getting the same old status quo over and over again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have said clearly that there is more to do in home care; the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has said it over and over again. In fact, we are committing more dollars to home care and providing more services to people in their homes and in the community. That's what a large part of the health care transformation is about. It's not about making a choice between acute care and home care; it's about making sure we provide the right home care, the right acute care, the right supports for people in the community.

The leader of the third party shakes her head, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is that we have to find ways to

make sure that the health care system changes with the needs of the people of the province, with an aging demographic, with different expectations on the part of those people who want to be in their homes and don't want to be in an acute care bed. We've got more work to do, and I'm hoping we can work with the third party on this.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I've heard the Premier talk many times about being interested in a balanced approach. For us, a balanced approach means helping seniors deal with illness at home without firing nurses and closing hospital beds; a balanced approach means capping six-figure executive salaries in hospitals so we can get 6,000 people off of home care waiting lists in this province.

Is the Premier ready to stop engaging in a conversation about a balanced approach and start taking action so Ontarians can have a five-day home care guarantee that we can afford?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think what we have here is a failure to do the math. Our recommendation, our transformation of health care, does require that we hold the line on hospital expenditures so that we can invest more in home care. The NDP, I'm afraid, is wanting to have it both ways. They don't want to make the decisions that will facilitate enhanced investments in home care.

The reality is, procedures that used to keep people in hospital for a week or two weeks are now performed as day surgery. The requirements for our hospitals are changing as our technology changes and as our population changes. We need to harness the savings that we can so we can accommodate the increased needs of our seniors, as our population ages, in their own homes.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. After 15 days of public hearings into the Ornge scandal and some 57 witnesses, it was confirmed in the course of those hearings that the Ministry of Health had very specific authority and responsibilities to oversee Ornge. In fact, the director of the emergency health services branch said under oath the following: "I agree that the Ministry of Health and the emergency health services branch have and had oversight responsibilities, and that oversight responsibility was basically set in line by the Ambulance Act, by the performance agreement and by the transfer-of-payment accountability directive."

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Given confirmation through those sworn testimonies that the ministry had specific authority, why is there no one in the Ministry of Health or any other department of the government that has been held accountable for their lack of oversight?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am very, very pleased that Ornge has made enormous progress over the past year. I think the member opposite would acknowledge that Ornge is a much more responsive, transparent organization now than it was just a year ago.

We've got a new culture at Ornge. It is putting patients first. It is respecting taxpayers. It does respect transparency. Dr. Andrew McCallum is now firmly entrenched as the CEO at Ornge. He is an exceptionally well-qualified person for this job. The volunteer board of directors is taking their responsibility extremely seriously, Speaker.

We are very proud of the progress that we've made, and I think if you're looking for accountability, we take full accountability for the situation at Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, it's not the accountability of Ornge or the transparency of Ornge we're concerned about in this question; it's about the accountability and transparency of the Ministry of Health.

The new Premier is picking up where the old Premier left off, refusing to answer questions directly on this important issue.

My question is this: Rather than hold the minister accountable, she promoted the minister to Deputy Premier. Rather than hold the deputy minister, Mr. Saad Rafi, accountable for his failure of oversight, he got a raise. I'd like to know from this Premier: Will she conduct her administration in a more transparent, more accountable way than the former Premier, who did everything he could to deflect responses about this issue?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm very pleased that we have been quickly able to reintroduce legislation respecting air ambulance service in Ontario. It does strengthen oversight; it does strengthen transparency. I very, very much hope that the member opposite and his entire caucus support this bill, now Bill 11, so that we can complete the task that was given to us by the Auditor General.

There were serious problems at Ornge. The entire board is gone; the entire senior executive team is gone. It is a new era at Ornge, and this legislation is vitally important. I urge the member opposite to quit playing politics with this and get on with fixing the problem. He has an important part to play.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Minister of Finance. In 2010, this government slashed benefits paid to Ontario drivers by 50%. These changes resulted in \$2 billion of annual savings for the auto insurance industry. This resulted in savings far more than tackling fraud alone, yet in the past two years, drivers have paid 5% more in premiums. Why won't this government commit to passing the billions of dollars in savings on to drivers in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. As I've stated before, we do not want rates to

be increased any further. We recognize that we need to do better than the status quo, but let's be realistic with what we're dealing with here. The costs of claims in Ontario are 10 times higher than the costs of claims in other provinces. That relates to the cost of premiums. We've taken steps in the past to try to minimize that price increase. That's why the price only increased by 0.26% since 2006, but we need to do better than that, and I will work with the opposition from both sides to make that happen. We'll look at taking the steps necessary to get at the root causes before us. We need to do better, and we will.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, we definitely need to do much more. Everyone agrees that we need to tackle fraud, but drivers deserve a guarantee that any new recommendations implemented, any new steps taken, are connected to lower premiums for drivers in Ontario.

Over the past two years, drivers have seen their rates go up time and time again. In my meeting with industry CEOs on Friday, I made it clear to them that this is simply unacceptable. Why won't this government commit right now to reducing auto insurance rates in this province by 15% over the next year?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let me be clear: We're taking steps to do just that. We do want to reduce rates. We do want to do better in Ontario because in relative terms to the other provinces, we are paying too much. That's the problem, because the costs are also extremely high in Ontario versus other provinces. We need to get at those issues.

But let me also be remindful here that while our rates have gone higher, but below inflation, it's not acceptable still. We need to do better. Even Sid Ryan makes a point of saying, over a "Million union members in Ont. I have not heard one say they want an election over auto insurance."

We need to work together to make this effective, and I will do that with you as well.

BRAIN RESEARCH

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I was pleased to hear in the throne speech that brain-related illnesses are a priority for this government. In my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, I often hear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And you're adding, too. I'm making a list. Okay, thank you.

Question, please.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: In my riding of Oak Ridges, I often hear from my constituents how they and their families are dealing with the challenges of Alzheimer's, autism, epilepsy and mental health and addiction. I think we're all aware that Ontario is home to many world-class research institutions.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Research and Innovation: Can the minister please let us know specifically what actions this government is taking to ensure an ongoing commitment to brain research?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for that question. Brain disease is a serious illness for Ontarians. One in five Ontarians, at some point in their lifetime, will develop some kind of brain disease. That's about 2.6 million people in Ontario.

That's why this government is proud to announce this morning that we are investing \$100 million over the next five years at the Ontario Brain Institute. This investment will allow the Ontario Brain Institute to expand beyond its current research scope and to develop new research into depression and neurodegeneration.

Canada is among the top five countries in the world for neuroscience research, and this is in part due to the world-class research being done right here in Ontario at the Ontario Brain Institute. Tackling these issues is critical to this government's commitment to fostering a fair society for all of us in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm glad that this government is continuing to invest in this critical research. It's clear that research investments have profound impacts, not only here in Ontario but throughout the world. We are making Ontario a leader in brain research and are helping to improve the health of all Ontarians. But, because of their neurological disease, many Ontarians are not achieving their full potential, and there is an impact on our economy through lost workplace productivity.

Could the minister please let us know how today's announcement will affect Ontario's economy?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I thank again the member for that insightful question. Brain diseases have devastating social impacts, but in Ontario, they also have an estimated commercial and economic impact of \$39 billion annually. Addressing these challenges will have a positive impact on Ontario's economy.

The annual global market for nervous system diagnostics and therapeutics is estimated to be \$130 billion every year and growing by 10%. We are lucky here in Ontario to be competitive in this market, with over 500 top neuroscientists conducting world-class research at the Ontario Brain Institute. It's clear that our commitment to research and innovation is strengthening Ontario's economy while ensuring we all have a fair society in this province.

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POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Premier, we know you were briefed in 2011 on the Oakville gas plant cancellation. We know you received a cabinet document on Project Vapour. Yet you continue to say that you weren't part of any decisions on this billion-dollar scandal. Recently, you made a subtle change to say

you "weren't in the room" when those decisions were made.

Premier, your credibility on the gas plant scandal continues to vaporize thanks to your ever-changing words. You say one thing, but you do another. Enough of this charade. You owe us the documents. Will you finally turn over the secret gas plant documents to us today?

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

Hon. John Milloy: As the honourable member is well aware, we have a committee of the Legislature which is seized with this issue and will have an opportunity to examine documents. Government members have already indicated the willingness of the government to provide all documents.

We're also very much looking forward to hearing from the opposition about their reasons for supporting the removal of the Mississauga plant, the fact that they were on the public record, everything from news releases to Twitter to YouTube to the Steve Paikin show, with the Leader of the Opposition being very clear that if he had been elected Premier, he would have cancelled it. Certainly, all of us are looking forward to the detailed policy analysis and accounting and financial work that I'm sure the Progressive Conservatives gave and I'm sure they will bring forward to the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we're not talking about what if; we're talking about what is. What is missing on these whited-out pages? What is missing in the documents from the Premier that we don't have? What is in those answers that we have questions for? What is in the OPA documents that were removed because of privilege, when privilege doesn't apply here?

We have an admission from the Premier that all documents will be released. Well, that actually means there are indeed more documents. No more what ifs; what is? What is in these secret documents, and will we have you turn over the Liberal Party documents today?

Interjections.

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

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, the committee will be dealing with all these issues, but I would have thought that the honourable member would have had more confidence in his leader's ability to have won the last election. I had a request for this today from someone. They want to hear the text of the Mississauga South PC candidate's robocall.

Here we are: "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 am 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. On October 6, choose change that puts our community first.”

In the words of the Leader of the Opposition when it came to the Mississauga power plant, “done, done, done.”

CASINOS

Mr. Jonah Schein: My question is to the Premier. Toronto city hall is filled with lobbyists who are pushing for a downtown casino. In fact, Toronto’s deputy mayor is so concerned, he has asked to ban lobbyists from city hall. This decision should be made by the people of Toronto, and it should not be made behind closed doors.

Speaker, will the Premier agree to hold referendums on casinos so that people can have their say?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the question. I know the Minister of Finance will want to comment in the supplementary.

I’ve been very clear that the decision to site a casino in a municipality is up to the municipality. The decision on what kind of consultation that the municipality wants to do is up to the municipality, because different municipalities will have a different take on whether they want to have a referendum, whether they want to do a different kind of consultation. But it is up to the community to make that decision. It is not up to the provincial government; it is not up to OLG. It is up to the community. I have been very clear and consistent that that is exactly the position that we will take: We will not be interfering in those decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Back to the Premier: I’m hearing a no. I see that the halls of Queen’s Park and the halls of city hall are swarming with lobbyists. We keep hearing about change here at Queen’s Park, but what people in Ontario continue to see is the same status quo. We see a government that continues to put well-connected insiders before the interests of the people of this province.

When it comes to casinos, the Premier is saying the exact same thing as her predecessor. Even Mike Harris respected people enough to let them have a say by referendum before imposing a casino on their community. Why won’t this Premier agree to hold referendums on casinos so that Ontarians can have their say?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to say to the member opposite that I actually have confidence in the city council of Toronto and city councils around the province to make decisions. They are elected representatives of the people of the city, and I also have confidence in the people of Toronto and the people beyond Toronto to work with their city councillors—with their representatives at the municipal level—to make those decisions.

Our responsibility as a provincial government is to give municipalities the latitude to make those decisions. If a municipality wants to hold a referendum or if a municipality wants to do another kind of consultation, they should have the right to do that. We should not be imposing those restrictions on them.

Our position is municipalities have the right to make those decisions and, as I say, I have confidence in the city council of Toronto to make those decisions.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is to the Minister of Labour. I think we can all agree that one of the most stressful things that can take place is to have a close family member diagnosed with a serious illness, not just for the person who has been diagnosed with the illness, but also for close friends and family. We also know, in a situation like this, how important it is for our loved ones to not only get the best possible care from our health care system, but also the help and support of their family during such a difficult and trying time. We all know from personal experience how hard it can be to balance family and work at the best of times, and it can get next to impossible when somebody is really sick.

Minister, can you tell me what you are doing to ensure that the good people of Mississauga East–Cooksville do not have to choose between paying their mortgage and looking after their loved ones?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member for this very important question and her constant advocacy on this extremely important issue.

Our government recognizes the challenges that hard-working Ontarians face when they must provide care for a loved one while also working full-time, and we believe that the last thing Ontarians should worry about when the health of their loved one hangs in the balance is the stress of work or the fear of losing their job. That’s why our government already provides Ontarians with a personal emergency leave for up to 10 days or a family medical leave for up to eight weeks to care for a family member at risk of death.

But we know that there is a gap for those hard-working Ontarians who are increasingly caring for their elderly family members with a chronic acute medical condition, not to mention other family members facing serious illnesses that do not necessarily pose a risk of death.

I will be tabling this afternoon family caregiver legislation and I am proud that our government is following through on this commitment to Ontario’s families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, minister; this news will be very much welcome in my riding. I believe this is especially critical in light of the demographic challenges we face that are seeing more and more families caring for elderly parents. We know that home is the best and most preferred place for people to recover from an illness or injury, especially following a hospital stay. There is no doubt in my mind that home care helps improve an aging parent’s or a sick child’s quality of life. In addition, it frees up hospital beds and shortens wait times in emergency rooms, so it’s a win-win all around. This is all part of the government’s focus on ensuring Ontarians are getting the right care in the right place.

I'm glad to hear this legislation is being reintroduced as soon as possible, as the minister indicated. Could he tell us if the proposed bill includes any changes from the previous bill?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As I mentioned, I am pleased to be reintroducing our family caregiver leave legislation this afternoon. These measures are something that caregivers across the province have been asking for. Extending job-protected leave to care for a loved one during a time of need is a policy that our government strongly believes is not only the right thing to do, but a real way to help our health care system support patients with the care they need in the setting that is best, often that is at home with the support of a family caregiver. It could be the crucial difference between going home, where we know it is more comfortable and better for the patient, or an extended and expensive hospital stay.

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To answer the member specifically, Speaker: There will be some new additions to the legislation to include provisions which complement the new federal measures in the Helping Families in Need Act. The proposed legislation would also provide leave for employees who are parents to care for a critically ill child or in cases where a child is missing or deceased as a probable result of a crime.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is to the Premier. When the last PC government was in power, it was confronted with a decision to build a power plant in the western GTA. After careful consideration and discussions with local residents, our government did the responsible thing and said no to the power plants because that's the way governments are supposed to behave.

But this is a Liberal government that simply can't say no. They said yes to locating the plants where they should never have been sited, yes to cancelling those plants to save some seats, yes to wasting hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars and yes to hiding documents from the people of Ontario.

Will the Premier stand up and tell Ontarians that it was only her government that ever thought locating the plants in Oakville and Mississauga were good ideas?

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. You know the party on that side has had energy policies—has a white paper on energy. We should really examine what they're saying on that side of the House. For example, they want to privatize OPG. You know what? Ernie Eves wanted to privatize OPG, and when he tried to do it, energy prices went up 30%. Not only that, when they were managing the energy system, Tom Long, who was the Leader of the Opposition's co-campaign manager, made off with \$1.3 million in Hydro One contracts. That's the record, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the firm of the Leader of the Opposition's co-campaign man-

ager received \$250,000, which the Leader of the Opposition later called a bargain.

We have a policy that makes sense in placing our electrical generation. We will continue to do it with credibility.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: It takes a decision to build a power plant to come before a decision to cancel it. It takes a decision to award power plant contracts that has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in cancellation costs. It's taken a decision to obstruct the work of this Legislature that leads to a contempt charge on the floor of this House.

Your Liberal government made all of those decisions, Minister. Your decisions have tarnished the Liberal Party, thrown its caucus members under the bus, and the people of Ontario are left to foot the bill.

Will the Premier stand up and admit that it is her government's decisions that have left it mired in scandal, and will she apologize to the people of Ontario for bilking hundreds of millions of dollars from their pockets?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: In 2011, there was a provincial election campaign: All parties supported the relocation of the Mississauga plant. We were fortunate enough to be elected; they lost the election. We honoured that commitment. We honoured the same commitment that they made, Mr. Speaker. So we are making the right decisions. As a matter of fact, we have a community in Oakville that likes our decision. We have a community in Mississauga that likes our decision. We have a community in Sarnia-Lambton that likes our decision. We have a community in Lennox in eastern Ontario—we have four parts of the province that like the decision that we made, that was a commitment that all three parties made. We're proud of our decision, Mr. Speaker.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday in Windsor, 200 concerned citizens gathered at the Windsor Regional Hospital to protest cuts to beds and front-line staff. This was one of more than a dozen similar protests that were held around the province, Speaker. Even though the minister says that she's okay with hospital cuts, I think it's pretty clear that the people of Windsor, and many other affected communities, are not.

Will the Premier explain to patients and front-line care workers in Windsor how cuts can possibly make for a better health care system in their community?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do know that across the province yesterday there were Ontario Health Coalition protests in various locations. I didn't notice that they were celebrating the additional people who were being hired in the community.

You see, we are transforming our health care system. It is hard work, but people across Ontario are embracing the shift in health care spending. We are investing more in the community. We are investing more in home care. We are investing more in keeping people out of the hospital, because that's the best way to deliver care to the most number of people.

It's unfortunate that the NDP does not acknowledge that our health care system has to change. The status quo is not an option. What matters to me is that patients are getting the care they need, in the most appropriate place, as quickly as possible, and that's what our transformation does support.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In recent weeks, the people of Windsor have learned that they're about to lose 34 nurses and that they'll never see the 48 hospital beds promised to them by the Liberal government not so very long ago. We've also heard that Maryvale children's mental health centre is being forced to cut 22 front-line care workers in a bid to shift resources from residential beds to outpatient services.

Now, more outpatient care should not—the minister needs to know this is what New Democrats think—come as a trade-off for other kinds of mental health services, particularly when everybody in Ontario acknowledges that mental health services are at a crisis low in Ontario. We need a balanced approach to addressing health care and mental health care services in the province.

Why is the Premier cutting health care staff and services first and asking questions later?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think I want to start by talking about funding at Windsor Regional Hospital, because I think it's important to know that the funding has increased by 83% over a decade. It's \$220 million more this year, so there is an increase in funding at Windsor Regional Hospital.

When it comes to mental health and addictions, our government has done more for mental health and addictions than any government has in the past. I have to say that that work has been supported by the extraordinarily fine work of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions that had membership of MPPs from all sides, chaired by the very, very capable member from Oakville.

We have made great strides. We have more to do, Speaker, but the implementation of our 10-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy is on track and people are seeing the difference on the ground.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We have many post-secondary students in the galleries today—if they're staying here. They are here at Queen's Park to talk with members from all parties about the issues facing their peers. These students are talking about the issues that we can all work together on, and I know this government is committed to helping all students in Ontario. A concern

on campuses across the province is the mental health wellness of students. We can all agree that the health of students is something we all care about.

Mr. Speaker, through you, could the minister inform the House what the government is doing to help ensure that the post-secondary students have access to the mental health supports and the services they also need?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question. Most of all, I want to thank the students who are here today to talk to all three parties about the important issues to them taking place in our post-secondary system. The member raises an important issue, as they'll be raising it with us today, and that's the issue of mental health services on our campuses.

We've been engaged in consultations with our post-secondary education partners, student groups, as well as mental health advocacy organizations, as we chart out our government's plan to address mental health on campus. I can assure you there are a number of recommendations now that my ministry is taking a good look at. I'm looking forward to rolling out some of those initiatives in the very near future.

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In the meantime, I'd like to commend all the student groups that are involved in advocating for this important issue. I look forward to working with them to bring forward even more progress in the days ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's good to hear that our government is taking action to address this important issue facing post-secondary students.

The students here also have said that they want to know what our government is doing to assist them with another important issue. The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is currently calling for the first two years at all universities to be entirely transferable. For some students, this means transferring from college to university. For others, it means from one university to another. Students are mobile; so should their credits be.

Like the previous issue, I know our government is listening and taking action. Speaker, through you, could the minister update the House on the current status of the province's efforts to help students graduate faster through credit transfer agreements?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think the students who are talking to us today about credit transfer are making some very valid points and raising some very valid concerns. It is indeed one of our government's top post-secondary education priorities because a strengthened credit transfer system reduces costs to students, to families and indeed to Ontarians and our government when it comes to the post-secondary education system.

Students have become more mobile, and the academic credits they earn should be more mobile as well. This is why in 2011 we established ONCAT, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer. I've heard the recommendation from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and I'm pleased that they've chosen a very bold and aspirational goal and objective. Each year, over

4,000 student transfers take place between colleges and universities. That's a huge increase to over 500 already-existing credit transfer articulation agreements. I look forward to working with students across this province as we continue to enhance credit transfer.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, last week the member for Oakville dropped a bombshell when he admitted that the Ministry of Health had failed to release all the eHealth documents requested by the estimates committee, and he didn't just make that statement once. To members' surprise, he conceded several times that the ministry is sitting on more documents related to the committee's request. However, he suddenly changed his tune about those additional documents after a Liberal staffer scolded him for his Freudian slip.

I have a simple question for you, Minister: Was the member for Oakville right or wrong when he stated that the Ministry of Health will be releasing more eHealth documents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the mischief that the honourable member is trying to make. I think it's important to correct the record here. On February 20, the Legislature unanimously passed a motion to appoint committees and membership. It was supported by all members in this House. It was a unanimous motion. In the motion, it outlined that committees would be provided with documents that they had requested in the last session before the prorogation, and that they would be provided within seven sessional days.

That work is ongoing. Committees are beginning to work, and again, the various ministries will respond to the motion that's been put forward by the committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the minister: We still don't have all the documents from the ministry that we've asked for. We've got plenty of eHealth, but we're asking specifically from the ministry. I'm sure you must have cringed when you heard the comments made by the member from Oakville. Perhaps she even questioned whether it was worth a billion dollars and a gas plant cancellation to save the member's seat in the last election. I hope the minister can understand why we're all a little skeptical when we hear the Liberals claim they have complied with the House, especially when it comes to providing documents. I'll remind the minister that on two different occasions now the Liberal government was forced to retract statements falsely claiming all the gas plant documents had, in fact, been released.

So I have to ask the minister: With such a poor track record on transparency, why should anyone believe you're actually telling the truth now?

Hon. John Milloy: Unfortunately, I guess within the Progressive Conservative Party there's not a lot of com-

munication. Maybe the member from Kitchener-Conestoga should have shown up when this House unanimously passed an order giving ministries seven sessional days to bring forward documents. This was an offer made by the government so that committees did not have to go through the exercise of re-requesting the documents. I guess the honourable member wasn't aware, because the rest of his caucus stood up and agreed to it. That is exactly what the government is doing and that is exactly what ministries and agencies that have been requested are doing.

Mr. Speaker, we will comply with the order of this House and work with the committees to make sure that they can undertake their work.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Education. Students at five East York schools are struggling to learn in mouldy, raccoon-invested portables because this government, this Liberal government, has reneged on its commitment to fund capital repairs at the schools in East York.

Why is the government compromising the health and safety of children in these schools by refusing to provide capital funding for these essential repairs that were in last year's provincial budget?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think it's important to put this all in perspective, that when we look at the amount of money that this government has provided for the Toronto District School Board, since 2003 we have increased funding for the board by over 30%, to a total of over \$2 billion, at the same time that their enrolment has declined by 13%. So when we look at the funding that has been provided to the Toronto District School Board, we are doing anything but renegeing.

What is quite clear is that the Toronto District School Board, like every school board in this province, has a responsibility to make sure that it has its own capital plan to make sure that it is taking care of the repair needs in its schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's very clear that the minister is seeking to shift the blame to the Toronto District School Board, and I am not sure that's where it is, because the ministry officials, in last year's budget, were very, very clear that the money was available and was needed by the Toronto District School Board, particularly in these underserviced schools. A Toronto Star editorial said it best: "The ministry needs to protect children who will otherwise spend their elementary years in overcrowded, rundown portables."

Parents are meeting tonight and demand answers. Is the answer they're going to get the one they just got, or when will this government finally commit on the urgent request to protect these 800 East York children who deserve so much better from this ministry?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think we need to acknowledge that there has been a significant history of the Toronto

District School Board having challenges with its capital planning process, with its capital portfolio, despite the funding that has been provided by the Ministry of Education.

Because there have been historic problems, we have actually provided a special assistance team to go into the Toronto District School Board and work with the Toronto District School Board, the trustees and the senior administration to come up with a new capital plan that will provide for, as we go forward, both new accommodation but also to do the maintenance that is required in the schools. I have met with that special assistance review team, and I know that they have a number of proposals for the Toronto trustees.

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

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my honour to present Maria Daskalos and Jim Parthenis, who are here today on a very important matter of concern to this Legislature.

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

Introductions of guests?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I don't think she is here yet, but I do want to introduce Joanne Di Nardo, the senior manager of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario division, who's here in support of the bill that I'll be introducing relating to family caregiver leave. So, welcome to her whenever she arrives. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome all our guests, regardless of whether they're here or not.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, as you know, last summer, parts of Ontario suffered through severe drought. When I toured Renfrew, I saw fields of corn where there wasn't a plant over 10 inches at the end of July, and farmers who were frustrated and worried they wouldn't have enough to feed their livestock.

I want to commend all the farmers and organizations that came together to form HayEast, which brought hay from western Canada to help farmers get through this difficult winter. It is wonderful to see people working together: the generosity of western farmers who donated their hay, people who transported it at cost and those in Ontario who came to help with the cost.

But farmers buying hay because of the drought are now facing another challenge. The government program designed to assist them with transporting the hay from the long distances doesn't work. Farmers will be feeding their livestock the purchased hay until May, but the

program only covers expenses to March 15. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't make sense that the program ends before the problem does. During the six or seven weeks after the deadline, many farmers will transport purchased hay from long distance at great expense, but it won't be covered.

I wrote to the Premier last week and asked her to extend the AgriRecovery program to mid-May. The deadline is now less than two weeks away, so I ask the Premier again to extend the program, go to eastern Ontario, visit the farms that have been impacted and hear from the farmers first-hand to make sure the program actually works for them. I'm going to talk with them in person, and I hope, Minister, you will, too.

HAMILTON SPECIAL OLYMPICS SKATING CLUB

Miss Monique Taylor: In January, I had the great pleasure of attending a send-off night for the skaters from the Hamilton Special Olympics Skating Club who are heading to the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Sara McKelvie, David Robertson, Tim Goodacre and Jessica Young were embarking on the trip of a lifetime with their dedicated coaches, Michelle Petullio, Kathy Sitak, Jenna Smith and Amanda Marazia.

The event was hosted by the Dofasco Skating Club and was a great night, filled with hope and optimism.

I was so pleased to congratulate our Special Olympics skaters—dedicated athletes who accomplish so much.

Their trip to South Korea was no exception. Sara won gold in solo and another in dance. David won silver in solo and another silver in dance. Tim won bronze in solo and silver in pairs. Jessica won silver in pairs and placed fourth in solo.

David and Jessica also had the honour of skating in the closing ceremonies, along with Michelle Kwan and Yuna Kim.

We're very proud of the Hamilton club's success. It is recognized for its excellence, and no other club in the world sent four skaters to South Korea.

Congratulations to all the athletes and their coaches, but I also want to put a special thank you in to Hamilton Special Olympics Skating Club coach Frank Sullivan for his commitment to the Special Olympians and for giving me the privilege of spending some time with them.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to share some important news in the domain of consumer protection.

Across Canada, Speaker, as you may know, March is recognized as Fraud Prevention Month. In Ontario, the Ministry of Consumer Services is at work every day to inform and educate consumers and businesses across the province. The goal, of course, is to provide a fair, safe and informed marketplace, where consumer rights are

fully protected against all kinds of undesirable business practices, of course including fraud.

Last week, Ontario's Minister of Consumer Services joined the Toronto Police Service to launch Fraud Prevention Month. The launch included partners such as the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Bank of Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Crime Prevention Association of Toronto, amongst a number of others. These organizations illustrate just how wide-ranging fraud and scams unfortunately continue to be in our society, and they illustrate how much we can accomplish together to raise awareness and educate consumers. Protecting consumers, of course, builds confidence, and building confidence in their transactions through preventing fraud helps promote healthy economic growth in this province.

I urge my fellow parliamentarians and this entire House and Legislature to join the Ministry of Consumer Services in recognizing March as Fraud Prevention Month, and to join us in our efforts to make our province's marketplace fair, safe and equitable for all.

BREAST CANCER

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I know we've heard much about the challenges in our schools we are facing lately, but today I am pleased to rise and acknowledge two high school teachers and their students at Robert F. Hall secondary school in Caledon. A group of students are heading to New York this week to perform in their own musical called *In the Pink* at the off-Broadway theatre New World Stages. The performance is scheduled for Tuesday, March 12.

The story, which is co-written by teachers Rob Ciccotelli and Frank Adriano, involves a group of 10 performers who tackle the issue of teenage breast cancer. *In the Pink* challenges some common perceptions about breast cancer and highlights the impact that the disease can have on young women. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, in 2012 over 22,000 women and 200 men were diagnosed with breast cancer. The students and their teachers at Robert F. Hall believe that it is a topic that must be discussed at the high school level, and this musical attempts to do so in a thought-provoking, entertaining and informative way.

The production has caught the attention of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, who sponsored the show and has been very supportive of the drama students during the development of the play. As a precursor to their New York debut, the actors took to the stage to perform *In the Pink* in Mississauga this week. Box office proceeds from the show will go to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.

Rob Ciccotelli, Frank Adriano and the Robert F. Hall drama students who participated both onstage and off-stage in the making of this production are to be congratulated for tackling the subject of breast cancer with intelligence and compassion. I wish them all the very best of luck in their big debut in New York City next week.

DIMITRA DASKALOS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Once again, I rise in the Legislature to mark the anniversary of the tragic death of Dimitra Daskalos. Once again, her daughter Maria is here to ask for justice for her mother. Maria has spent the last two years fighting for hospital accountability.

Maria has been engaged in back-and-forth letter-writing for years with the hospital, ministry staff and the Premier's office. The hospital caused extreme hardship and suffering to Dimitra Daskalos and her family at a time when compassion and care were required. The family believes that infection-control protocol was breached and has repeatedly asked for an investigation. She has been stonewalled by both the government and the hospital. Maria and her family collected 5,400 signatures in a petition asking for Ombudsman oversight, which was presented in this Legislature.

The Ombudsman's bid for jurisdiction to investigate complaints about patients' experience at the province's hospitals and long-term-care facilities has support from a wide range of patient advocacy groups. This would be viewed as a positive step by almost everyone except this government; as an example, I point to the omission of Ombudsman oversight of Ornge and Bill 11. It is unconscionable that Maria Daskalos has to be in this House again requesting justice for her mother. It is time for the Minister of Health to take responsibility and order an investigation.

JEAN FRASER

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to take some time today to recognize a member of my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt. Jean Fraser is a role model for everyone in this House and is watching us today. Over the last century, and even now, she continues to contribute to our community in a meaningful way. Yes, Mr. Speaker, you heard it correctly: I said “over a century.” On February 8 of this year, Jean Fraser turned 100 years old.

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Jean has been volunteering at the Sunshine Centres for Seniors, which help isolated and frail seniors who are at risk for depression and need to be connected to a supportive community. This particular riding also has Camp Sunshine, which aims to enhance the quality of life of seniors.

Jean has been volunteering at the Sunshine Centres since 1996, when she was 83 years old. She has brought her talents to Camp Sunshine, where she has grown to be a strong leader, a dependable volunteer and an amazing friend to other seniors.

Today I would like to celebrate and recognize Jean's contributions to our community, and thank her for her warmth, kindness and goodwill, with which she actively contributes and makes a positive difference to Camp Sunshine and to my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt.

I'd also like to congratulate her on turning 100 years young. She's an inspiration and role model to all of us around her.

TAXATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements? The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much, Speaker. I have to also congratulate you on doing that title so well.

Speaker, taxes are the largest part of a family's budget. Under Liberal governments, they only go one way, and that's up. That's why, in 1999, the Harris government introduced the Taxpayer Protection Act. The goal of the act was to make the government directly responsible to the people for new taxes. Because of the large impact that taxes have on a family's budget, the act required new taxes to be voted on by the public before they were enacted.

The Liberals have subverted the act in every possible way. Using the "notwithstanding" clause, they have gutted it and made it useless. I understand that they may disrespect taxpayers, but they should at least have the respect to repeal the act that they so disagree with.

This afternoon I'll be introducing a bill to strengthen the Taxpayer Protection Act, to better protect Ontario taxpayers, and to remove that "notwithstanding" clause from the act. My bill will return the Taxpayer Protection Act to its original goal: protecting the hard-earned money of Ontario workers. It will force the government to call a referendum if they want to make changes to the act.

No matter what, Ontario taxpayers will have a say, and Liberal attempts to fleece even more money out of Ontarians must be stopped.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have a feeling the member knows already what I'm going to say, so I'm going to provide him an opportunity to withdraw before I ask him to.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw, Speaker.

DISASTER RELIEF FOR CONMEE

Mr. Bill Mauro: Conmee is a community just west of Thunder Bay in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. People might be more familiar with Kakabeka Falls and Oliver Paipoonge. If you go through Kakabeka Falls, you find yourself in Conmee quite quickly. It's a very small community: about 760 people and about 200 to 230 households.

In May 2012, Thunder Bay and region, including Conmee, was hit by what many are calling a 100-year flood and, of course, they suffered severe damage to their infrastructure, their roads and their bridges.

A few days after that, I was able to tour the damage with Reeve Kevin Holland. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and now the Premier, Kathleen Wynne, showed up in Thunder Bay within about eight days after the disaster hit and announced about \$16 million in funding relief through ODRAP at Saint Peter's church in the east end. We were very pleased to have her for that. The relief was for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Thunder Bay, Oliver Paipoonge and Conmee.

Speaker, Conmee's original estimate came in at about \$800,000, but in working with the ministry, that number has now been revised. Very recently, at the ROMA/OGRA conference—the Rural Ontario Municipal Association—I was very pleased to meet with Reeve Holland, CAO Maxwell, and Councillor MacMaster so that we could share the great news with them about the revised number, having worked with them, increasing that \$800,000 number by \$1.2 million to a total of \$2 million for Conmee to help them with their roads and their bridges as a result of that disaster.

I want to thank everybody involved for their work—great news for Conmee in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: Last Saturday I had the privilege of attending a rally of about 200 local residents in Bethany in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. They came out in sub-zero temperatures for one reason: They were there to present me with the latest three boxes filled with petitions, letters and emails in opposition to the proposed industrial wind turbines at Sumac Ridge, Settler's Landing and Snowy Ridge. They were joined by MP Barry Devolin and broadcaster Dale Goldhawk, both of whom spoke against these projects.

For four years the community has been fighting these proposals. Much of the credit for mobilizing the members should go to Councillor Heather Stauble of the city of Kawartha Lakes and Paul Reid of Manvers Wind Concerns, two tireless crusaders. They have been supported throughout by their local municipal councils.

Citizens have turned up en masse at public meetings, rallies and open houses, making it very clear to the proponents and this government that these wind turbines are not wanted in their community.

As I said in my remarks on Saturday, the Premier made it clear in her throne speech that these projects should go to willing communities. This is clearly not a willing community, and the government should abide by its commitments in the throne speech and deny the applications as soon as possible.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TAXPAYER PROTECTION
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION
DES CONTRIBUTABLES

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1999 sur la protection des contribuables.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm absolutely sure the member wants to hear his bill.

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. Randy Hillier: Speaker, the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, presently contains restrictions on introducing a government bill to increase or permit the increase of a tax rate under a tax statute designated under the act or to give a body or a person, other than the crown, the authority to change a tax rate in a designated tax statute or to levy a new tax.

This bill amends the act to extend those restrictions to a bill that amends those restrictions or that repeals the act. This bill also removes the present exemption from those requirements for a bill that gives a municipality the authority to levy a new tax.

RESPECT FOR MUNICIPALITIES ACT
(CITY OF TORONTO), 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE RESPECT
DES MUNICIPALITÉS
(CITÉ DE TORONTO)

Mr. Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act respecting the City of Toronto and the Ontario Municipal Board / Projet de loi 20, Loi portant sur la cité de Toronto et la Commission des affaires municipales de l'Ontario.

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. Rosario Marchese: My bill, in short, would free Toronto from the Ontario Municipal Board. The bill changes the relationship in law between the city of Toronto and the Ontario Municipal Board. Currently, under various statutes that govern land-use planning, certain municipal decisions can be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. Amendments eliminate those rights of appeal with respect to decisions of the city of Toronto. Amendments also eliminate a right to make certain other types of applications to the board with respect to the city. The city is authorized to establish one or more appeal bodies to hear any of these matters and to hear such other matters as the city considers appropriate.

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EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT
(LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI
(CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)

Mr. Naqvi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.

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

First reading agreed to.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll wait. I don't know what everybody ate for supper or breakfast or lunch or whatever.

The member for a short statement.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

HELPING ONTARIANS ENTER
THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT
À FACILITER L'ACCÈS AUX MÉTIERS
SPÉCIALISÉS EN ONTARIO

Mr. Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 22, An Act to amend the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act / Projet de loi 22, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la qualification professionnelle et l'apprentissage des gens de métier.

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. Garfield Dunlop: This bill amends the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act to specify that no more than one person may be apprenticed to each journeyman of an employer in a trade, and to remove the power to make regulations respecting the ratio of apprentices to journeymen who may be employed by an employer in a trade.

Mr. Speaker, the short title of the bill will be Helping Ontarians Enter the Skilled Trades Act, 2013.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put a motion. Is it agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 12 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice with respect to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, and that the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this motion without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 110(a), the Standing Committee on Justice Policy shall be authorized to consider and report its observations and recommendations concerning the tendering, planning, commissioning, cancellation and relocation of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants;

That the committee be authorized to consider all documents filed with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly by the Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority on September 24 and October 12, 2012, and February 21, 2013, and that such documents be deemed to have been ordered by that committee;

That, notwithstanding standing order 108(h), the committee be authorized to consider any report prepared by the Auditor General with respect to the cancellation and relocation of the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants;

That, pursuant to standing order 110(b), where the committee exercises its authority to send for persons, each party shall be entitled to an equal number of witnesses; and

That these terms of reference shall be incorporated into the terms of reference for the Standing Committee on Justice Policy adopted by the House on February 20, 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is my understanding that the parties are familiar with the motion.

Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY WEEK

SEMAINE DE SENSIBILISATION À L'AGRICULTURE CANADIENNE

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to stand in the Legislature today to recognize the

second annual Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week. From March 4 to March 8, elementary school and high school students across Canada, from British Columbia to Newfoundland, are getting a chance to learn about the importance of agriculture in our daily lives—including agricultural terms, I would say to the member opposite.

Monsieur le Président, l'industrie agricole de l'Ontario est un important contributeur à la santé de la province, tant notre santé économique que la santé de notre population.

There are more than 200 agri-food commodities produced in Ontario, and last year agriculture and agri-food contributed \$34 billion to Ontario's GDP and supported more than 700,000 jobs across the province. Ontario's food processors purchase about 65% of the good things that are produced on our farms.

Mr. Speaker, when our agri-food industry thrives, all of the people of Ontario benefit, because a thriving agri-food industry contributes to a strong economy that creates jobs and a society where every person is able to contribute and flourish. That's why I'm so pleased to take on this portfolio. It's important to me that people in our cities and towns understand and appreciate where their food comes from. It is important for our farmers, it's important for our communities and it's important for our families.

I'm so pleased that, throughout this week, Ontario students are learning about agriculture in Ontario. Activities in classrooms across the province are helping students gain an understanding of the agriculture industry and where their food comes from.

Des activités qui se déroulent dans les classes de l'ensemble de la province aident les élèves à avoir une meilleure compréhension de l'industrie agricole, de même que d'où proviennent les aliments qu'ils consomment.

It's an excellent opportunity for teachers and students to inject agricultural awareness into elementary and secondary classrooms across the country. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the folks at Ontario Agri-Food Education for their hard work and dedication to bringing focus to Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week and for sharing material with teachers. It's through initiatives like this that we can all work together to highlight the importance of Ontario's agri-food industry and we can show the connection between our rural and urban communities as we bring agriculture alive for our young people.

Célébrons donc ensemble la Semaine de sensibilisation à l'agriculture canadienne et remercions Ontario Agri-Food Education de son beau travail.

Please join me in celebrating Canadian Agriculture Literacy Week and thanking Ontario Agri-Food Education for their great work. Merci.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It is a pleasure to rise in the House to introduce our proposed Employment Standards

Amendment Act (Leaves to help Families), 2013. I want to welcome Joanne Di Nardo from the Canadian Cancer Society for being here in the House as well.

This legislation is about compassion and making it possible for every working man and woman to meet the commitments we all have to our families when a crisis occurs. Our proposed new family caregiver leave would allow Ontarians the one thing they need most when it comes to caring for family members who have a serious medical condition: time to be with their loved ones. This bill is for the young working family or single parent who needs to care for their child in hospital with a critical illness. It is for the husband seeing his wife through a difficult period of chemotherapy. It is for a working adult helping to care for their elderly parent recovering from a broken hip.

1530

The bill provides unpaid leaves which tie into the federal employment insurance benefits already available for parents dealing with the critical illness of a child. Our bill also provides unpaid leaves for parents in tragic situations, where their child is missing or dies as a result of a crime. This is an additional support for these parents who are now eligible for federal employment insurance benefits.

Speaker, our proposed family caregiver leave would build on Ontario's family medical leave and would provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job-protected leave to employees to care for family members with a serious medical condition.

We all know that caring for a loved one is a priority. In order to provide this care, many caregivers take time off work at the risk of losing their jobs in such difficult circumstances, or they continue working, wearing themselves down. They work during the day and care for their family at night, all the while suffering extreme stress that impacts their mental and physical health and their productivity.

I think we can all agree that no one should risk losing their job in such difficult circumstances, especially in these challenging economic times. So we are taking steps to protect those jobs and ensure that caregivers are able to focus on what matters the most: providing support to their loved ones. This bill is our way of saying to the people of this province that we will help protect you as you protect your loved ones or as you cope with an unthinkable tragedy such as a murdered or missing child.

We know Canada's population is aging. That's why, earlier this year, our government announced Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors. A commitment under that plan was to reintroduce this important legislation so that families could take the time they need to care for their loved ones as they age. Today, we are following through on that commitment. Aging at home is important to many seniors who want to be with their families. Family caregiver leave would help more of these elderly Ontarians recover from illnesses or injuries at home by allowing caregivers time off work.

This legislation also supports the new Ontario government's focus on putting patients first and delivering the right care at the right time and in the right place. When a family member is sick, home is where they want to be. Home care is more comfortable, more convenient and can improve recovery from illness or injury. After a hospital stay, home care helps an aging parent or a sick child's quality of life. It also frees up hospital beds and helps shorten wait times in hospitals and emergency rooms.

In the end, Speaker, this legislation is about compassion and helping alleviate the stress faced by caregivers during an already very stressful and emotional time. Our proposed leave would provide these caregivers the comfort of knowing their jobs are secure. This legislation simply says that we believe in families and that family caregivers need and deserve to be cared for, too.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to report on the important steps our government is taking to review Ontario's Condominium Act, 1998. This month, we will begin the second of a three-stage collaborative public engagement process of the Condominium Act review.

The condominium market has changed dramatically since the act came into effect over a decade ago. Today, about 1.3 million Ontarians—a number equal to the population of Manitoba and almost 10% of the population of the province of Ontario—are living in condominiums, and more than half of the new homes built in Ontario are indeed condominiums.

That's why, over the past six months, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of the legislation that governs the rights and responsibilities of condominium owners, developers, corporations and boards of directors and establishes a number of protections for buyers.

In stage 1, working with Canada's Public Policy Forum—recognized leaders in innovative public engagement—we asked Ontario's condominium community to tell us what they thought of the act. We asked them, and we heard from the following: more than 500 people at five public information sessions across Ontario, including one I hosted in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East; a residents' panel—36 condominium owners and residents, randomly selected from across all of Ontario; also, a 25-member stakeholders' round table; and the people and the organizations who sent over 400 emails, including 180 submissions, to the Ministry of Consumer Services.

This process was not limited to existing condominium owners or stakeholders. Every citizen of Ontario was invited to participate, and indeed hundreds of them did just that—hundreds.

Members of the Ontario condominium community, including owners and prospective owners, residents, board members, developers, managers, lawyers, people with an interest in the sector, and others, shared their

issues with us and their ideas for solving the problems. Permit me to summarize a few of them.

People want to see improved qualifications and professional standards for condominium managers. They also seek support for condominium boards of directors, including knowledge of the act and their rights and responsibilities, particularly for first-time directors.

They seek more efficient means of resolving disputes between owners and boards of directors, including the enforcement of rules and their responsibilities as set out in the Condominium Act.

They want sales documents for condo units to be supported by summaries that are clear and explain key information to the buyers.

As well, members of the residents' panel proposed seven core values that should guide the changes to the act that will be coming forward. These are: well-being, fairness, informed community members and stakeholders, responsiveness, strong communities, financial sustainability and, last but not least, effective communications.

There are some issues we can move on—perhaps some quicker than others, where there's consensus. The general level of agreement that exists within the condo community is very encouraging to see, and this review is being driven by the very people who will be affected by the results.

Mr. Speaker, this collaborative public engagement process has given us the kind of grassroots input that is at the very heart of a democratic process, and it continues. This past January, the Public Policy Forum released a report of all the findings from stage 1 of the review, and we are accepting public comment on the report until March 11 of this month. The public can provide comments at any time during the review.

Starting this month, in stage 2, experts in condominium issues will review the report and the public comment it generates. They will expand on the work developed, and options will be put forward for recommendations to update the act. The experts represent a diverse spectrum in the condominium sector. Their options and recommendations report is expected to be available for public comment by the end of this summer.

At that point, we will be ready to begin the third and final stage of our condo act review. In stage 3, we'll convene the residents' panel once again to review the experts' options and recommendations report. Condominium residents and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to review and provide comments in the fall of this year, before it's presented to government and the condominium sector.

In the end, we all want a condominium market that is safe and well informed. We need to get this right so that we have long-term solutions as well as perhaps some short-term wins here. We are confident that the people of this province will continue to work with us to achieve that very end. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Seeing no further, it's now time for responses.

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY WEEK

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to recognize agriculture literacy week. I think it's great that the students in our schools have the opportunity this week to learn more about the contributions of our farmers. We know how hard they work and the challenges they face. We know how much we depend on them for the food we eat and the products we use every day.

I'm especially pleased to hear the new Minister of Agriculture and Food rise and talk about the importance of agriculture literacy, because so far her government's record has been disappointing.

A recent study by Farmers Feed Cities found that only 41% of 18- to 34-year-olds claim to be aware of where their food is grown. Many people were hoping that the local food act would include food literacy, which would in part address this. But instead, we had a bill that had nothing concrete and died on the order paper only days after it was introduced.

Our farmers are struggling with red tape and spiralling hydro costs. A couple of years ago, I had the sad experience of bringing a group of new farmers to this Legislature. They felt forgotten by their government. They were all telling their children to look for other careers.

1540

That's not the future we want for agriculture in Ontario. We want parents to tell their children about the great opportunities in agriculture. We want students to learn about it and consider a career as a farmer, a veterinarian, a crop adviser. We want an agriculture industry—we want to celebrate that agriculture industry, not just this week but throughout the year.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Mr. Randy Hillier: There's a good way to do public policy and a wrong way to do public policy. Fifteen months ago, a previous incarnation of this bill was presented to the House. It was an awful bill, filled with holes, inconsistencies and contradictions, and pulled together at the last minute to have some legislation after the last election. That's not the way to do public policy.

You know, it's amazing what 15 months of thinking, considering and deliberations and hearing criticisms from your opponents' side can do. The bill tabled today by the minister is a much better bill. It seems to have addressed the concerns of the PC caucus. Unlike the prior bill, this one will close up the many inconsistencies with the federal labour code. It will introduce the sensible changes made by the federal Conservative Party to Ontario.

Unfortunately, the family caregiver leave section of the bill still has some holes. There are no parameters defining what's serious and what isn't. Additionally, the act still doesn't have a way of dealing with the federal government on that issue.

Though there are some things in the bill which could be worked through in the committee process, this act is a

great improvement, and I look forward, with the PC caucus, to working with the minister.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Jim McDonell: With great interest, I listened this morning on the condominiums. This is something that I have heard over the last year that I've been here. Stakeholders have been asking for this for many years, and they have some key issues: minimum qualifications for managers, transparency in reserve fund management, training and support for boards of directors, clarifying the act, clarifying declarations and bylaws, and ensuring that buyers are aware of their responsibilities in the community.

Clearly, this is an area of the province that has grown tremendously since 1998. The industry has a chance to mature, but we're seeing that legislation has grievously fallen behind. These stakeholders have been looking for their chance for input, so we're glad to see the input. The study has been started. We've seen stage 1 done. We're anxious to see stage 2 and on to stage 3, and actually, we're anxious to see if this government will actually act this time.

Numerous times before, we have seen action but it's been retracted, or prorogued, and it died on the order table. Let's see the concerns of this important industry actually dealt with this time. It's quickly becoming over 50% of the market of all new homes, so we can see that in the city of Toronto, this is a huge issue and something that needs to be dealt with soon. We look forward to seeing this and hope that it finally comes, legislation that actually deals with many issues of this concerned group.

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE LITERACY WEEK

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my honour today to stand in the Legislature and speak on behalf of my New Democratic colleagues regarding agriculture awareness week. This is a week that's dedicated to showing Canadian students the importance of agriculture in our daily lives in Ontario. In Ontario, the fine folks at OAFE, Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc., play a leading role in this. Finally, everyone has realized how big a role agriculture plays in Ontario: There are 700,000 jobs. A lot of people don't realize that.

But maybe, probably, legislators should also take a few lessons in agriculture awareness week, because as we speak, we pave over 125,000 acres of agricultural land every year, and like a lot of people say, they don't make that stuff anymore.

It's ironic that we're talking about agriculture awareness week as rural schools are closing; those are the places where future vets, future feed advisers, future farmers, future ag ambassadors are created. So it's our sincere hope in the New Democratic Party that people will, in this Legislature and outside, actually take agriculture seriously. We're hoping to work with the new

Minister of Agriculture, because there are a lot of things that we could do, but in a lot of areas, as we pave over land, as small businesses close because the regulations don't equal the risks, we have to take those things into account so our kids can also enjoy agriculture.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to add comments on behalf of our party on the Family Caregiver Leave Act, a bill that was presented in the last session and died with prorogation. New Democrats originally agreed with the intent and the premise of the bill, which is of course to enshrine protection in the Employment Standards Act for those family members who are seeking leave to provide care for those within their family who need it. It's something that I think is a generally accepted point of view, and something that we think should be a given, really. If you take the scenario as to whether a family member, a parent, would need to quit or leave their job if a child was critically ill, it should be a given that any employer would extend that type of a leave to a family member. What this does, of course, is enshrine that into law.

What we're concerned about here and what we'd like to see addressed at committee are some other measures of flexibility within the bill that address the changing need and the demographics, where it might not be that family members need to take a full week off. They may need to, in fact, take two or three days at a time, or a Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, or Friday, to provide just small amounts of care to a demographic that we know will need it.

As we struggle to address the important issues of home care and support for our elderly population in this province, I would hope that the government will take those considerations seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing this work its way through committee and I look forward to adding our party's additions to it.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate the minister on her new portfolio.

It is good that we finally have something to talk about, because for four long years I introduced changes to the Condominium Act, and for four painful, long years, each minister who was in that portfolio said, "The system is working."

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I remember the Attorney General, who was the then minister, said, "The system is working just fine." Other ministers said the system was working just fine. They were all wrong. The system was not working, and we needed changes. We finally have one, and we've begun the review. The Lord can be merciful from time to time.

On the whole, that review is okay, but I got to tell you I've got some problems with what's not there. What's not

there is the following: Tarion, the agency that deals with warranties, is not even mentioned. It is an agency that is controlled by developers. There is not one mention of Tarion and the influence of developers on that agency.

Secondly, there's reference to tribunals but only reference to a tribunal, and in order to get consumer protection we need to have a tribunal where people can go when they have a grievance to get a problem solved. That's a serious oversight, in my view.

The third is that there is no mention of bad development or bad developers. They are absolutely missing in that review. How can we protect consumers when we don't talk at all about bad developers and bad development?

I'm looking forward to making sure that we address those three in particular, as we do the ongoing review.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition from the riding of Durham that reads as follows:

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with;

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

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and the" Kathleen Wynne "government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to present this to Jessica, one of the pages in their last few days here.

1550

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here that's signed by over 600 people from the northwest. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the process popularly known as 'declawing' is actually an amputation of a cat's toes that is both painful and unnecessary;

"Whereas research has shown declawing a cat significantly reduces a cat's quality of life and leads to both behavioural and health problems;

"Whereas declawing removes a cat's natural defences and leaves them helpless in situations where their life may be in danger;

"Whereas most reputable cat shelters have a no-declawing policy, due to the permanent damage it causes; and

"Whereas the process is considered to be inhumane and is banned in many jurisdictions;

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

"To ban the unnecessary and inhumane medical procedure known as declawing in the province of Ontario."

I support this and will be giving it to page Jasmine to deliver.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

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

"Therefore, 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'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Vanessa.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the process popularly known as 'declawing' is actually an amputation of a cat's toes that is both painful and unnecessary;

"Whereas research has shown declawing a cat significantly reduces a cat's quality of life and leads to both behavioural and health problems;

"Whereas declawing removes a cat's natural defences and leaves them helpless in situations where their life may be in danger;

"Whereas most reputable cat shelters have a no-declawing policy, due to the permanent damage it causes; and

"Whereas the process is considered to be inhumane and is banned in many jurisdictions;

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

"To ban the unnecessary and inhumane medical procedure known as declawing in the province of Ontario."

I give this petition to Justin.

WIND TURBINES

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

"Whereas we, the residents of Clearview township and neighbouring townships, oppose the wpd Canada Fairview wind project on Fairgrounds Road and all wind energy projects in Clearview township; and

"Whereas we support the petition of mayors and councillors from 80 municipalities, farm organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, which petition requested that the province place an immediate moratorium on all wind projects until an independent and comprehensive health study has determined that turbine noise is safe to human health, amongst other things; and

"Whereas wpd Canada's Fairview wind project violates the OLS airspace and usability of registered aerodromes in Clearview, including Collingwood Regional Airport and Stayner field, and wpd Canada's draft renewal energy approvals reports do not recognize these impacts or the jurisdiction of the government of Canada; and

"Whereas wpd Canada is seeking final approval from the province for the Fairview wind project prior to completion of the federal Health Canada study and prior to federal actions to protect aviation safety;

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

"That the government of Ontario agree and accept that until the federal health study is completed and federal aeronautical zoning is in place, that it will immediately take whatever action is necessary to give full effect to a moratorium on all wind turbine development in Ontario, including all projects for which final approvals have not been given."

I'm pleased to sign this petition as I agree with it. In fact, I was just on Sun TV taping a program about this topic which will air at 5 o'clock tonight and 10 o'clock tonight.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas without an integrated plan to grow the economy and balance the budget, our province will continue to face historic deficits and fail to create jobs, especially in northeastern Ontario; and

"Whereas consultations this summer revealed that businesses are not expanding and hiring because of uncertainty surrounding the sale of the ONTC freight

division and the handling of the divestiture of the ONTC; and

"Whereas infrastructure like the ONTC freight division is important to northern job creation;

"We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to:

"—replace the government's current ham-fisted fire sale of the ONTC with a strategic asset review of all ONTC assets, operations and services including full consultation with northern municipal and business leaders;

"—ensure Ontario Northland's rail freight division remains publicly owned; ...

"—appoint an ONTC board of directors based on transportation and business expertise, not patronage."

I agree with this petition, sign my name to it and give it to page A.J.

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

"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-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."

I agree with the petition. I will be signing it and passing it off to page Jasmine.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm pleased to present this on behalf of some constituents in the Stirling and Belleville area in eastern Ontario.

"Whereas the 2012 Ontario budget eliminates the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit and the Home Repairs Benefit; and

"Whereas these two programs have been used by thousands of Ontarians across the province as a way of lifting themselves out of poverty and achieving financial independence; and

"Whereas these two programs are in the best tradition of providing Ontarians with a hand up and not a handout when they're in need;

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

“That the government of Ontario find some way to restore the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit and the Home Repairs Benefit that aid the Ontarians who depend on these services without endangering the province’s ability to return the budget to balance.”

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. John O’Toole: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

1600

I’m pleased to sign and endorse this on behalf of my constituents and the people of Ontario, and present it to page Jessica.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sprott Power, also known as Zero Emission People, Energy Farming Ontario Inc., and Wind Works, are proposing to construct 10 wind turbines, known as Settler’s Landing and/or Snowy Ridge Wind Parks within the city of Kawartha Lakes in order to produce up to 20 megawatts of power; and

“Whereas the proposed wind parks are to be located, in whole or in part, on the Oak Ridges moraine; and

“Whereas the location of the proposed wind parks will adversely affect wildlife populations, wildlife migration patterns, human health, and the natural environment; and

“Whereas the proposed wind parks will also reduce property values and the quality of life in the surrounding communities;

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

“The government of Ontario live up to its throne speech commitment, and deny these applications in recognition of this not being a willing community for industrial wind turbines; and

“That the government announce an immediate moratorium on the further development of industrial wind turbines until complete studies have been completed into all direct and indirect health impacts associated with these projects.”

This is one of thousands of petitions that have been brought to me by the people of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I’ll hand it over to page William and affix my signature to it.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

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

“Whereas we oppose the making [of] Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township, Ontario, non-operational on March 31, 2013;

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

“We ask that the park remain operating and facilities such as the animal sanctuary, cabins/shelters, playground equipment and ground maintenance remain open and operating.”

I’m certainly pleased to sign the petition.

WIND TURBINES

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

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

“Whereas poor decisions by” this McGuinty-Wynne “government, such as the Green Energy Act, where Ontario pays up to 80 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity it doesn’t need and then must pay our neighbours to take it for free, and the billion-dollar cost of the seat-saving cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas power plants, have contributed to making the cost of Ontario power the highest in North America; and

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

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organizations ... have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed; and

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

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

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

I agree with this and will be signing it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 27, 2013, on the motion for 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 (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I’m standing today to speak on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Davenport and to speak to this important issue.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Yeah, Davenport. Right here in Toronto.

I’m honoured to rise today to speak as the NDP’s environment critic to the Great Lakes Protection Act. I hope you’ll bear with me. This is the first time I’ve done a lead. I’ll be speaking for an hour, and I know that I’ll have the attention of the House here. The environment minister is here; I really appreciate that. Thank you, Minister. My colleagues will be listening as well—also, shout-outs to the two people at least watching at home, Grandma Grace and my brother, Matthew. Thanks for tuning in.

I’m really glad to see the government reintroduce this bill. They had introduced this bill before, and of course I was disappointed, as many others were, that the Liberal government decided to prorogue this Parliament, send MPPs home and wipe this bill, along with many others, off the legislative agenda. I’m glad to see it’s back here now.

That was almost five months ago, Speaker, when we were not in here, we were not debating the issues that mattered, and when I had to be in my riding explaining to the members at home why we weren’t doing the work that was important to them. So I know that in here time moves very slowly, and things take their time and it takes

a long time for legislation to pass. Back in Davenport, things are happening faster; things feel more urgent.

I think I’m also going to speak to the young people here today and recognize the pages in the House who spend weeks here. I know you’ve got your last week here before you go back to your communities. But I’m curious to know what your experience was over the last two and a half weeks here. Did this place inspire you? Do you leave here thinking we’re going to get progress on environmental protection? Are we going to be able to protect the Great Lakes—I sure hope so—or is it going to be people just carrying on for long periods of time?

In Davenport, in my community just down the street from here, while this place was not moving, people continued to lose their jobs; people continued not to be able to put food on the table for their families; people continued not to have proper access to transit in our city; and the environment continued to warm over those months. So I think it’s really important that we get back here and we work on these issues that are so important. We need to restore the faith in our communities that we can get things done here, and I’m pleased to be working with our leader, Andrea Horwath, and my colleagues in the NDP, to actually make this Legislature work to get results for people here. We know that we can’t change everything right away, but we’ve put some things on the table that make a lot of sense, that are realistic and that will make an impact on people’s lives.

So it’s taken these last few months to get back in here and to address this issue and important issues like the Great Lakes Protection Act.

Great Lakes play a vital role in all of our lives. Millions of Ontarians live next to and depend upon the Great Lakes for drinking water, for recreation, for tourism and for jobs. Over the past 10 years, this Liberal government has not done enough to protect and sustain these ecosystems. Even this bill, as it stands now, has significant weaknesses that should be addressed. The NDP believes we can do better, that the government must do better when it comes to protecting the Great Lakes.

In my time speaking today, Speaker, I want to briefly touch on the importance of the Great Lakes to our province and the strengths of the Great Lakes Protection Act as it does stand already, and then to highlight some of the weakness in the bill and the ways that New Democrats believe it can be improved and strengthened.

Our concerns with the bill are twofold. First, New Democrats are concerned that a number of threats to the Great Lakes are left unaddressed, like threats posed to wetlands and green spaces along the basins and threats from nuclear waste. By addressing these threats, we can better protect the Great Lakes. Second, New Democrats are concerned about the bill’s effectiveness. Will it be limited unless there are concrete actions and requirements set out by the Ministry of the Environment? We need action to protect the Great Lakes now. We need a commitment from this Liberal government now.

The bill outlines tools and mechanisms available to the ministry to protect the Great Lakes, but it’s silent on

when this will happen and how this will happen. As the current legislation stands, there's no actual requirement or timelines for action from the ministry to set targets for the protection of the Great Lakes.

New Democrats are committed to strengthening this bill. We will support it. We will send it to committee. We will make it better. We're committed to passing a Great Lakes Protection Act that recognizes the complex challenges facing the Great Lakes and that has actual commitments to addressing these challenges.

Speaker, the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence system constitute the largest source of fresh water in the world. They support a vast diversity of species: around 4,000, species of plants, fish and wildlife in the Great Lakes area. The Great Lakes provide drinking water for 80% of Ontarians. The Great Lakes basins contain 40% of Canada's economic activity, from manufacturing to fisheries to tourism to recreation to aggregates and mining, all of which rely on clean water. Shipping on the Great Lakes contributes \$200 million every year to our provincial GDP, and the vast majority of our hydro-electric power comes from rivers feeding the Great Lakes. It's fair to say that millions of Ontarians depend upon the Great Lakes for drinking water and for employment, as well as for recreation and tourism.

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Speaker, as somebody who lives in Toronto—and I've worked as a social worker in this city with many folks who are low income—I know that a lot of people in my community can't actually get to a cottage in the summertime, can't get to be in nature. I find it difficult to remember that people are so far removed from a Great Lake that's just down the street from them and that we don't actually have a mechanism to connect people to the natural environment.

Interjection: Unless you're in northern Ontario.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Unless you are in northern Ontario; that's right. I'll come back to visit again soon.

I think we need to talk about an environmental strategy in this province that works for everyone. I think we need to make sure that everyone in this province can make good environmental choices. It can't just be for the 1%. I think to do that, we need to make sure that the 99% start to build a relationship with our natural environment and that government has a role to play in facilitating that relationship.

I know that there are programs that are badly underfunded at this point, programs that will take urban kids and ensure that they have access to the wilderness, have access to canoeing, to swimming. We need to make sure that we facilitate that relationship, going forward.

In our city, in Toronto, we need to make sure that people can access the Toronto ferry and are able to get to the water. But this all comes back to a political will to make sure that there is investment in public services.

I think governments have failed in this province to prioritize the important things, to prioritize food and water, and so I'm really happy to see a bill that puts

water at the forefront. It should put food at the forefront, too, when we think about our fish.

But the Great Lakes, at this point, are plagued by a number of environmental challenges, challenges that endanger the enjoyment and the benefits of Ontarians from visiting and living near the Great Lakes, and there are challenges that require dedicated funding to be effectively addressed.

Some of the challenges faced by the Great Lakes are escalating nutrient levels that result in algae buildup and beach closures. They result from pollution. Our Great Lakes face invasive species like zebra mussels and Asian carp, and of course the impacts of climate change. There is significant destruction of critical habitats, and we continue to take excessive amounts of water. These are some of the challenges facing the Great Lakes.

Speaker, for a number of years, action on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence protection has been delayed. Negotiations on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement have been delayed, and the Canada-Ontario agreement respecting the Great Lakes ecosystem has been extended several times, rather than reviewed and renegotiated to reflect current conditions.

As Ontario's Environmental Commissioner has shown in his annual report, the Liberal government's record in protecting the Great Lakes has been spotty at best. We've seen inadequate funding for cleaning up Great Lakes. We've seen a failure to control sewage overflows. We've seen a lack of monitoring of phosphorus levels in the Great Lakes. We've seen insufficient protection of coastal wetlands from development and pollution. We've seen 70% of our coastal wetlands lost. And we've seen a failure to reduce farm and livestock nitrogen and phosphorus runoff.

There's a lack of consideration of the impact of infrastructure plans on the Great Lakes, and there's a failure to educate the public about the importance of the Great Lakes.

In addition, the government has refused to listen to the 100,000 people who are calling on them to put a stop to shipping radioactive steam generators on our Great Lakes.

The challenges facing the Great Lakes have only increased and we need a renewed political commitment to the Great Lakes now.

How are we doing, pages? Are you still with me? Are you listening?

New Democrats, our party, have been strong advocates for government action to protect the Great Lakes for a long time. In 2011, the NDP committed to implement a Great Lakes Protection Act. That act designated one minister clearly responsible for the protection of our Great Lakes and for ensuring that decisions by all ministries protect the quality and the quantity of the Great Lakes.

But we wouldn't be at the point where we are here today, at second reading of the Liberal government's version of the Great Lakes Protection Act, without the diligent effort of activists and environmental groups. So

I'd like to recognize and thank the many activists who have pressured the government on this issue. This act is the result of their efforts, and the improvements that the NDP will be pushing for are also the result of activists taking the time to speak with us to educate us on how this bill can be strengthened. So thank you, again, to all of you.

New Democrats are happy to see the Ministry of the Environment finally listening, and we are looking forward to working with this government to make this bill stronger.

I'd like to mention some things that we think are good about this bill. For one, I think we can all agree on its stated purpose. Its stated purpose is "to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin" and "to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and the restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin."

It's also good to see that the bill recognizes the rights of First Nations people, who have lived around the Great Lakes for millennia and have fundamental rights to these traditional lands and waters.

The bill also refers, in its preamble, to the Great Lakes Strategy vision of Great Lakes that are drinkable, swimmable and fishable. And this is positive; it's an ambitious goal and one that we should pursue. The pressing question is whether this bill will go far enough to achieve this goal.

The bill creates a Great Lakes Guardians' Council, and the purpose of the council would be to help improve collaboration and coordination and facilitate discussion over priorities and targets. The council may include a wide range of stakeholders, including Great Lakes ministers, municipalities in the basin, First Nations and Métis communities, and representatives from environmental organizations and the scientific community. I appreciate that the council's membership does include other ministries. Securing the involvement of all ministries whose policies have impacts on the Great Lakes is a good idea. But there are no actual requirements for ministers to align their policies and programs with the Great Lakes Strategy.

We only need to look at what happened when the Liberal government introduced and passed their omnibus bill, Bill 55, last spring to see what types of changes other legislation can have on our environment. Bill 55, the budget bill, included changes to nine environmental laws, including the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, and the Public Lands Act, circumventing the requirement for public consultation. We need to be sure that actions taken under the Great Lakes Protection Act are not going to be undermined by other legislation.

Also, the section of the Great Lakes Protection Act dealing with the guardian council is worded in such a way that council membership is entirely up to the discretion of the Ministry of the Environment. There is no core group within the council and no actual requirement

for certain groups to be consulted. Who will determine whether a person or an organization's representative should or should not be on the council? How big is this council? When is the first meeting of this council? How often will this council meet? So it seems to be that it's up to the Minister of the Environment to determine who is consulted and when.

It would make sense to me for the Great Lakes Guardians' Council to have a core group of stakeholders, and that membership and meetings are open and transparent so that all Ontarians can have a say in decisions that matter to them.

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Another element of the act is its encouragement of geographically focused initiatives. These initiatives are supposedly intended to enable local communities to address local issues of concern. They can be developed by the province or another public body, like a municipality or conservation authority, to address a priority issue. Priority issues can include things like excessive algae, the protection of habitats or coordinated efforts to improve beaches.

This all sounds great in theory—local input is absolutely important—but there's a significant amount of vagueness surrounding the geographically focused initiatives. For one, this act doesn't say how long it will take for these initiatives to be developed. What is the expected timeline for an initiative to get approved? How many initiatives will be developed? How will these initiatives be funded? Who will determine how and which of these initiatives will be funded? There need to be legally enforceable policies associated with these initiatives to ensure that real actions take place.

Based on the briefing that I received from the Ministry of the Environment, I also understand that these initiatives require government approval at the proposal stage and at finalization. Here, "government approval" means cabinet approval. I'm worried that, without legally enforceable policies, these geographically focused initiatives sound like a way for the government to say that it is empowering local communities while putting the protection of the Great Lakes on the back burner and failing to show leadership itself and deliver initiatives that work, and that it could be a way for the Liberal government to sidestep the hard work of putting together initiatives in the best interest of our environment and use the approval process to have final say on what can and cannot be done.

There's a difference between local empowerment and downloading. I want to make sure that we are doing the former and not the latter. Again, this approval process concerns me because cabinet has the final say, and as such, it's open to political interference. Unfortunately, Speaker, we have seen all too much political interference when it comes to the public good in the province of Ontario.

While these geographically focused initiatives sound good, this Liberal government needs to show real commitment to grassroots and local empowerment. I would

like to see targets, and I would like to see commitments around the following: How many initiatives does the government intend to set up? By when does the government want to have these in place? What areas or issues will the government prioritize for these initiatives? We want to see accountability so the approval process from start to finish is very clear to all interested parties and Ontarians.

Speaker, by now it should be clear that there are clearly some good elements to this bill, and we should be building on them to strengthen the bill and protect the Great Lakes. I think that by working together, we can make this better. New Democrats' concerns around these elements like the guardians' council and the geographically focused initiatives are based on concerns over accountability and transparency, a lack of targets and a lack of commitments to concrete action.

Again, the Great Lakes Protection Act sounds great. It feels great to say, "Yes, we want to support and protect the Great Lakes." Everyone does. But at the end of the day, we also need action.

We all know that the Great Lakes are under immense distress. So where is the leadership? Speaker, it takes real leadership to look at all the options and say, "This is what we will commit to"; "This is what we will do"; "This is our plan for action"; "These are the real results we'll get for Ontarians." Andrea Horwath has shown this leadership, and maybe the Liberal government can take this time to learn from her and her reasonable proposals.

At this point we are back here in the Legislature trying to make sure this place works a little bit better. We are approaching a budget, and I hope the government has heard clearly about the priorities that we've heard, as New Democrats, from the people in our constituencies. We have laid out a few of these, and we expect the government will listen to these priorities as we move through the budget process.

The first one of these priorities is about social assistance. It's about supporting people who are without full-time paid work, who are dependent on social assistance, but up until now, their income has been clawed back and taken away. Not only is it an disincentive from finding and keeping work; it's also putting people further in poverty, and it often prevents them from paying the bills.

One of the things we have put on the table—and I think it's long overdue; it's very reasonable—is to make sure that there are no clawbacks on income for the first \$200 that somebody on social assistance in Ontario gets, going forward. We've heard support from the Conservatives on this. I'd like to see support from the government on this. It's a very small piece of the social assistance reform package that the Lankin commission put out, but it is an important piece, and it would put up to \$200 more into the pockets of low-income people. I hope the government is listening to this and that they know how serious and committed we are to making sure that this province is fairer and that they've put this initiative forward in the budget process.

Another very key piece for me is around how we share our resources. We've put forward an idea that will actual-

ly bring in resources, bring in revenue, and make sure that we can pay for the things that we care about, like protecting the Great Lakes.

I hope that the government hears our seriousness when we talk about closing corporate tax loopholes. We know that we would save over \$1 billion in the next several years if we closed some of the gigantic loopholes that this government has created. Those billions of dollars can go to our public services, to our health care, to creating jobs and to protecting our environment.

Speaker, I think I might have strayed off there for a second, so I'd like to come back here and say the Great Lakes Protection Act states the Minister of the Environment "may" set both qualitative and quantitative targets. This allows the minister to set measurable targets, and that's good. But the Great Lakes Protection Act should require the minister to set targets, both qualitative and quantitative, and it should require a timeline for when these targets should be announced and completed.

When I was at the ministerial briefing on this, the Ministry of the Environment representative spoke about how these targets take time to produce. They rely on a science-based approach, and they require a lot of research. No one is disputing that we need a science-based approach, and science-based targets are what the NDP wants to see as well. We want to see a solid step towards a government commitment within this act, a commitment with targets and priorities as identified in the Great Lakes Strategy.

In the strategy, the government identified six priority areas: engaging and empowering communities; protecting water for humans and ecological health; improving wetlands, beaches and coastal areas; protecting habitats and species; enhancing understanding and adaptation; and ensuring sustainable economic opportunities. The strategy then identifies key actions that could be achieved in each of these priority areas.

What we're looking for from this government is leadership to identify targets and timelines based on these priority areas and actions which have already been identified. We aren't asking this government to reinvent the wheel; we just need to build on what has been done. We're asking for a commitment. We're asking for legislation with some teeth.

In addition to these priority area targets, the government can also easily set targets for geographically focused initiatives and set timelines for when the guardians' council should meet. Targets and timelines are important. Setting targets will direct and encourage action. Targets are also yardsticks, and we can measure our progress against them.

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When the Great Lakes Protection Act was first introduced, I received over 1,000 emails from Ontarians across this province. The message to me was clear—

Mr. John Vanthof: A thousand?

Mr. Jonah Schein: A thousand. They wanted concrete action, John.

Mr. John Vanthof: Your people are engaged.

Mr. Jonah Schein: That's right. They wanted timelines and they wanted targets for protection of the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance, made up of the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Eco-justice, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defence, Great Lakes United and the Sierra Club, stated that, "Targets must be set and progress towards achieving them must be reported on. Without targets it may be difficult to do what is necessary to save the Great Lakes."

Not only are qualitative and quantitative targets needed for protection of the Great Lakes, but commitments should also be made to report periodically and to provide interim progress on these targets as well.

The minister's statement on the bill indicated that the minister has heard environmental groups' and Ontarians' concerns about the importance of targets. But to date, the government has not made this a requirement of the bill. If we are going to be serious about addressing the challenges faced in the Great Lakes, we need that commitment from the Liberal government. We need to see this government put timelines and targets in this bill and to show some real leadership on the Great Lakes.

The Environmental Commissioner should be able to report on protection efforts in his reports. It's only targets and timelines that will allow the commissioner to hold this government to account. We need regulations associated with the act, and we need these to be posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights. The purposes of the act should be incorporated into ministerial statements of environmental values to guide provincial decision-making.

The time for action on behalf of the Great Lakes is now. New Democrats have added their voices to the voices of the environmental groups across the province and everyday Ontarians who want to see timelines and targets, and they want to see accountability in this bill. We will continue to push for these to be included.

Let's talk about the other areas of the Great Lakes Protection Act that need clarification and strengthening. We need to ensure that the act addresses the entire Great Lakes basin, including the areas that feed the Great Lakes. When we were consulting with folks about the Great Lakes, some groups expressed uncertainty about whether the bill applies to the entire basin, and whether geographically focused initiatives can only be carried out in areas where there are municipalities or conservation authorities.

It's important that all wetlands—that forests and green spaces in the entire Great Lakes basin—should be addressed by the act. Wetlands help filter and recharge fresh water, and they influence the quality of drinking water. Wetlands prevent flooding, droughts and erosion. They provide important habitats and help mitigate climate change impacts by storing greenhouse gases. Our wetlands have 600 species living in them. Speaker, the value of environmental services provided by the wetlands' ecosystems in Canada—for example, providing drinking water and habitat for fish and wildlife—is estimated at \$20 billion annually.

I think this calls attention to the important difference in the way we can do our accounting. There's the money that we do spend to try to protect our fisheries, to try to protect our water, and then there are the natural benefits of having an environment. I think too often the numbers that get thrown around in this building don't take into account the benefits of the natural environment and the economic benefits of the natural environment, but also just the plain old benefits of being able to go for a swim or having glass of water that you can drink.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Or fishing.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Or fishing. Food, right? Food and water.

The truth is that wetlands in Ontario are threatened by development and are threatened by invasive species and they're threatened by pollution. Speaker, 80% of fish need wetlands, but 70% of coastal wetlands have been lost due to development and pollution. I've seen this first-hand. I've recently been to Second Marsh in Oshawa; I've had the chance to see the marsh there. I've walked out on the observation area. I've seen the incredible diversity of the land there and the species there, and even though I visited on a cold November morning, there were people walking about, using these trails, experiencing nature as part of their daily lives. Not only is it amazing, but Oshawa as a municipality has done a lot over the past two decades to restore the marsh and the surrounding areas, and to restore its waterfront to a healthy environment that can be enjoyed.

Currently, this project is threatened by the port authority's plan to set up an ethanol plant, even though the ethanol plant is opposed by citizens and hundreds of people; it's opposed by the municipality. Its provincial and federal representatives, however, have been silent on this issue. I've written to the ministry about this issue, but so far the ministry has not responded and hasn't shown any leadership on this issue. That's a shame.

These wetlands are crucial, and they are a threatened part of our ecosystem. Waterfronts on the Great Lakes should be protected. The Great Lakes are for everyone. They're not just for the profit of a few, and we need to make sure that we have government that protects everyone. I'm hopeful that strengthening the Great Lakes Protection Act can result in new tools, and mandates available public bodies to properly defend these precious parts of our environment. The New Democrats will work to see that the entirety of the Great Lakes basin—the lands, the green spaces and the wetlands surrounding the lakes and the rivers that feed them—is properly protected.

Conservation groups have also expressed a concern as to whether this bill will actually strengthen controls on pollution and discharges into the Great Lakes. Surprisingly, the bill currently fails to state as an explicit purpose the reduction and elimination of toxic substances into the Great Lakes. Tough new restrictions are needed on chemical, toxic and sewage pollution, with serious enforcement standards and mechanisms, as well as strict new regulations on industrial food production to curb

chemical runoff, including the input streams feeding the lakes.

There has to be a change. The polluter must pay. Ontarians shouldn't have to pay for the cleanup of big companies' pollution with their health or with their tax dollars because the Liberal government won't properly enforce regulations on corporations.

There is also a concern about whether the bill will adequately deal with the upgrading of sewage- and stormwater-management systems. There is clearly a need to invest in our aging sewage infrastructure, something that many cash-strapped municipalities are simply not able to afford. It's nice to put this bill out there, to say these nice things, but without actual resources in place to make sure that communities can make good environmental choices, we're simply not going to see the change that we need to see.

We need to pay more attention, I think, to cost-effective, environmentally friendly approaches such as water efficiency programs and soft-path green infrastructure approaches to reduce sewage flow. These are things like green roofs, porous asphalt, stormwater detention ponds and constructed wetlands. Even in the city of Toronto here, right over at the University of Toronto, in preparation for the Pan American Games, the government has made a deal with the university to put AstroTurf on the soccer pitch over there. This is exactly the wrong direction to take. There is no opportunity to reduce the groundwater that's going to go right into our Great Lakes. We can see that if you just step out the door here at Queen's Park.

These are all initiatives to keep stormwater out of sewers and to use natural systems to remove pollutants, which leads to a higher quality of stormwater ultimately being released and less damage to our environment.

There are other imminent threats that can also be addressed by the Great Lakes Protection Act. The act can easily lead to a change in Ontario government policy to continue to allow Ontario's nuclear power stations to use outdated once-through cooling systems. These systems—the current systems that we have in place—allow plants to suck in and spew out hundreds of millions of litres of water a day, killing hundreds of millions of fish each year. This is something that could be easily remedied. It could be remedied by requiring a closed-cycle cooling water technology for industrial facilities operating on the Great Lakes. These are systems that are used cost-effectively in the United States.

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It's also not clear whether the bill will change the government's policy to allow Bruce Power to ship radioactive steam generators from its nuclear stations across the Great Lakes, which is a plan that's been opposed by First Nations leaders and hundreds of thousands of Ontarians.

Finally, Speaker, it's unclear whether the bill will ensure that the provincial government requires a full environmental assessment before allowing the shipment of tar sands bitumen across the Great Lakes. This is a

plan that puts the Great Lakes at risk of a spill, like the one that happened in Michigan in 2010, which cost over \$1 billion to clean up. Speaker, we can't afford these potential costs to our environment or to our provincial budget.

I know that my colleague the NDP energy critic has written to the Ministry of the Environment about these very issues to make sure that we have an environmental assessment before this project goes forward.

Speaker, these are all real threats to the Great Lakes and the millions of Ontarians who depend on these lakes. They are real reminders of the dangers and the environmental costs of relying on nuclear power too, and further investing in nuclear power.

As New Democrats, we believe we should be focusing on energy conservation first and foremost, that we should move towards renewable energy, and yet we have a Liberal government and an official opposition who continue to move forward with expensive and environmentally costly nuclear power. New Democrats have been long advocating that government prioritize conservation over these expensive plans to expand our reliance on nuclear power.

Speaker, what about the issues of beach water quality? Let's not forget that we are working for Great Lakes that are drinkable and swimmable and fishable. There is a need for improved monitoring of beach water quality and restoration and improvement of beaches with chronic water quality problems. Right now there are beaches in Ontario that are not tested for water quality, there are different frequencies for testing, and it's not easy for the public to access these tests. Speaker, if you go down to swim in Lake Ontario after a rainy day, it's probably polluted because of all the runoff, but the testing cycle doesn't actually allow you to get those results in time. By the time those results do come in, it might be safe to swim again. We need to change this.

Lake Ontario Waterkeeper has called for action to expand the number of beaches that are tested, to move to real-time posting of testing results to improve public access to water quality levels. They've also called for a beach remediation fund to help deal with problem beaches, and they're calling for a clear public target, such as ensuring that the Great Lakes beaches meet the Ontario provincial water quality objective by a given year, let's say 2020. Again, Speaker, targets are feasible and they are necessary for the Great Lakes Protection Act to actually fulfill its vision.

Ontario also needs a comprehensive coastal protection strategy. This strategy should include a range of measures such as watershed planning in prioritized areas, and education and incentives for private landowners to engage in coastal protection and land protection in priority areas. There should be a strengthening of the provincial policy statement to ensure protection for coastal wetlands and stronger regulation of phosphorus and other emissions. There should be improved stormwater techniques, and the promotion of shoreline conservation through the official plans.

Speaker, there is also a need to expand source water protection in northern Ontario, as recommended in the Walkerton inquiry. We need to see real plans for action from this government. In fact, the Great Lakes Strategy includes performance indicators for priority areas that could be built upon and made into concrete targets and timelines.

At the moment, the Great Lakes Protection Act does not actually require the minister to see the Great Lakes Strategy through. The act does not require the Ministry of the Environment to actually implement the strategy. It requires the minister to review and maintain the strategy, but that is quite different. Again, there's no requirement for action; there's no commitment. I'd like to see greater leadership from across this floor.

So why is there a lack of targets and timelines? I think it's related to my next point. There are minimal commitments to funding any part of the Great Lakes Protection Act or Strategy. In fact, the only funding I've seen is that committed to the guardian council, and that is a shame, Speaker. Already, we see ministries that are unable to do their job. There is simply no way they can protect our lakes. There's no way they can protect from invasive species without proper funding, and the costs and the damage that will happen to our Great Lakes if we allow these invasive species to get in are unimaginable. And yet this government won't actually put any resource, won't dedicate any funding to its protection, and this is a shame.

According to the Environmental Commissioner—again, for those of you watching at home, the Environmental Commissioner is a really important piece of how this Legislature works. It's an independent voice that provides regular updates about how we're doing as a province on environmental protection. The Environmental Commissioner has reported that “chronic underfunding has been a key weakness of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem.” It's only a fraction of the cost of cleaning up areas of concern or upgrading sewage treatment facilities, and none of this has been allocated.

The reality is that this government needs to commit adequate funding to develop and support Great Lakes protections and initiatives. This Liberal government has let the Great Lakes be exploited for private profit and has ignored many of its existing commitments to protect the Great Lakes. And now, the government wants to introduce a bill with almost no funding commitments, maybe because it's wary of the costs of cleaning up their previous errors.

It reminds me about how this government insists on cutting taxes for big corporations. It racks up billions in debt and it tells the rest of Ontario that it's time for austerity. It cuts back services and tries to impose wage freezes. If we had not moved ahead with this agenda of tax cuts, we'd have the budget balanced right now and we could be investing in environmental protection.

Interjection: It's true.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's true, Speaker. We've lost about \$15 billion a year since the time that former Pre-

mier Harris, Premier McGuinty and now our new Premier have been here. It's about \$15 billion annually that has been lost to corporate tax cuts.

This isn't fair. It's not in the interest of Ontarians. Again, this government needs to commit adequate funding to develop and support Great Lakes protection programs and initiatives.

The government failed to allocate any funding to the Great Lakes in the act or the 2012 budget bill, Bill 55. The Liberal government must follow through on its campaign promise, a promise that did contribute to their election to a minority government. During that campaign, the Liberal government promised \$52 million to protect the Great Lakes and committed to allocating any additional funding needed to adequately implement regulations, initiatives and targets stemming from the act and the strategy. Speaker, you make a promise; you get elected on that promise. I believe you should keep that promise.

This government doesn't commit to the money. I'm worried that this act will become like other acts and agreements signed before it. It's a nice idea, but it's an idea that eventually gets forgotten or is implemented at the discretion of the government, and who knows when that might happen or how long this party might be the government? Far too much work has gone into this act and this strategy to have it fall by the wayside.

There needs to be a shift in how the Great Lakes are viewed, I believe. The Great Lakes are a shared public good. We need to stop seeing this invaluable part of our province as primarily a resource for private profit. Groups like the Council of Canadians have made clear that the root cause of degradation of the Great Lakes is the traditional view of the lakes solely as a source for private profit or for personal benefit. But we need to shift our thinking to see it as a shared public resource, a commons to be shared and protected and managed by those living around the lakes.

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Communities must have the right to say no to projects that destroy, divert or withdraw vast amounts of water from the Great Lakes. This vision is already reflected in community efforts across Ontario to pass resolutions to ban the sale of bottled water in municipally owned facilities and at municipal events, and to reject the public-private partnership for water and sanitation services.

Speaker, I know that if the official opposition were listening, they would be very angry, because they want private citizens always to have the right to buy plastic and put their water in it and to drink that, at any cost to the environment. But they're not listening, and that's okay.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I was listening.

Mr. Jonah Schein: All right.

Mr. Randy Hillier: But I still don't agree with you.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Speaker, New Democrats also proposed legislation to ban bottled-water sales in provincial government facilities, and we join Ontario's Environment Commissioner in calling for a significant

increase to fees for water withdrawals. It's embarrassing that large companies in Ontario currently pay less than \$4 for withdrawing a million litres of water. It's good business if you can get it. This isn't sustainable, and it's not in our province's best interest.

In 2010, 122 countries voted to pass a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly recognizing the human right to water and to sanitation. The Ontario NDP has promoted this vision by urging the Liberal government to reference the right to water in the Water Opportunities Act, passed in 2010.

As we know, the Great Lakes are not just about water. They're about fish and they're about food. Just yesterday, the United Nations put out a report on our failings as a country to ensure the right to food.

Speaker, I was in my own community yesterday to hear the United Nations report. They did it on the Internet. It was pumped in onscreen, and it was actually to a room of about 150 people who use a local meal program. Those people didn't know that there's actually no enforcement of any right to food in Canada. These are people and families who, every week, struggle to just make sure that there is food in their households. I think it's time we put food and water first in this province, and so far, this government has refused.

The Liberal government now has the opportunity to recognize the human right to water and sanitation in the Great Lakes Protection Act. This recognition would require the government to uphold its obligations to respect, protect and fulfill this right.

"The obligation to respect" means that the Ontario government must refrain from any action or policy that interferes with the enjoyment of this right, including denying essential water services because of an inability to pay.

Under the obligation to protect, the government is obliged to prevent third parties from interfering with the enjoyment of this right—for example, by protecting local communities from pollution caused by hydraulic fracking, and from inequitable extraction of water by corporations or governments.

Under the obligation to fulfill, the Ontario government is required to adopt any additional measures directed towards the realization of this right, such as investing in public water and waste water services.

As the NDP critic for the environment, I have to say that access to water, and the right to water, is one of the central issues in our province. People are concerned about their water. They want to protect it. They feel that corporations have an extreme advantage, that corporations often get the go-ahead to build quarries and landfills below the water table and to develop these close to rivers, all to the endangerment of people's drinking water.

We saw this recently play out in Melancthon. We saw international companies go ahead and try to create a mega quarry in Melancthon, to take agricultural land that had been in production for hundreds of years, and to take rock out of the ground instead of food. In that process, they would have displaced over 600 million litres of water per day.

Speaker, I would say that this is one of the few good-news stories in the last year in this province. While legislators were locked out of this building, residents in Melancthon and activists across this province were organized. They came together and beat the company there and ensured that they withdrew their application to have a mega quarry.

I do have concerns that that mega quarry company is just waiting for a Conservative government in Ontario to give them the go-ahead to reverse this decision. This is something we need to worry about. I'd like to hear a commitment from the Conservative government to protect agricultural lands in Ontario, to prevent that from becoming a mega quarry.

That kind of imbalance, when it comes to corporations versus the community, is the kind of imbalance that we've seen too often in this province, and we've seen the impacts on our access to food and water in Ontario.

Speaker, I saw this inequity when I was in Brantford recently. Brantford decided to rezone areas along the Grand River in order to protect the natural heritage features and attributes of the land. Actually, in Brantford, there's documentation of human settlement from over 1,100 years ago. It has been identified as a source protection area and an intake protection zone. However, developers have proposed to set up residential units in this area, which would not only disrupt the groundwater flow but also risk contamination entering the local water source. In response to the city's decision to rezone the area, these developers have taken the city of Brantford to the Ontario Municipal Board, and now they're having their rights trampled. We know that the OMB is unaccountable and it doesn't side with the environmental concerns of citizens.

So it begs the question: What about the autonomy of local communities to protect their food and water?

That is why the government should recognize the rights of Ontarians to water. The government should also consider a process for citizens and communities living on the basin to sue corporations and governments that are knowingly polluting their local water sources, for violation of their human right to clean water, and a declaration that water and waste water services are public services to be equitably and affordably provided by government.

Viewing the Great Lakes as a commons to be shared amongst the people and access to water as a right should guide the Great Lakes Protection Act in the right direction.

Speaker, I look forward to this government's consideration of our party's proposals.

New Democrats have concerns that this bill sets up a mechanism to develop initiatives but it doesn't actually create initiatives itself. It enables change, but it doesn't lead the way on change. New Democrats are concerned that this bill sets up a mechanism for a discussion of priorities and collaboration but it doesn't actually set targets or timelines or require ministerial collaboration or action.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's right; it looks like it's doing something, as opposed to doing something.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It looks like it's doing something.

Speaker, the bill is welcome and we're happy to see the government introduce it, but the fact is, we've heard a lot of conversation, but we need to see action when it comes to Great Lakes protection. It's important that we create a legislative framework that enables action to protect the Great Lakes.

The threats to the Great Lakes are immediate; they are pressing. I would argue that they're more pressing, more important than the partisan or political interests of any one party here in this Legislature.

In his 2010-11 annual report, the Environmental Commissioner outlined a range of actions that Ontario needed to take then—and to take now. He said to:

- adopt integrated watershed planning, as developed for Lake Simcoe, to all Great Lakes;

- ensure that all municipalities have plans in place to deal with sewage overflows;

- reinstate the practice of reporting data on phosphorus and other pollutant levels for municipal waste water plants;

- include policies within local source protection plans so that they can require amendments to official plans and zoning bylaws in order to protect the Great Lakes as a source of drinking water;

- build on the successful cosmetic pesticides act, to reduce harmful effluents into the Great Lakes from industry and agriculture;

- update the 1992 Environmental Farm Plan to reduce agricultural runoff of phosphorus and nitrogen and other effluents; and

- strengthen the 2002 Nutrient Management Act to ensure better control of manure runoff from livestock operations.

1700

Speaker, the Environmental Commissioner was clear that these things simply have not happened. But the good news is that ideas for immediate action are already out there. The Environmental Commissioner has put some of these forward, and New Democrats have put our ideas forward, and environmental stakeholders have spent 10 years proposing targets and timelines for this Liberal government, and the Liberal government has itself included actions within the strategy.

Now what we need to see are commitments within the act. There are concrete actions that the government can commit to now to get work on the Great Lakes started, and New Democrats would like to see these commitments reflected in a strengthened Great Lakes Protection Act. The NDP will be pushing to see clear targets and timelines included in the act, greater clarity on the guardians' council, and geographically focused initiatives. And we'd like to see that threats like pollution, like nuclear waste and like the erosion of wetlands and green space within the basin are not overlooked but that these are properly addressed in the act.

Speaker, we look forward to the government making good on its election promise from 2011 and providing the financial commitments to seeing the Great Lakes protected, and we look forward to working with this government to make this act as strong as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments? Questions?

Mr. Phil McNeely: It's a pleasure for me to rise today to respond to the member for Davenport, who speaks with, you can tell, a lot of emotion towards the environment and a lot of concern towards the environment. That's great to see, and I only expect that from that member.

One of the issues that I was interested in as the new PA for the environment, looking at the documentation, is that climate change is a real concern for the Great Lakes. In many ways, climate change connects to the water levels of the Great Lakes, which we've heard from many up in, especially, Georgian Bay.

I sat with somebody the other day in Ottawa and they were talking about the great water changes, that their docks are no longer reaching the shoreline—and that climate change is very easy to see why. There's less ice cover and there's more absorption of energy by the water. As the water gets warmer, there's more evaporation, and that's something that's going to continue. You'll have less ice cover every winter. The same thoughts go into what's happening in the Arctic. We're just seeing it within our waters here.

Wetlands is something that I was involved in for many years, so I'm glad to see that that was one of your comments. Some of the projects that will come out of the Great Lakes Guardians' Council will be wetlands, and increasing wetlands, which are so important to take all those toxic chemicals out of the water before they enter the Great Lakes.

I could stand up here and speak for probably several minutes on what you said. I'm glad about the issues that you've brought up. They're the important issues.

We look forward to getting this through the committee stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to just refer to the member from Davenport's comments about doing things in an evidence-based fashion and whatnot, along with many other things in that 60-minute speech.

I've got a study here from Environment Canada that looks at 14 very significant categories and criteria in the Great Lakes from 1987 up until 2012. These 14 categories cover everything from eutrophication to loss of fish and wildlife, closure of beaches—a number of different things. It's interesting, when you look through that evidence, whether we take Thunder Bay—in 1987 in Thunder Bay, there were 10 of those 14 criteria we were concerned about. They were below levels; that's now down to five. There's been a significant improvement in Thunder Bay. When you look at Severn harbour, in 1987 there were six areas of concern; it is now zero. It is

excellent. You keep going through—same with Wheatley Harbour on Lake Erie, and even the St. Lawrence River, the outlet: 11 areas of concern in 1987, down to 3 in 2012.

It's interesting. We should actually talk about how good our environment has been doing. We have been making tremendous strides in our environment. I know we hear a lot of doom and gloom and that we must be protected by the Minister of the Environment's new guardian council—his guardian angels over there—even though we have no idea what they're actually going to do other than cost us money, but I'm going to bring this over to the Minister of the Environment so that he can have some evidence, and to the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions? The member for—

Mr. John Vanthof: Timiskaming—Cochrane.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Timiskaming—Cochrane. Sorry.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour for me to once again be able to rise in this House and comment on the comments of my colleague the member from Davenport, across the way from Ottawa—Orléans and the last speaker from Lennox—Frontenac—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark.

Mr. John Vanthof: —Lanark and Addington. I wrote it down wrong; I'm sorry.

We've been given an incredible resource in this province and this country with the Great Lakes—the Great Lakes basin, in our province—and a lot of times we might not appreciate it, because a lot of us are far away from it. My constituents in Timiskaming would be surprised to learn that they are covered by this—a lot of them would be—because they are, because a big part of my riding is in the Great Lakes basin.

I think we all have to work hard to protect the resources that we've been given and make sure that those resources are still there for oncoming generations, but it takes more to protect resources than just creating more enabling legislation. Once again, it's a good thing that we're here discussing enabling legislation, but there are concerns out in the country that in a case like MNR, they don't have the resources right now to enforce the legislation that's out there. Once again, we should have the best legislation that we have, and if this legislation is going to make issues like that better—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You can take the ones from my area.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, but there are cases where we have things going wrong just because we can't enforce the legislation we have now. Sometimes to solve those problems, we make the legislation stronger, but we don't actually look if the legislation we have now is working. While we look at new legislation, we should also work together to make sure that the legislation we have now is working to its full capacity. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to commend the member, first of all, on having a very constructive and positive approach to this piece of legislation. I know there's a temptation in legislative bodies across the country—and, indeed, internationally—for people who sit in the so-called opposition benches to automatically oppose anything that a government brings forward. I thought the member analyzed the bill extremely well, identified where he thought there were strengths in the bill and indicated where he would like to see changes made. That's precisely the approach that we should have in this regard.

I wish I could have heard the same the other day from my good friend, the critic for the Conservative Party. As I mentioned on that occasion, the hardest job in this world, or at least in this Legislature, has to be environment critic for the Conservative Party, because you're not allowed to defend the environment. He's a great guy—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, please; he's a great guy. I think he, in his heart of hearts, probably has a lot of affinity for this bill, but the people in the Conservative caucus bureau write these speeches that members are forced to read. I know that my friend Mr. Hillier does not read those speeches the way he is told to.

I want to indicate—the member may not have been aware of the fact that the government has dedicated, very recently, \$46 million to the cleanup of Hamilton harbour—a tremendous amount of money—matched by the federal government and by the people locally, so that will make a huge difference, and we have committed some 52 million additional dollars. He would know as well that the government has allocated and already invested three quarters of a billion dollars on the upgrade of water treatment, particularly waste water treatment plants, along the Great Lakes. So I'm looking forward to his continued advice and suggestions as we proceed through the readings of this bill.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Davenport has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Speaker, it's pretty much every day that I pinch myself with the reality that I was elected to be a member of provincial Parliament and to come into this building.

A lot of things don't work in this province, a lot of things don't work in this Legislature, but you know, a lot of the debate that happens here seems very insignificant and yet the legislation that comes out of here is incredibly important.

I want to appreciate all the members in this room, but specifically the Minister of the Environment and the member from Ottawa—Orléans—I know that your heart is in this, and it gives me more hope knowing that your heart is in this. But it's going to take more than hope. Climate change denial simply is not going to protect us. We do need science. The progress that we've made in this province has been through collective action. It's been when we've had government take a strong lead on this.

I appreciate that some new resources have gone in, and yet I'm concerned that the priorities of the province, the political priorities in this building, have been too far on the side of private interests and not as much on the side of the public good. Speaker, we do need to make sure that this is a properly resourced initiative, and that we make food and water a priority in this province.

I appreciate being in a caucus with members from all over Ontario. It also gives me a great sense of confidence to hear from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who grew up in northern Ontario, who lives in northern Ontario, who lives close to a lake and has a real relationship to the natural environment.

I think that we'll have to make legislation that works at all levels, that actually sets out a good framework, but that actually really works for communities in Ontario. That is the way; that is the key to success.

Speaker, thank you very much, and we'll continue debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to rise to speak about the reintroduction of the Great Lakes Protection Act.

If I may, Speaker, I'm going to recap a bit about that first, and then I'd like to talk about what this means in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, because waterways, including Lake Ontario and the Rouge River, which runs through my riding and feeds into Lake Ontario, as well as Highland Creek, are boundaries of my riding, actually. I don't think it's too common that we have many ridings that are surrounded by water, and that those water boundaries are indeed the riding boundaries. I will talk a little bit about Frenchman's Bay as well, which is a very important watershed in our Great Lakes system, and how this is very near and dear to the residents in my riding, because this is what I devoted my maiden resolution speech to. There have been great developments on that since I did that speech back in November 2011.

Just first, I guess, to recap on what we're doing here with the Great Lakes Protection Act: On February 25 of this month, the act was reintroduced for first reading. The proposed legislation is indeed enabling and includes flexible tools to work with local organizations, build on existing programs and other groups for targeted action. The proposed act was an election commitment of the Liberal government in 2011. It was part of the recent throne speech and Premier Wynne's commitment to Ontarians. It was first introduced in June 2012, and it was affected by prorogation. So here we are now, reintroducing it.

However, things happened during prorogation; things continued to move.

Going back to the summer, the public was invited to comment on the proposed act through the Environmental Bill of Rights, and the meetings with stakeholders were held. I know others were busy working on preparing to reintroduce this, during prorogation and since it ended.

Why do we need the Great Lakes Protection Act, Speaker? I think we all know that the Great Lakes are vitally important to the people of Ontario for drinking water, quality of life and prosperity. We need to restore them now, to continue to enjoy their benefits for this and future generations. As you know, Speaker, so much of the work we do in this Legislature is not about today; it is about the future. This piece of legislation is no exception to that.

New challenges are overwhelming old solutions when it comes to our Great Lakes in Ontario. That's why we need new initiatives to help the Great Lakes. The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is designed to give the province new tools to restore and protect our Great Lakes so they're drinkable, swimmable and fishable.

The Great Lakes provide more than 80% of our drinking water and are important to the people of Ontario for economic prosperity. Over 95% of Ontario's agricultural land is in the Great Lakes basin. Scientists tell us that three of our four Great Lakes are in decline, and they are Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron.

While developing this legislation, we've listened to the people of Ontario, and they were clear about the importance of this legislation to protect the Great Lakes. We will consider amendments during the legislative period to reflect the feedback we received following the introduction of the bill last year. We'll continue to listen to First Nations and Métis communities, Great Lakes experts, municipal leaders, interested stakeholders and the people of Ontario as the legislation proceeds through the House.

I guess the big question is, what exactly would this piece of legislation do? If passed, it would help restore and protect the Great Lakes, as I mentioned before, so they are drinkable, fishable and swimmable.

The purpose of the proposed act is twofold: (1) to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin; and (2) to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and the restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin.

The proposed act would create a Great Lakes Guardians' Council, which would provide a collaborative forum among Great Lakes ministers and others, including aboriginal, business, agricultural, environmental and municipal reps, to talk about priorities, potential financial measures and partnerships for projects, and sharing information.

The act would require the minister to maintain the Ontario Great Lakes Strategy, the first Ontario roadmap ever, which lays out provincial priorities for Great Lakes protection.

It would also enable the minister to set Great Lakes science-based targets, and, finally, following consultations with local groups, enable the establishment of a geologically focused initiative to take focused action in priority coastal, watershed and other ecologically significant areas.

What gaps does this proposed act fill? We're very fortunate in Ontario to have leading legislation that covers specific areas such as drinking water testing, for example. However, we don't have a comprehensive suite of tools to address the combined stresses on the Great Lakes at a regional level. In the sessions that have been conducted by the ministry, we heard the need for more comprehensive approaches. The act will allow for local groups, the province and others to work towards comprehensive solutions for a specific area.

We also heard the need to bring players together for coordinated and focused action, and so the act creates the Great Lakes Guardians' Council. We also heard the need for clear, science-based targets, so the act will allow for the developments of these targets.

When I think about the Great Lakes, as I said at the beginning of my comments here this afternoon, I immediately think of my maiden resolution in this Legislature in December 2011. My resolution asked the government to consider joining two other levels of government—the federal government and the municipal government in the region of Durham—to support the rehabilitation of the Frenchman's Bay harbourfront entrance with a \$3-million infrastructure investment. It was proposed at that time to be supported by the same amounts by the other two levels of government.

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This is a very important watershed in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, and I was absolutely thrilled that that resolution received unanimous consent from all three parties in our Legislature. I think that happened for a couple of reasons. I think it's because we all agreed that sometimes it just makes sense to support particular projects, no matter what party stripe you come from, no matter what side of the House you sit on.

In this case, safety was a compelling reason to support the restoration of the harbourfront entrance in Frenchman's Bay. Safety was a huge issue—is a huge issue—because, on a navigational map, Frenchman's Bay harbour is identified as one of the most dangerous harbours in all of Ontario. Of course, many economic and tourism benefits are going to come from that harbour entrance being restored: There will be more boats; there will be more tourism; there will be more spending. There will be a boost to the local economy, and it will restore the harbour entrance to a level where we will have—I think it's 1,500 boats we used to have at that harbour entrance, as opposed to the mere few hundred that are currently there.

Most importantly, and last but not least, the most, I think, compelling point was that there were, and there are, many ecological benefits to improving that harbourfront entrance. When I was doing my research for that project and developing that resolution to present here in the Legislature—I've actually used this approach in subsequent initiatives on behalf of my constituents in Pickering–Scarborough East: first and foremost, listening to people, listening to what people see are the issues and the opportunities, and talking to all the stakeholders.

I also learned from that exercise that it is important to consult the experts. I recall conferring with the head of geography and ecology at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, who actually joined me in my constit office and undertook to give me some expert advice on whether this project should proceed. As we know, when we look at changing things, there are different views, and not everyone may be on board. Indeed, not absolutely everybody in my riding is totally supportive of the harbourfront entrance expansion, but I feel it's my job to get that expert advice and listen to people. I think this approach, quite frankly, has served me well; it has served other members of this House very well—

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It is, and I think at the end of the day that's one of the reasons it was, I think, fairly easy for all sides of this House to support that project. The benefits were there; the risks were low, if not non-existent; and it was a shovel-ready project. Not only did all the parties in this House agree to it, but all levels of government ended up contributing to the project, including the federal government. I think it was on July 1 of last year, when we got all the funding secured by all levels of government, that it was announced. So that was fantastic.

Hon. Jeff Leal: What a great gift for Canada Day.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It was a great Canada Day gift for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Had a parade?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Well, we did. We had a Canada Day parade, and we had lots of things going on.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Free hamburgers?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Free hamburgers, as the member from Peterborough is mentioning. It was a great day.

It's a change in the community. The big trucks are out there building the new barges. It's causing, of course, some disruption in the community as this project unfolds for the next while. This is the west side of the Frenchman's Bay harbour.

People in my riding also know that on the east side of the harbour, there is a huge restoration project at the waterfront at the foot of Liverpool Road. That was disruptive, too. There was lots of construction and dust. But at the end of the day, they got a beautiful community centre that combines great retail opportunities, as well as waterfront activities for everybody to enjoy. So I think as the Frenchman's Bay harbour entrance project continues, we'll get closer to seeing the benefits that I talked about before.

I mentioned that the Great Lakes are important to my riding because of the water that defines many sides of my riding: Lake Ontario on the south side, Highland Creek defines the southwest side of my riding, and the Rouge River, which I mentioned before, flows right through my riding into Lake Ontario. We all know about the Rouge Park, that it's moving forward to being a great national park. There are many residents in my riding who are very concerned about and are focused on the ecological condi-

tions of that and the preservation of all the watersheds around that.

Again, residents in my community and others nearby have participated actively in public consultations about the proposed Rouge National Park, and while there are some issues, such as the transit issues to and from the park, and while there are many opportunities, new business and tourism opportunities, the main concern, as I've heard attending those public consultations, is that people want a balance. They want a balance of these ecological conditions, respect for the watersheds, while looking at new ways to engage communities in this exciting national park that we're going to have. The park's there already, of course. It's a matter of refocusing it as a national park.

Interjection.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yes, it's incredible how many people live right nearby it. Tens of thousands of people live right next to the Rouge Park, and Lake Ontario is, as part of that park, paramount.

Mr. Randy Hillier: You guys don't want to give it to the feds.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I think actually we are well under way to moving that forward in terms of an arrangement with the federal government because, at the end of the day, everybody wants to enjoy that park. Everyone wants to enjoy the waterways around that, and I'm very hopeful that people will see more details of that shortly.

But going back to the Great Lakes Protection Act, Speaker, I think we need to recognize what it is going to achieve for us in terms of going forward: what we don't have now; what we'll have in the future. It will help protect and restore the Great Lakes so that they are drinkable, swimmable and fishable—sounds like a logo or a slogan, maybe, that we can use going forward.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Sounds fishy.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Sounds fishy. Indeed, it does.

People do need that kind of protection because sometimes I think we take it for granted. We take for granted the water we drink, the food we enjoy, the electricity, the employment, the enjoyment—all those things that are indeed associated with the Great Lakes, yet the science shows that three of our four Great Lakes are indeed in decline. So we do need new solutions to some of the problems that have contributed to that.

There's much to protect, and we know that the Great Lakes are one of those key underpinning things in Ontario's economy—not something you think of every day, but that is definitely there.

The lakes contribute billions of dollars of wealth annually, supplying energy, providing water for industry, agriculture, shipping goods, recreation and tourism, and that I see as only growing.

I know in the region of Durham where I live, there's been some discussion about if we should have a food terminal in Oshawa, and if that was to be pursued, it would be adjacent to the lake. You can see how our local

and provincial economy intersects with the Great Lakes—in this case, Lake Ontario.

The Great Lakes, as I said before, provide over 80% of our drinking water, and that's something I know people take for granted sometimes. We all turn our tap on or get water out of the filtration system on our fridges. We're really blessed to be able to have that in Ontario, because we certainly know that is not the case in other parts of the world. So we need to protect what we have and ensure that it's there for the future, and the Great Lakes Protection Act would create the tools to help make the Great Lakes be there for us in the future—for us, our children and our grandchildren.

1730

We're lucky in Ontario to have leading legislation that covers specific areas, such as drinking water. However, we don't really have the tools necessary to achieve that vision for the future, and we heard about the need to have that, so this legislation will bring players together, in addition to what's already happened and leading up to the reintroduction of this bill. We need to keep focused on the clear, science-based targets, so the act allows further development to set these targets.

Speaker, you see that in I think almost everything our government puts forward—evidence-based, target-based—because at the end of the day there are more demands than maybe our resources allow, so things have to be evidence based. Going back to my Frenchman's Bay example, you'll recall I stated that I consulted the experts, I asked for the expert opinion, and that professor from U of T Scarborough indeed endorsed the Frenchman's Bay harbour and in fact said that it would not compete with other important environmental initiatives to preserve the ecological conditions of, in this case, Frenchman's Bay.

I think it is important we continue to consult with experts. It is important that we have targets going forward. Certainly in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, with so much wonderful water around our communities, whether it's in the Scarborough part of my riding, whether it's in the Pickering part of my riding, our community, and I believe all other communities in Ontario, value that. They want to make sure we're wisely protecting that, carefully making the right kinds of investments, and that our strategies will result in the preservation of the lakes for not just us today, but our children, our grandchildren and generations to come.

I thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this important piece of legislation, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an opportunity again to address Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act. I know the minister is over here just trying to get his third party back onside after some of the concerns I think that they in fact shared with the party of the official opposition.

I did listen intently to some of the comments that the third party made—very valuable comments. I know the

member, after my remarks, from Timiskaming–Cochrane commented on the agricultural community sharing some concerns with this bill.

The minister obviously just stated how the government's investment in Hamilton harbour recently had taken place, and so I ask—they've made that investment already—how come they need another layer of bureaucracy to do things that they've in fact already done?

I think that simply proves our point that this piece of legislation is just, as a member or the minister just recently stated, somewhat fishy. Again, the minister stated how they made that investment in Hamilton harbour, so how come this new act is even needed when the government is clearly making investments for our Great Lakes?

I'll get into, at a later time—the minister just recently stated, "Well, we need the tools." Well, the tools are already available out there. You look at the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between Canada and the US, and the Canada and Ontario agreement. Those tools are already there. We go into shoreline regulations, the Planning Act, giving municipalities—the Conservation Authorities Act—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It's a pleasure to stand up and to respond to some of the comments that have been made. First of all, I'd like to take a second to congratulate the member from Davenport on his first one-hour speech. It was very well done. I'm also pleased to respond to the comments made by the Minister of Consumer Services.

One of the themes that we've heard today is that we want our Great Lakes to be drinkable, swimmable and fishable. In Ontario—and in particular, in northern Ontario—we have an intimate relationship with our environment and with our lakes. It's important that we recognize that we have multiple uses for those lakes. We use the water to sustain ourselves. We drink water; we need it to live. There are a lot of people who rely on fishing, believe it or not, especially a lot of First Nations communities where they rely on fishing to sustain themselves.

We depend on it culturally, as I said, with First Nations communities, but also in non-First Nations communities. It has become a way of life for us. It doesn't seem to matter the season: Whether it's winter, summer, fall or spring, you'll always find people out and about and finding a way to make good use of our lakes.

We also depend on it economically. That's especially evident when it comes to industries like tourism. It's no secret that my own family has a tourist camp, and they depend on the quality of the lakes and the fish stock in order to be able to sustain themselves.

So we need legislation that respects the variety of uses. I appreciate the fact that there has been talk of needing clear, evidence-based and science-based targets to ensure that it is fair for all of the uses that we have.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate in support of Bill 6 and to address the comments made by the Minister of Consumer Services, which I think were very well articulated.

There are people that take a very strong environmental interest in the Great Lakes, there are people that take another interest in the Great Lakes, and there are other people that I think take it for granted.

Some of the statements that I'm hearing from the official opposition are, "We have the tools in place. We should just take it for granted. Don't worry; be happy. It'll be okay." But what we don't realize is that the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River—the region surrounding the Great Lakes—if you include Ontario and you include the Great Lakes states, there are 56 million jobs in that basin. There is \$5.1 trillion worth of GDP in that region. So if you don't have an interest in the environment, if you don't have an interest in ecosystems, maybe you have an interest in the business value and why you should be reinvesting in this asset we have.

We've got a wonderful natural asset right on our shoreline that covers—the vast majority of the borders of Ontario, to the south, border on the Great Lakes and on the St. Lawrence River. It just seems to me that we should be taking care of that, that we should be bringing in legislation that allows for that asset to be protected for future generations. I think Bill 6 does that. Bill 6 is a step forward.

Others in the third party have said, "Maybe it doesn't go far enough. Perhaps it can be improved along the way." There's probably some truth to that. But it seems to me that anybody who might suggest that this isn't needed, or that perhaps this is superfluous to other legislation that is in place, I think is wrong.

I think this legislation is very important. I think people in my community of Oakville, a lakeshore community, would find that this piece of legislation is probably something that's long overdue and something that certainly should be supported.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a pleasure to speak today and give comment to the Minister of Consumer Services with respect to Bill—I can't find the number, but it's the Great Lakes Protection Act—

Interjection: Bill 6.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Bill 6.

As my colleague and the PC critic, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, has said: rules, rules, rules. We have lots of rules and regulations. Even the members from the third party have commented that they have so many rules and regulations out there, the government agencies or bodies that are to implement these don't have time; they're not implementing what's already there.

So we have this government that continues to have opportunities that they think they can duplicate, overlap and conflict, which seems to be a consistent theme over there.

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Of course we want to protect the Great Lakes. We're all kind of indirectly involved. You can get from the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock to the Great Lakes and onwards, so we are all concerned about the quality and the protection of the Great Lakes. But we have so many acts out there already—the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Nutrient Management Act. Farmers have done a great job in following those, helping us to prevent runoff that would, in some way, affect the water quality. They are the best stewards of the land, the farmers. I can go on—the Conservation Authorities Act, and we're all involved in the conservation authorities. This legislation dips into a lot of their domain.

What we have said, and what our critic from Kitchener–Conestoga has repeatedly said, is that the tools are in the toolbox in the rules, the regulations, the acts that are already before us. Maybe we should use them better. I think collectively, we can work towards that. I end my comments with that, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. First, let me acknowledge the members who have contributed to this debate this afternoon: the member from Kitchener–Conestoga; the member from Kenora–Rainy River—thank you for bringing the northern perspective to this discussion; the member from Oakville, who is also a member who has a waterway as part of his riding boundaries, I believe; and, last but not least, the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I'm glad to hear that there is common ground when it comes to protecting the Great Lakes in our province. I heard that from the discussion from all sides of the House here. I have heard some concerns, particularly from the official opposition, and my reaction to that would be: Let's get this to committee. Everyone has some strong views on this; then let's get it to committee and see where it goes, because we have what I believe is common ground on this bill: that we all want to protect the Great Lakes today. We want to protect it for our future.

So let's bring our feedback, our ideas to committee. Let's move this forward and find this as another example of how to make minority government work. We have a common cause and a purpose, as I found here in the Legislature, a shared vision around my Frenchman's Bay motion. I sense there's common ground here with the reintroduction of this act, and I look forward to seeing this go to committee and that we do what's right to protect our environment, our Great Lakes, balancing it out, of course, with all the other interests and issues, and I think we can do that at committee going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a pleasure to rise here in the House this afternoon and debate and discuss Bill 6, the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2013.

As you know, Madam Speaker, I have always been a huge advocate here in this chamber for water protection and waterpower development and how important water really is. It's a little disturbing when we hear the government talk—and it is talk—about how they care about the environment when you see industrial wind farms intruding upon our landscape throughout the province. They, in fact, are allowing industrial-sized wind farms to be developed on protected lands; the Oak Ridges moraine, in particular, in my riding. We have also heard of instances where trees with eagles' nests have been harvested so that these industrial-sized wind turbines can go on.

So the credibility this government is putting toward the environment is somewhat lacking, and of course what this bill should be called is “an act to appease Liberal political supporters and cronies,” because this bill is just another classic example of the Liberals attempting to pass needless legislation in order to keep or make a few friends—in this case, radical environmental groups.

The stated purposes of this bill are “to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin; and ... to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved in the protection and restoration of the ecological health of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin.”

These seem like worthy purposes at first glance, but what the Liberals fail to mention is that there are already excessive, much-legislated designs in place to do just what they're proposing. The Ministry of Natural Resources already has the power to regulate shorelines for watershed management under the Conservation Authorities Act, while municipalities have the authority to prohibit development of shorelines under the Planning Act.

Despite all of these existing regulations, the Liberals want to create yet a third regulator for Ontario shorelines and allow the Ministry of the Environment to enter the fray and give the ministry the authority to collect fees for non-compliance.

Not only will this bill muddy the regulatory waters surrounding Ontario shorelines and the Great Lakes, potentially making it more difficult for any meaningful protection to take place and stymying any potential for responsible economic development, but I worry that the proposed regulations may actually outright conflict with existing legislation.

Existing Ontario water legislation, such as the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Nutrient Management Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Water Opportunities Act and the water resources act, may all be in conflict with proposed legislation under Bill 6.

It seems that unlike what this bill leads you to believe, it's not that the Liberals lack the legislation to get the job done and protect Ontario lakes but, rather, they lack the political will and competent decision-making skills to do so. Instead, they'd rather rely on feel-good, save-face legislation that appeases a radical environmental base. So

it seems to be yet another example of a long line of Liberal regulatory duplication, overlap and conflict.

This proposed bill is long on generalities and very short on specifics. It leaves all decision-making and priority setting to the Ministry of the Environment and proposes the creation of yet another unelected, unaccountable board: the guardians' council. Under the mandate of this bill, the Great Lakes Guardians' Council would identify priorities, sources of funding and areas in need of remediation, as well as advise the minister on setting targets, establishing interjurisdictional agreements, and approving proposals and initiatives.

If passed, this bill would allow the creation of this council, which would be full of Liberal cronies and radical environmentalists. They would be allowed to sidestep the Legislative Assembly here and create cumbersome and excessive legislation that would hamper the home building, farming and manufacturing that Ontario depends on to grow and prosper.

It also must be noted that the protection and use of the Great Lakes is a binational concern. The creation of a provincial board to address a multi-state issue seems irresponsible, as its decisions may only confuse and hamper good work that is already under way between Canada and the United States.

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There already exists between Canada and the United States the International Joint Commission, the IJC; the Great Lakes Water Quality Board; the Great Lakes Executive Committee; and the management committee of the Canada-Ontario agreement. These international agreements all serve to realize the priorities set out in the United States-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

To coordinate meaningful and effective remediation efforts for the Great Lakes, the provincial government must work with, not against, our partners by using the forums already in place. A Great Lakes governance framework between both Canada and the United States, and between the federal and provincial government, has reliably functioned for over 40 years.

So the question remains: Why have the Liberals decided that Ontario suddenly needs even more regulation to protect the Great Lakes when it is obvious that the legislation already exists? Madam Speaker, the answer to this question may lie in the fact that the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is the work of the Great Lakes alliance, which intensely lobbied the Liberals to include in Bill 6 the guardians' council in order to allow this lobby to shape Ontario's environmental policy.

The Great Lakes alliance is a grouping of six powerful environmental organizations operating in Ontario, including Environmental Defence, the Sierra Club and Great Lakes United, which is run by United Auto Workers Local 55 in Buffalo, New York.

While this bill proposes that its legislation will allow public bodies—including municipalities and conservation authorities—more control, it only gives these authorities the token role of requesting new regulatory areas. In fact,

the true power ultimately rests with cabinet, which must approve an initiative at the proposal and finalization stages, and with the guardians' council, which is responsible for developing and implementing proposals.

Of course, this is not to say that environmental groups are all radical or fundamentally bad. Indeed, two responsible and respected environmental groups in Ontario—Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ontario Headwaters Institute—have expressed a number of concerns with this bill. They worry, as I do, that the Liberals do not truly care about protecting Ontario waters; rather, that they are more concerned about their own political well-being, and that they are focusing on passing the bill only to appease the radical environmental lobby rather than focusing on proactive and effective measures and using already-existing tools.

It seems that time and time again, Madam Speaker, instead of making the decisions necessary to enact real, positive change, the Liberals instead keep attempting to reinvent the wheel. An example of this in the bill is the series of new regulatory areas called GFIs, or geographically focused initiatives, to deal with a long list of potential issues.

Of course, what this bill does not tell us is that areas of concern have already been established under the COA. Furthermore, the United States and Canada already have the power to designate priority watersheds under the IJC's International Watersheds Initiative. Again, we're seeing some repetition here over regulation, duplication, conflict.

Of course, my Liberal colleagues will retort that despite all the legislation that exists—that seems to be working, I should add—we need new legislation and new tools to deal with changing conditions and new priorities. What is baffling is that when questioned as to what these new and changing priorities are that must be dealt with by passing even more legislation, the Liberal government has answered that this is a matter the guardians' council will determine after the bill has been passed. So if the Liberal government does not even know what the priorities are, how can they propose legislation to deal with the problems and priorities that may not even exist? Once again, the answer points to that the Liberals' true purpose in passing this bill is for their own good rather than the good of Ontario.

Through passing this bill, they aim to centralize decision-making authority and to empower and appease their political supporters and cronies. In this effort to concentrate their power within the Ministry of the Environment, the Liberals are disappointingly ready and willing to create regulatory chaos that will cost the government millions of dollars and years of time to sort out, not to mention distracting from any real environmental protection and stymying the economic activity that Ontario so desperately needs.

A Liberal government deciding to put political considerations before responsible decision-making and, in the process, costing the province dearly: This seems like a narrative we have heard before, and a narrative that is

set to cost the province up to \$1 billion, like the Liberal gas plant scandal.

On the matter of money and responsible decision-making, it should be brought to everyone's attention that this bill makes absolutely no mention of cost. Without any financial information on Bill 6, we do not know how much the formation and maintenance of the guardians' council will cost, how much the creating and administering of the GFIs will cost, nor do we know how much it will cost to implement the array of new regulations that the Liberals propose. Other than the likelihood that some regulatory actions and actors will be funded through the fining for non-compliance with the regulations that will come from Bill 6, there is no mention of where the money will come from.

This is especially concerning given that we do not even know the specifics of the priorities that this bill proposes to address. We are also left unaware of where the financial powers of the guardians' council—a non-elected, non-accountable, politicized body—will lie. Will their financial powers lie with cabinet? This is a question that must be answered.

This leaves us with a lot of unanswered questions and no price tag. This bill serves as another example of why our province is in such a massive debt situation—and why it cannot, under a Liberal government, that can't get out of its debt. The Liberal government's costly, in-

effective and politically motivated legislation serves to explain how our province is in this dire economic situation. Window-dressing proposed legislation such as this one, Bill 6, just shows that this Liberal government has still not learned its lesson and is still not serious about addressing the jobs and debt crisis.

Ontario is blessed with the Great Lakes, and we are fortunate to live in a province that benefits from the largest freshwater ecosystem on the planet. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin is a fantastic resource, integral to the well-being of Ontario citizens. Many of our province's economic activities, such as farming, manufacturing, electricity generation, and shipping, all depend on this water system, and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin provides defining natural features that make the area a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family.

What we have is, again, a piece of legislation brought forward by the government which actually does nothing but stymie our economy and the interests of—thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I must bring to the attention of the member that it is now 6 p.m.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. Wednesday.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Jagmeet Singh
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