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Monday 18 March 2013

Lundi 18 mars 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 18 March 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 18 mars 2013

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: My guests are just going through the metal detector as we speak, but I will introduce them just in case I miss them altogether: Madame Marie-Josée Bergeron, who is mother to page Magalie Malette; and Madame Léanne Génier-Bédard, who is mother to page Nicolas Bédard, from Nickel Belt and Sudbury. Welcome to Queen's Park—they are just on their way.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to introduce my special assistant from Orléans, Shawn Kalbhenn, who is in the gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please welcome, from the 37th, 38th and 39th Parliaments and Deputy Premier—today we have the Honourable George Smitherman, who is hosting a visiting delegation from Honam, an economic development region in South Korea. From the Honam delegation, please welcome Dr. Dong Kim, Mr. June Hang Lee and Mr. Calvin Yi. Welcome to Ontario.

With the House's approval and indulgence, we have a very special group with us today in the House. As all members will recall, a devastating tsunami struck north-eastern Japan on March 11, 2011. In concert with the international community, Canada and Ontario responded with emergency, financial and material aid. As a result, Ambassador Ishikawa of Japan was granted the very rare privilege of addressing the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on April 17, 2011, to offer thanks to the citizens of Ontario for their support.

As part of a larger reconstruction effort, the government of Japan established a student exchange program, Kizuna, which means "bonds of friendship," in which they invited high school students to visit Japan, tour the affected areas, learn first-hand from survivors and rebuilders, and develop ties with Japanese youth.

We have with us here today, in the Speaker's and the visitors' galleries, students from the Japanese Seiwa Gakuen high school of Japan and students from Malvern Collegiate Institute of Toronto. This group is accompanied by the consul general of Japan, Mr. Eiji Yamamoto. Please join me in welcoming our wonderful and special guests.

Thank you for your indulgence. I just wanted to remind you that that doesn't give anyone else permission

to give an essay before you introduce your guests—only the Speaker.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is for the Premier. Why did your throne speech not mention anything about getting public sector pension costs under control?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm happy to answer the Leader of the Opposition's question, but just for one second, I would like to acknowledge that our friend, my friend, a great friend of publicly funded education, Irene Atkinson, a trustee with the Toronto District School Board, is under medical care at the moment. She's one of the strongest fighters I've ever met, but she's fighting for her own life right now, and I just want to say that my prayers and, I believe, the prayers of all of us are with her and her family. Irene would never shy away from a difficult question; I will just say that.

Mr. Speaker, we are working to modernize the pension policy framework, and we're playing a leading role, in fact, in a national discussion around pensions. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we are right now in the process of finalizing arrangements with our public sector partners on pension viability.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here's the problem, Speaker: The gold standard public sector pensions are the ticking time bomb in our finances. Premier, you've rejected any more legislative wage freezes. When I asked you directly about which Dalton McGuinty program you would eliminate or postpone, the answer was "none," and your throne speech did not even mention wrestling down public sector pension costs. The unfunded liability between what's been promised to government workers and what can be afforded is about \$100 billion. That means \$100 billion that won't go into hospitals, won't go into classrooms, won't go into highway infrastructure.

Premier, can you specifically tell us what you're going to do to help reduce or eliminate the \$100 billion in unfunded liability, or do you plan to go to taxpayers or do you plan to take it out of hospitals and classrooms?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is an issue that we've tackled head-on. Our government has recently reached agreements with three public sector plans that freeze contribution rates for five years, Mr. Speaker. The agree-

ments ensure that pension plans don't add to employer and taxpayer costs when addressing a new funding shortfall, and in fact will mean cost avoidance of a billion and a half dollars over three years. From our perspective, that's exactly what needed to be done. We're tackling it. We're working with our public sector partners, and we are making sure that those dollars are saved over the coming years.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: This is precisely the point I'm making, Premier. You've agreed you're not going to increase contribution rates any more, but that does not address the unfunded liability. For example, a teacher could retire on a pension at 55 years of age and collect 70% of their best five years, meaning the pension would be about \$60,000 to \$65,000. That's \$15,000 higher than the average taxpayer makes in the province of Ontario. So nothing you're doing is going to address the fact that people will be earning more in retirement and living longer in retirement than they did to contribute to the system.

So I'll ask the Premier back: Specifically when it comes to teachers, do you agree we should raise the retirement age? Should we reduce benefits? How exactly are you going to pay for that difference?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the underlying issue for the Leader of the Opposition is that he's interested in driving a wedge between people who have pensions, and people who don't have pensions—people who have worked for years to negotiate their pensions.

1040

Our position is that we need to make sure that pensions are viable, but more than that, that everyone across the province has the ability to retire and have the kinds of supports they need, which is why my predecessor led a national discussion on pension reform. We are part of that discussion nationally, Mr. Speaker. We know there are changes that need to be made, and here in Ontario we're working to make sure that pension plans are viable.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: To be very direct about it, it's you who have created this wedge. As education minister, you signed on to 12.5% wage increases for teachers—they've gone up 25% to 30% under the Liberal government—and that means pension payouts have increased as well, while the 80% of people who are not on the government payroll have had their wages frozen; they've gone backwards and been asked to pay more and more taxes. This actually means there are 11,000 workers today who are making about \$140,000 or more a year. That means they'll retire with guaranteed pensions of \$100,000 a year, Premier.

When 75% of people in the private sector have no registered pension whatsoever, do you think it's fair for them to continue to bail out gold standard public sector pensions that are just not affordable in 2013?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think what is fair is that we, as a government, and, I would suggest, this whole Legislature work together to figure out how we make sure that all of the people living in this province, all of the people who are working for their families have the prospect of a retirement that is comfortable, that they're able to provide for themselves and their families. I think that's the conversation we should be having.

What's happening here is that the Leader of the Opposition is trying to create that rift between people who have worked for years, who have been part of a federation that have worked with their employees and have bargained particular benefits—that's a reality. That's what has happened.

Our job is to make sure that everyone in the province can have a healthy, safe and reasonable retirement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Mr. Speaker, I just think this illustrates how the Premier is increasingly out of touch with the reality of those who have to actually pay the bills. I know her first instincts are always "What can we do to appease the government union leaders?" I'm talking about the 80% of taxpayers who are not on the public sector payroll, who are paying more and more in taxes and wouldn't even dream of the gold standard pensions that are just not affordable when you look at the reality of the 21st century.

The Drummond report had eight recommendations. To date, your government has implemented zero of those recommendations when it comes to public sector pensions. For the teacher pension, he recommended increasing the average age of retirement for teachers. He also said, "When faced with unfunded liabilities, reduce benefits rather than increase contribution rates." So, of those two recommendations, increasing the retirement age or reducing benefits, Premier, what do you think is fair and reasonable? Or are you going to take it out of the pockets of taxpayers or out of the budgets of hospitals and classrooms in the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, the irony is a little thick. It is that member's government that actually created an early retirement option for teachers, Mr. Speaker. They were eager to put that in place.

The larger point is that it is our responsibility as government to make sure that we do everything we can to work with our partners to make sure that pension plans are viable. That's what we've been doing. We've been getting deals, we've been working with them, and we've been making sure that those plans are viable. But the broader issue is to make sure that all the people of Ontario have the prospect of a reasonable retirement. That's why we have been national leaders in the discussion of how to make sure that people can retire in comfort and have a reasonable expectation of their retirement, no matter who they work for, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, the Premier seems to be out of touch with the reality of public sector haves and pri-

vate sector have-nots when it comes to pensions, including the gold standard pension for government workers. If unions for steel, mining and transportation have all agreed to a hybrid pension, where new workers get a less generous pension plan, why don't we do the same for government workers in our province? Speaker, isn't that a fair and reasonable proposition?

To the teachers' pension plan: The teachers' pension plan now is paying out \$2 billion more a year in benefits than it collects in revenues. That's simply not sustainable, so I'll ask you again: Premier, are you going to take that out of benefits, are you going to raise the retirement age, or is your plan to take that \$2 billion a year out of the pockets of private sector taxpayers or hospitals and classrooms? Tell me where that \$2 billion a year is going to come from.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, we have signed agreements—in fact, we signed an agreement with the Ontario Teachers' Federation last week, Mr. Speaker. The contribution rates—they'll go down. So we are going to avoid costs of \$1.5 billion over the next three years.

I would think that that's something that the Leader of the Opposition should celebrate, Mr. Speaker. I would think it's exactly the kind of change that he would like to see. But instead, what he is doing, in my opinion, is he's standing up and he's working to drive a wedge to increase the rift between people who work in one part of the economy and people who work in another part of the economy.

My job, our job, is to make sure that—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Our job is to make sure that people who live in Ontario, no matter where they work—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, do not start.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —have the opportunity to have a reasonable retirement, to be able to look after their families and to live in some comfort when they leave their work.

CASINOS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats would also like to express our heartfelt concern over the accident that happened to Irene Atkinson over the weekend. We obviously extend our thoughts and our prayers to her and hope that she recovers from her situation.

My question, Speaker, is to the Premier. Does the Premier think Ontario will be better off if Toronto has a casino?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear that municipalities should have the right and the opportunity to decide whether they want to have a casino in their jurisdiction. That is our position, Mr. Speaker, and that is the position that we will continue to take.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier pretends she doesn't have a stake in the casino game, Speaker, but every day there's a new story of the government scrambling to stack the deck. We know there are a lot of lobbyists with a lot of money pushing casinos at the backrooms of Queen's Park here, but in rural Ontario and municipalities across the province, people are getting tired of the OLG pressure tactics. Now, mayors that had been on board are raising serious questions about sweetheart deals for Toronto.

Does the Premier think this is building a stronger Ontario, or is she ready to admit that it's time to turn down the heat on the hot mess that the OLG privatization is creating?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that the issue that the leader of the third party is addressing is the issue around the formula that's being used across the province. I've been very clear that the formula is the same across the province. The magnitudes of the particular projects are different, so depending on whether it is in a small town or a large urban centre, the formula will be the same, but the actual revenues are different. But there are no special deals, and municipalities will be able to choose whether they want a casino or not.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier seems to be in a rush to get casinos into cities and towns before everyday families have their say. The Premier wants municipalities to have the say, but she's afraid to let the people living in them speak through referenda.

When the Premier promised more conversation, people assumed she meant something more than the backroom meetings organized by well-connected Liberal lobbyists. Is the Premier ready to back away from the OLG's private casino push and insist that casinos shouldn't be built unless people have had a chance to vote for them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the leader of the third party knows that every municipality is required to have a consultation. When we talk about municipalities and we talk about the people who represent them, those, to my mind, are one and the same thing. So a municipality needs to decide, and I think municipalities have the authority and have the capacity to decide what kind of consultation to do in their constituencies. Until that consultation is done and until those decisions are made, Mr. Speaker, there will be no—

Interjections.

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

There are two things happening here that still continue to bother me, and I'll still tell you to stop doing it, and that is, when the answer is being given, you cannot continue a dialogue with someone else over there; and when somebody is speaking on this side, the same thing is happening where we're getting comments. That helps bring the tone down.

1050

The second thing is, I have some people who are not even in their seats heckling right as soon as the answer starts—before it even starts. So let's stop, please.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just to say, Mr. Speaker, that I have a lot of faith in our municipalities to work with their constituencies, to work with the people in their constituencies, to make these decisions.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Placing a bet on casinos seems like a risky way to balance the books. If the government is truly interested in a balanced approach, New Democrats have laid one out, starting with the closing of corporate tax loopholes that will ultimately save the treasury over \$1 billion a year.

My question is a simple one, Speaker: Is the Premier ready to do that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to say that I appreciate the opportunity to have met with both the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third party over the last week. I know that the leader of the third party is aware that all of the issues that she has raised are things that we are looking at, that we're interested in working with her on. Likewise, there are some issues that I put forward to the Leader of the Opposition that I thought we could work together on. So this issue of compliance and the opportunity to look at where there might be changes in the tax system, we're looking at those, and as I say, I look forward to continuing to have a discussion with the leader of the third party on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week we learned that the finance minister had written his federal counterpart about tightening corporate tax compliance. That's one step toward balancing the books, but it's a baby step. We've identified measures that will save \$1.3 billion annually, and thus far the government has only followed up on the one that saves the least amount of money.

Can the Premier assure us that we're going to see some real action in the coming budget on corporate tax loopholes being closed?

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: Indeed we are. We're undergoing consultations now right across the province. We appreciate the contributions made by the NDP in regard to some of these recommendations. We also appreciate some of the notes that the Conservatives have brought forward. We will do everything in our power to try to maximize the results from those consultations so that the benefit of our budget will be felt throughout the province. We appreciate what's being put forward, and we also do want to cut any tax loopholes that exist.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I'm kind of concerned. When it comes to implementing the casino

schemes of well-connected insiders, the Premier seems ready to move heaven and earth. But when it comes to taking simple steps that will help us take a balanced approach to balancing the books, the Premier wants a little more conversation.

Is the Premier ready to admit that there are better ways to balance the books than ramming casinos into communities that don't want them and to start taking real steps to close corporate tax loopholes in this upcoming budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let's be clear. Around the casinos issue, we have two steps. One is, are the cities or the municipalities interested in having that discussion? That's what they have to decide first off, and depending upon that we'll then enter deliberations over what—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: —next, and they still have the opportunity to even say no again should they wish. There is a two-stage approach, and we do want to encourage that discussion. I think that is what's most important.

When it comes to decisions around the budget, I welcome your input, because that's the way we're going to be able to put a budget that's balanced and that recognizes the sensitive recovery we have in our economy. We need to look at this in a very prudent way. We have a fiscal matter before us: We need to balance our books by 2017-18. We also have an economic reality. We want to promote growth. We want to enable us to have even a better future going forward. That's what this budget's going to be all about in the coming months.

CASINOS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. Premier, as you know, over the weekend, serious questions have been raised since it came out that Toronto was being offered a special deal in conjunction with your government's ongoing casino drive. Throughout the weekend, I heard from a number of municipal officials—including those in Ottawa, Windsor and Niagara Falls—and industry stakeholders and residents expressing objections to this idea that a sweetheart deal has been offered to the city of Toronto. Premier, it's not right to pit one community against another.

My question this morning is this: Is the OLG's municipality contribution agreement a standard agreement, or do the terms vary between municipalities? Will you reveal the specific formula being used to calculate the hosting fee for the city of Toronto and all other municipalities?

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: The Premier has made it very clear in her statement last week that it's going to be a consistent approach between all municipalities. We recognize that the scope and breadth of the casino, resort and convention centre that is being proposed in Toronto is going to be much grander and much bigger than in the other municipalities. But the bottom line is the formula

will be consistent, and the decision will be, ultimately, that of the municipality. We'll let them deliberate and make that decision first before we have further discussions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: Your own OLG officials have said that Toronto would rake in anywhere from \$50 million to \$100 million in casino hosting fees, and Mayor Ford has said he would expect a hosting fee of up to \$168 million. The CEO for the OLG said that they are promising Toronto higher hosting fees based on the amount of capital invested and the economic benefits it may generate. Unfortunately, every other municipality in this province receives host community fees based solely on a percentage of net slot revenues.

Given these glaring inconsistencies between the OLG and you, my question to you is very simple: In order to confirm that no special deals are being offered to your hometown, will you release the formula used to calculate host fees? Will you stand in your place and guarantee that all municipalities will be treated the same throughout this province?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let me be clear: There is no special deal being made with Toronto versus any other municipalities in the province. What is different, however, is the contributions being made by the proponents for the city of Toronto and the scope and depth of that project. It is going to be a major development that is being proposed, including infrastructure. It is a different contribution being made by the proponents, and that will have an impact on the city going forward. But that decision will be ultimately made by the municipality, and that's what's going to work. The degree and the fairness between the municipalities is consistent right through the formula.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, I'm trying to help you. Accept my help.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The second thing is, he would like to be in his own seat, which is the tradition, to even get to the point where I can help you. I would really appreciate that.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll do that.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment will not engage in escalating.

Now that you're in your spot, I'm going to help you even more, just in case you think that that's the signal to carry on.

New question.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you for your intervention, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Premier. Premier, in less than two weeks, your government will end the Slots At Race-

tracks Program partnership, which will ensure the demise of the horse racing industry. To make things worse, your government has adopted a divide-and-conquer approach by forcing deals with certain tracks and leaving others to perish.

Will the Premier freeze the cancellation of the SAR partnership until the government engages the industry in a real consultation process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said here and I have said elsewhere around the province that there will be horse racing in Ontario this year and that we're working to find a way forward to have a long-term sustainability plan for horse racing in the province. It's very important to us that that happen.

It's also important to us—coming out of the recommendations of the transition panel—that we have an integrated industry: that horse racing be part of the larger gaming industry. That was a recommendation by the panel. The fact is that there was not sustainability built into the model as it existed.

This was not the first time that this issue has been raised; it was raised in 2008 that there needed to be a right-sizing of the industry. That's what's happening. We're working to get agreements with tracks. We understand that it will be a smaller industry, but we want it to be sustainable well into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Premier, your government seems to be relying on the Tories' white paper to privatize gaming and clearly doesn't care about the thousands of jobs that will be lost in rural Ontario. The industry has seen catastrophic results already. The cancellation of the SAR partnership caused a 50% reduction in sales at last year's yearling auction and crippled the breeding industry. There are only two weeks left to make this right. Will the Premier stop the cancellation of the SAR partnership while it works with industry to come up with a real plan to preserve jobs in rural Ontario?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm actually operating on the recommendations of Elmer Buchanan, John Wilkinson and John Snobelen, who worked together to come up with a model that would be sustainable.

The fact is that the model as it existed was called unaccountable, un-transparent. It was bloated. That is what the panel said about the model that had been in place. It had to change. There had to be some sustainability that would allow the horse racing industry to carry forward beyond the next year or so, so that's what we've been working on.

The panel found—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings and the member from Huron–Bruce, come to order, please.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what the panel said: "The panel believes the industry should get back to basics by creating a stronger link between the racing product and consumer demand."

That's what we're trying to do. That's the work that we're doing with the racetracks. We want the industry to be sustainable and, if I may say, we're on track to make it so.

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Minister, one of Ontario's rising employment stars, especially in the western GTA, is the aerospace sector. Honeywell in Erin Mills makes aviation electronics; MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates makes space vehicle parts in Brampton; Spar Aerospace makes navigation guidance and aeronautical systems; and Goodrich makes landing gear in Oakville.

One of our Mississauga stars is Cyclone Manufacturing in Meadowvale, which makes jet airframe parts; and recently Sumitomo Precision Products, also in Meadowvale, made an exciting announcement which will help skilled Ontarians build profitable careers and profitable aerospace products for export.

Minister, please expand on how the high-value, high-skills aerospace industry has found a home in Ontario in the last 10 years.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question from my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville. I know that he and I are so proud of the contribution that Ontario's aerospace industry makes to this province.

Frankly, I have to say that a couple of weeks ago, when I was out in Mississauga and visiting for the grand opening of Sumitomo—a Japanese manufacturing facility which is based in Mississauga, which is manufacturing landing gear—I was so impressed, not only by their contribution but by the hundreds of people who were there that same day to honour the opening of this facility that represented the aerospace industry in this province.

In fact, across Canada, everybody knows that we have a very strong industry in aerospace, but 28%—nearly a third of that industry—is here in Ontario. It provides jobs for 22,000 Ontarians, generating over \$6 billion in annual revenue to this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, the aerospace sector does not merely employ thousands in Ontario; it adds billions of dollars to our province's economy each year. Made-in-Ontario components are part of nearly every aircraft flying today.

In western Mississauga, 2013 has given us two major new aerospace investments to celebrate: first, the agreement by Taiwan-based AIDC to partner with Cyclone Manufacturing to produce tail assemblies for the Bombardier Challenger series of jets; and just recently, the major announcement you mentioned by Sumitomo Precision Products, which is also located in Meadowvale, which is growing as the heart of Mississauga's aerospace sector.

Meadowvale's expanding aerospace sector means opportunity for our technical and engineering graduates. Would the minister elaborate on how Ontario is working

with the aerospace industry to build careers, opportunity and profitable world-class businesses right here in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: In fact, Ontario is home to 14 of the world's top aerospace firms. That's pretty remarkable, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say that in order to continue to attract this important investment, we need to be at the table, and we need to have competitive incentives to make sure that we attract these important investments.

In fact, in the last seven years our government has invested nearly \$85 million into our aerospace industry, most recently including Sumitomo Precision Products in the member's riding of Mississauga–Streetsville. It was a \$3-million loan that supported a \$10-million project that's creating 50 new jobs.

Sumitomo is going to be manufacturing landing gear in this province. Many of my colleagues, I'm sure, don't know that 60% of the large commercial aircraft in the world have landing gear manufactured or assembled here in Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, last week the justice committee heard from professional engineer—

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Let me repeat that for the member from Mississauga–Streetsville: professional engineer Bruce Sharp, a 25-year expert in his field.

His independent analysis of your government's decision to cancel the gas plants is at least \$828 million, more than three times your government's stated figure.

Following Mr. Sharp's testimony, the member from Mississauga–Streetsville refused to confirm the \$40 million for Oakville that the government insists is the cost. So, Speaker, someone is not being forthright here.

I say to the Premier, tell us now, because we know that you know: What is the real cost of cancelling Oakville?

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, we have a legislative committee that is looking into these issues. There are a number of witnesses who are coming forward, such as the former Speaker of the Parliament of Canada, for example, who gave evidence and information that in his opinion there was no contempt here in any way, shape or form. We now have another witness who's coming forward, giving a calculation, making certain assumptions on the cost of the power plant.

There will be other witnesses coming forward, so I would urge the members opposite to respect the committee, to respect the fact that there will be additional witnesses coming forward, and to recognize the accountability of the committee—that it's going to have to make a decision at the end of all of this evidence. I encourage the critic opposite to be patient.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, Ontarians want you to stop hiding behind technicalities, legalities, procedure and spin.

Mr. Sharp echoed that sentiment in the committee last week. When I asked him what would make his analysis more complete, he said, “a transparent and spin-free disclosure of” information. I asked him if he thinks the government has provided that, and his answer was simple: “No.” Mr. Sharp doesn’t feel you’ve released all the documents to get an accurate picture of the true cost of the Oakville and Mississauga cancellations. Speaker, quite frankly, neither do we.

Premier, you’ve had over a month now to live up to your promise of getting to the bottom of this scandal and turning over all of the documents. Your failure to do so can lead to only one question: What else are you hiding?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The Premier has been very clear, open and transparent. When she became Premier of this province, she made a commitment to the opposition, she made a commitment to the public, that it would be fully, completely transparent. In fact, it was the Premier whose initiative enlarged the mandate of the committee so that they can make further investigations on a broader range of issues.

We also have been very transparent in making the CEO and the chair of the Ontario Power Authority available to the media for an unlimited period of time. They underwent tremendous cross-examination, and they indicated clearly that there was no political control over their timing or the nature of the release of documents.

Mr. Speaker, we’ve been open, transparent and clear, and they just don’t want to accept it.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Your failure to actually answer the question from the opposition speaks volumes. Your party has maintained that it cost \$40 million to cancel the Oakville gas plant. We had very clear testimony last week that that was not a credible number.

Premier, will you actually speak to the question and admit that \$40 million is not a credible figure for the Oakville gas plant cancellation?

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

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: It’s great to be back, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. John Milloy: The question from the member from the New Democratic Party began by referencing the question from the member from Nipissing. I agree with one thing that the member from Nipissing said, which is that it’s about time we look at this without spin, without the type of rhetoric we’ve seen coming from that side.

That’s why, Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased, on this side of the Legislature, that the Auditor General is looking into the Mississauga plant, and that is why the Pre-

mier proactively asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville plant.

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Do you know what Bruce Sharp, the gentleman who’s being referred to by both parties, had to say to the *Financial Post*? This is what he had to say: “The situation begs for these numbers to be confirmed and publicized. I can think of no better provider of this service than Ontario Auditor General Jim McCarter and his staff.”

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is looking into—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, your ongoing deflection in this matter continues to speak very, very loudly.

I had the opportunity to be here when Dwight Duncan refused to answer questions about the shutdown of coal plants. That led to the media’s correct assumption that, in fact, he was backing off on that number.

Your predecessor said that the \$40 million was the number, that it had been nailed. We’ve seen clear evidence that, in fact, that figure was not credible, not correct.

Premier, will you answer the question? Do you stand by that \$40-million figure for the cancellation of the gas plant done by your party?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, the opposition can’t take yes for an answer. The fact of the matter is that the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, is looking into the matter.

But again, what I find strange is that when the member stands up, he fails to remind the House that it was his party that opposed these gas plants. Mr. Speaker, here are some good quotes.

The member from Toronto–Danforth, September 26, 2011, *Inside Toronto*: “We wouldn’t build it.”

Etobicoke–Lakeshore NDP candidate Dionne Coley also pledged to fight the plant, she told *Torstar News Service* on September 16.

“Local NDP candidate, Anju Sikka, soon issued statements concurring with the new Liberal cancellation”—the *National Post*, September 29, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties had the same position as the government on the cancellation of the gas plant. It’s about time they came clean on why they were in favour of that cancellation and the type of costing behind their decision.

GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of the Environment.

Engaging our communities and providing our communities with an opportunity to take action to restore and protect our Great Lakes is an important part of improving the health of our Great Lakes. I understand that the Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund could help fund small-scale local community action to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Speaker, through you, I would like to ask the minister for further details on this program.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'll be delighted to provide that information for that excellent question. The Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund is a \$1.5-million funding program that offers non-profit groups, such as service clubs, the opportunity to finance activities to support local community activities that restore and protect the Great Lakes in the St. Lawrence River basin. Funding has also been made available to First Nations and Metis communities and organizations in Ontario. The funds are distributed through modest grants, valued up to \$25,000 per project, for actions that contribute to cleaning up the Great Lakes one small step at a time.

On March 6, I was at the Royal Ontario Museum with the 9th Pickering Scout troop, who used funding from this program to learn environmental stewardship practices. Together, we were happy to announce the next round of projects that will be funded through the Great Lakes community fund.

These goals will help us achieve our Great Lakes goals. We want all Ontarians to become Great Lakes guardians so we can continue to enjoy the Great Lakes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's good to hear about the community involvement to protect our Great Lakes. This includes the work of the 9th Pickering Scout troop that my minister mentioned. I know that it is important that our government continues taking action to protect our lakes and restore them.

I understand that the minister received many great ideas from individuals and communities who are eager to take action to protect the Great Lakes. Speaker, through you, could the minister elaborate more to the House on the types of projects that received funding for that in the very first round?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First, I would like to thank the applicants who have demonstrated their concern and their enthusiasm for protecting the Great Lakes and who have applied for the program.

To date, through the first round, the ministry has funded over 80 projects across the province. We helped a grassroots community group with landowners and volunteers to reduce the impacts of runoff erosion and habitat loss in the Gananoque River. The Simcoe and District Fish and Game Club received support to improve water quality through bank naturalization. And we've funded the Bruce Peninsula Biosphere Association's project to monitor and restore streams flowing into Lake Huron and Georgian Bay.

There are many more great initiatives happening across the province, over 80 of them. I want to congratulate all of those applicants who have received funding and encourage those with an interest in restoring and protecting our Great Lakes to apply in the next few months.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is to the Premier. Your party is showing two polar opposite approaches to your gas plant scandal. While the Premier publicly states her willingness for openness and transparency, she sends out

her minions to carry out attacks on opposition members, energy experts and anyone who's looking to get to the bottom of the \$828-million gas plant scandal.

The facts are clear: The \$40-million number for Oakville is simply a fairy tale. It has been discredited. Yet your Liberal Party henchmen have no time for facts, openness or transparency when you, Premier, feel their time is better spent launching mean-spirited and vindictive attacks on Ontarians.

Premier, you're either saying one thing in public and another thing behind closed doors, or you've lost all control of your caucus, who continue to resort to attacks on Ontarians who seek the truth. So which is it, Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let's have a little bit of transparency from the opposition. First they promised to cancel the gas plant, and then, when we fulfilled their promise, they called it a scandal. Then the member said that a judicial inquiry was too expensive, and the member from Nipissing held a press conference calling for it. Then we came forward with the idea of a select committee. Instead, they went after a mean-spirited, vengeful motion against a former member of this Legislature. Then we went in front of that committee and we offered to provide them with all government documents related to the gas plant, far beyond anything that they had asked. And you know what? To the shock of myself and I think everyone on this side of the Legislature, they raised their hands and voted against it.

In terms of transparency, I think the opposition has some explaining to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: I think the government House leader fails to remember that he decided to build the plant. It takes a decision to build a plant before a decision to cancel it.

Premier, the cancelled plant will cost 15 times more than your government had originally stated, and you're sticking to that number, which is completely inexcusable. If I ran a business and told my customers that their product, at checkout, would be 15 times more than the price tag, I wouldn't be in business for very long. But this government instead refuses to accept the fact that this \$828-million figure means their reason for hiding the truth is open to the public. They prorogued because of this cost. They failed to release documents because of this cost. They threw their energy minister to the wolves because of this cost. The government is intent on standing by this expensive, insulting charade at any cost.

So, Premier, will you finally admit that the reason for your government's decision to obstruct the work of this House is because you're trying to cover up the true cost of a politically motivated decision?

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

Mr. Rob Leone: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. John Milloy: I can just read into the record again a quote from Mr. Bruce Sharp, the witness that the member referenced, and I quote what he told the Financial Post: “The situation begs for these numbers”—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member for Leeds–Grenville is on the edge, and I would expect him to treat all members honourably in this House.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: He said, “The situation begs for these numbers to be confirmed and publicized. I can think of no better provider of this service than Ontario Auditor General Jim McCarter and his staff.”

But let’s talk about some of the other witnesses in front of the committee, like former House Speaker Peter Milliken. Perhaps the honourable member saw this article in the Toronto Star:

“Tory Witness Bolsters Liberals’ Case to Clear Chris Bentley of Wrongdoing

“A Progressive Conservative gambit appeared to backfire on the first day of witness testimony at the legislative committee....

“Former federal Speaker Peter Milliken, who the Tories called to bolster their case that then-energy minister Chris Bentley was in contempt of the Legislature last year for withholding documents, torpedoed that argument.

“I don’t know why there would have been a breach. I don’t understand that,” Milliken told the justice committee”—

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

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LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Long-term care is in a sorry state in Windsor—maybe that’s the best kept secret that we’ve been hearing so much about. But it’s no secret that the elderly people who are stuck in local hospitals waiting for long-term-care beds were promised years ago by this government that this situation would be fixed, and it’s no secret to a veteran doctor and former chief of surgery at Windsor Western and Windsor Regional hospitals. When Dr. David Wonham addressed pre-budget hearings in Windsor last week, he said the situation amounts to “abuse.”

When will this government live up to its commitments and finally fix long-term care in Windsor?

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I believe the leader of the third party does know that the long-awaited long-term-care home that was to have been built on the Hotel-Dieu Grace site is now under construction. It took longer than anyone wanted it to, but it’s very important to the people of Windsor and area that that home be built. I’m very pleased that the Schlegel

family has stepped up and is building what will be a wonderful new long-term-care home in Windsor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, when this government botched the Grace site long-term-care redevelopment, it’s the frail and elderly in Windsor who paid the price, and so did Windsor hospitals, which are teetering on crisis mode and operating well beyond their capacity. People who belong in long-term-care beds are stuck waiting in hospital as patients pile up in the gurneys and hallways. Dr. Wonham called the situation “pathetic,” and likened the scene in Windsor hospitals to “a war zone MASH unit.”

The Premier’s solution is to fire nurses, cut hospital beds and tell families to hurry up and wait. When will this government relieve the pressure on Windsor hospitals and make long-term care a real priority?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think it’s incumbent upon the leader of any party in this House to actually understand the issues before they make such claims. Funding at Windsor Regional Hospital has increased dramatically since we have been in office. In fact, the increase in their budget is \$100 million.

We are increasing capacity in long-term care, and we are, most importantly increasing capacity for home care. We are well on our way now in the transformation of our health care system. We are investing more in home care so that we can get people the care they need at home, which is where they want to be. It’s better for people and it’s better for our health care system.

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, when one thinks of the multi-billion dollar mining industry in Ontario, one automatically thinks of the positive effects for the north—and indeed that is true. Speaker, I was in Timmins over the March break to see first-hand the importance of the mining industry. I was there for pre-budget hearings.

But that said, the north is not the only part of Ontario that benefits from mining. In fact, in my own hometown of Mississauga, there are 30 mining supply and service companies. This makes Mississauga the leading destination in all of Ontario for mining supplies and service companies to do business. As the amount of mining business conducted in Mississauga and all over the GTA grows, it highlights the fact that the mining industry is important to all parts of the province.

Will the minister please inform the House how the mining industry is having a positive impact on cities from Mississauga to Thunder Bay?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: It’s an amazing story. Thanks to the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville for the question because you’re quite right to highlight the extraordinarily positive impact of mining in all regions of the province. Certainly northern Ontario comes to mind, but the mining supply and services sector is remarkable—

between \$5 billion and \$7 billion in mining supplies, and a lot of it in Mississauga.

It's important to note that just a few weeks ago Toronto hosted the world's top convention in global mineral exploration, investment, financing and technology, welcoming 30,000-plus delegates from 125 countries to the Prospectors and Developers Association conference. I was honoured to be there to represent the province. Premier Wynne was there to help us open up the Ontario pavilion and to highlight the advantages of doing business in Ontario.

Bottom line: The mining industry itself creates over 75,000 direct and indirect jobs in Ontario, certainly including the jobs the member from Mississauga East-Cooksville—I look forward to the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: After listening to the minister, it is clear that he's passionate about the north and the mining industry. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a member of this government, which recognizes the importance of the mining industry in this province. As articulated by the minister, the mining exploration industry is an important contributor to our economy and to job creation in Ontario, which the minister alluded to.

Minister, can you tell us what the government has done over the past 10 years to promote the mining industry right here in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks so much to the member for this great—we certainly recognize the extraordinary positive value of the mining industry to our economy. We've invested over \$120 million in Ontario mineral sector activities to date, and our investments certainly are paying off, Mr. Speaker.

Here's an interesting statistic: In 2003, exploration expenditures in Ontario were \$193 million—a significant sum. In 2011, we surpassed the \$1-billion mark in mineral exploration. That makes Ontario the leading jurisdiction in Canada for exploration. The value of mineral production in 2003 was \$5.7 billion, an impressive figure. In 2011, we reached \$10.7 billion. We are the top province in Canada for mineral production. This is incredible: an increase in jobs, an increase in activity across the sector. Certainly all parts of the province are represented, and certainly we are very proud of our strong support of the mining sector.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Premier. Bruce Sharp is an independent energy expert. In a legislative committee, he testified on the true cost of the Liberals' political decision to cancel the Oakville gas plant. Based on his expertise, we know the true cost is at least 15 times more than what the government told us. In light of this new information, will the Premier finally admit to the sham? Will she finally tell us the true cost of the cancelled gas plant?

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, I can only repeat that the opposition can't take yes for an answer. We have asked the Auditor General—first of all, we're very pleased the Auditor General is looking into the Mississauga plant cancellation. We also, at the urging of the Premier, asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville plant situation. And Mr. Sharp, who seems to be quoted at great length across the way—this is what he told the Financial Post, Mr. Speaker: “The situation begs for these numbers to be confirmed and publicized. I can think of no better provider of this service than Ontario Auditor General Jim McCarter and his staff.”

Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that when the Conservatives were such great fans of cancelling this plant, that they have refused to provide the Legislature or the committee with their costing and with the policy analysis that went into their decision from the Leader of the Opposition to talk about cancelling the plant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, that's just not good enough. It's certainly not good enough for my constituents, who are concerned and want to know why this government has a double standard when it comes to power plants in rural Ontario where local communities have been ignored.

Since the finance minister may have to negotiate tax hikes with the NDP to pay for this power plant scandal, we think he must know the true cost: \$40 million is a long way from \$638 million.

Will the minister admit that the true cost of the cancelled Oakville gas plant is at least 15 times more than the \$40 million the Liberals have been claiming?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, I think the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, will provide good advice to members of this Legislature, as well as the committee that's looking into it. But, Mr. Speaker, where is the Conservative analysis—we'd all like to see that—which led the Leader of the Opposition in that wonderful YouTube video to stand there being questioned by the press, to talk about how he was going to be cancelling the plant, and in the words of, first of all, Richard Brennan of the Toronto Star, when he said, “If you get in, is that done?” Then the Leader of the Opposition responds, “That's right, done.” Mr. Brennan then asked “Done, done?” and then the Leader of the Opposition responds to thunderous applause, “Done, done, done.”

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So, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to getting the analysis and costing from the Progressive Conservatives about their promise in the last election, which we were happy to fulfil.

WHISTLE-BLOWER PROTECTION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, since June 2012, governance at the Iroquois Falls family health team and Anson General Hospital have been in question. Since

then, the situation has become critical with health care professionals resigning, resulting in shortages in health care and public allegations of fraud and workplace abuse at the family health team and at the hospital.

After my repeated requests, the LHIN announced that an independent review of the governance of these facilities will be conducted, but as a result, the hospital board started legal action against the nine residents who had been the most vocal in bringing these issues forward. The legal action was to intimidate the people who were actually standing up for the community.

Minister, are you prepared to stand by while health care dollars are used to sue and intimidate whistleblowers in Iroquois Falls?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I very much want to thank the member for the question, and I want to thank him for raising this issue with me some time ago. I know he has been in regular contact with members of my staff. He is doing the right thing for his constituents, and I applaud the member's approach for bringing issues forward that matter to his constituents. The member opposite knows that we are dealing with this issue, Speaker, and again I welcome his comments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: The review has started. The minister has spoken about the need to protect whistleblowers, yet in Iroquois Falls at this moment and with the review starting, these nine people who are being sued with public health care dollars—how are they supposed to participate in this review? Because public dollars are being used for the lawyers from the hospital board; public dollars are being used for the lawyers from the LHIN. There's lots of lawyers at the Ministry of Health. The only people who are stuck in this are the nine people who actually stood up for their community.

Minister, are you prepared to protect all whistleblowers in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think it's important to acknowledge that the North East LHIN has commenced the review. They have secured KPMG to review Anson General Hospital governance and management. The review will determine if the allegations of patient and staff abuses are real and the role of management and governance in addressing these allegations. They will also look at the policies and procedures in place to address patient and staff complaints.

This is important work, Speaker. I thank the member opposite for raising this issue. The North East LHIN is actively engaged in a review, and I think we have to let that review happen.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. On my very first day in this chamber as the member representing the wonderful community of Vaughan, I had the privilege of asking the minister a question about the Vaughan

hospital. At that time, I was delighted to hear the minister reaffirm our government's commitment to building the hospital, which is being planned, developed and will be operated by the exceptional team at Mackenzie Health.

Residents in my community were understandably disappointed, therefore, to read media reports in January that the Leader of the Opposition's hand-picked standard-bearer in Vaughan is actually a staunch opponent of our plans to make the Vaughan hospital a reality in partnership with Mackenzie Health. Then, a few days later, the member from Thornhill put out a media release stating that in fact the party opposite does support our approach.

These very public inconsistencies on the part of the official opposition have understandably caused some concern and confusion in my community, so I would like to ask the minister to please provide some additional clarity with respect to the status of the Vaughan hospital project.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Vaughan for this question, and also thank you for his constant and tireless advocacy on bringing a hospital to Vaughan.

Vaughan is a growing and thriving community, and it's one of the fastest-growing in the country. It's important that families in Vaughan have access to the finest-quality care in their community. That's why I'm very pleased to say we are going ahead with a new hospital in Vaughan.

I want to assure residents of Vaughan that we are on track. We first announced the hospital's approval as part of our multi-year infrastructure plan in 2011. More recently, in September 2012, my ministry provided support to Mackenzie Health to proceed with developing a stage-2 planning submission. That plan was submitted to the ministry and the Central Local Health Integration Network a full month ahead of schedule.

As we get closer to the project start date in 2014-15, I know the member from Vaughan will continue to ensure that we maintain our progress and momentum. This is not a—

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I thank the minister for that update and for all of her terrific work on behalf of the people of my community. I know that Vaughan residents look forward to us being able to start construction of the Vaughan hospital as soon as we possibly can.

Speaker, hospital projects provide communities like Vaughan with the opportunity to come together and to work in a united way to make them a reality. Moreover, as residents learn more about the services that will be offered at their local state-of-the-art facility, they grow increasingly excited about being able to access top-notch health care closer to home for their children, for their grandchildren and for their aging parents and grandparents.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please provide additional information regarding the kinds of services that are

expected to be provided at the new Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I know that having a full-service hospital is important to the people in Vaughan, and it's hard to imagine why anyone would oppose it. But I can tell you that residents of Vaughan will be getting a full-fledged facility, providing a broad range of core and speciality services.

Among other things, the new Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital will offer patients state-of-the-art emergency services, medical in-patient and intensive care beds, new modern surgical services, operating rooms, advanced diagnostic imaging and specialized outpatient clinics that may include oncology, cardiac care, eye care and diabetes clinics. Some 80% of the rooms at the new hospital will be single-patient rooms. That means superior infection prevention and control. And the hospital will be built with a flexible design that will allow space to adapt over time, as new best practices emerge.

This new hospital will provide a very high level of care and a wide range of services to the people of Vaughan, and I know the member and I and our government will continue to support a new hospital in Vaughan.

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

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? There are so many in the House. I believe nobody knows them.

It is now time for statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

POPE FRANCIS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Habemus Papam, Speaker. We have a Pope. Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord.

On behalf of all members of this Legislature and Ontarians of all faiths, I would like to offer our sincere congratulations to His Holiness Pope Francis. As the 266th Pope, Pope Francis is the first to be a Jesuit, the first to come from the New World and the first to come from the southern hemisphere.

Pope Francis, from Argentina, is known for his passionate concern for the poor and is a man who leads an austere and humble lifestyle. There is tremendous optimism that his reserved character and modest background will resonate with a wide audience and convey a message of humility and evangelical simplicity.

At such a significant time, we look forward to Pope Francis's grace and wisdom in strengthening the faith experience and delivering God's word across the world and bringing together those of all faiths and religions. With courage and wisdom, his word will engage the family, especially our children. It will celebrate our cultural diversity, use our resources wisely and enlighten our spirit.

We look to His Holiness to guide the transformation and direction of the Church and to empower local parishes to identify and undertake key priorities in the community. We hope that his guidance enhances the incredible work already under way in our churches, as well as expanding upon the diverse ways in which our faith communities can strengthen our cities and province.

May his learning grace of life transmit an inspiration for the 1.2 billion Catholics found throughout the world.

As I regularly say, Speaker, may the wisdom found in John 5:8 transmit into a guiding path for all those to our Lord Jesus Christ.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Ms. Catherine Fife: Good afternoon, Speaker. Today, I'd like to bring to the attention of this House a growing and emerging issue that not only affects the riding of Kitchener–Waterloo but every riding in the province that is attempting to manage and direct growth in a fiscally responsible and sustainable manner; an issue that my colleague from Trinity–Spadina raised by way of a private member's bill.

Recently, the Ontario Municipal Board sided with developers against the democratically elected regional government and regional official plan, a plan that was 10 years in the making.

The region, in accordance with the Places to Grow legislation, had consulted with all stakeholders extensively and adopted their growth strategy to be more intensive with less sprawl. The region's plan called for 85 hectares of development. The development community argued that 1,053 hectares were required to meet future growth.

The region made a strong argument for future housing needs, particularly for a growing segment of the population: seniors who will transition out of single-family homes into high-density housing. As a result, many homes in the sprawling communities that exist would be open for new families. This would be new housing choices for families and seniors. Choices drive the market.

Density was also a key discussion in the decision. But the OMB made a clear distinction: Density targets must be planned for but not necessarily met.

My office has received many concerns about this decision, the main question being, "How is it possible that an unelected board can overturn a policy designed by a regional government and supported by a provincial government?"

The region has appealed this decision, as they should. If this decision holds, it will negatively impact the people of Waterloo region by way of increased taxes to support extensive infrastructure, water, sewage, fire, police services and schools. It will negatively impact the province as a whole.

POPE FRANCIS

Mr. Joe Dickson: I thank my good friend from Oshawa for his comments on Pope Francis.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in welcoming our new Pope, Pope Francis.

Pope Francis was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1936. His father was an Italian immigrant railway worker and his mother was a housewife. He has four brothers and sisters.

Prior to becoming Supreme Pontiff, he has been Archbishop of Buenos Aires since 1998 and a cardinal since 2001. Before becoming archbishop, he taught literature, philosophy and theology, as well as psychology. He holds a degree in philosophy from the Catholic University of Argentina and a master's degree in chemistry.

In 1958, at the age of 21, he decided to enter the Society of Jesus and started studying to become a Jesuit priest—a very humble order—making him the first Jesuit pope in our Roman Catholic history.

As the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he turned down the opportunity to live in the very comfortable archbishop's residence, opting for a spartan apartment where he cooked on his own and he rode the bus.

His Holiness has a deep concern for the poor and working class. He is a consensus seeker, a humble person who favours simplicity over pomp and grandeur. He is the pope of all people. I would like to just say on behalf of the 1.5 billion Catholics in the world that we welcome the new pope, Pope Francis.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask for unanimous content, if I may through you, that we stand for 60 seconds in silent reflection and prayer on behalf of our new pope, Pope Francis.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ajax–Pickering has asked for unanimous consent to stand in reflection of our new pope at the end of all statements. Is it agreed? Agreed.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to raise a concern, a concern shared by my colleagues in the PC caucus. It is also a concern shared by thousands of constituents across Ontario. That concern is the impact of industrial wind turbines from an economic, health, environmental and social perspective.

We've seen the proof; we've seen the FOIs that prove that this Liberal government knew that there were adverse health effects from wind turbines before the Green Energy Act was even implemented. These FOIs prove that this Liberal government was trying to cover up their green energy scheme by telling environmental officers, who discovered the adverse health effects, to stand down. This further perpetuates this government's history of secrecy for their own gain.

This government should be ashamed that they have approved wind turbine contracts without a viable business plan and based on a study that only looked at direct health impacts of wind turbines, which is being directly hit with a wind turbine in the head. That is a direct impact.

This is shameful. Evidence is mounting. The Grey-Bruce medical officer of health has said that since we have excess energy in Ontario, now is the time to pause and study the indirect health impacts of industrial wind turbines. I agree with her.

Now is the time. We have the proof, we have the surplus energy and we have professionals raising red flags. This government needs to stand up, do the right thing for Ontario and immediately call for a moratorium on further wind development.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think the trumpets we were hearing were for the Pope. I'm not sure, but we've been hearing some odd sounds.

IRENE ATKINSON

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I stand today to deliver a love letter really on behalf of all of us to our beloved trustee Irene Atkinson, who is currently fighting for her health in an ICU unit. Irene, as many people know, succumbed to smoke inhalation because of a fire in her kitchen. Now I think we want to send her a message that we want her to fight for her own health the way she fought so hard for 40 years in my riding for the health of our children in our public school system.

Irene is a feisty woman. Irene is known, of course, for her efforts for a fully funded public education system, but we know her in Parkdale–High Park as a woman who calls a spade a bloody shovel and as a woman who stood up not just for the public education system, but for clean trains from Pearson to downtown, for parks—for everything, really, that would make our community a better place.

So now our love and our prayers go to Irene and her family, from all of us. I think I speak on behalf of all of us, Mr. Speaker. Irene, now is the time to fight for yourself, because we need your energy more than ever. We need your spunk more than ever. We need you, Irene. We love you, Irene. Get well soon.

VOLUNTEERS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I invite the House to join me in congratulating two amazing young men from my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. Jonathan Yapeter and Maaran Murugathas recently won a bronze medal at the International Robot Olympiad in South Korea.

Jonathan and Maaran are grade 7 students at John McCrae Public School in Markham, and they were the only Canadians at the competition. They were so honoured to represent their country and return home with a medal. They are inspiring young people in Markham to become interested in robotics.

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I got to know Jonathan and the Yapeter family soon after they came to Markham from Indonesia in April 2008, mainly because of their outstanding community involvement. I see them everywhere. Jonathan's brother

Jullian was a legislative page here at Queen's Park in 2010. He has since run successful campaigns to become a representative for his student council at Pierre Elliott Trudeau High School two years in a row. He actually told me he modelled his campaigns on mine. He volunteers with seniors and organized a fundraiser for the Hospital for Sick Children. Mother Janny volunteers with Catholic Community Services of York Region, helping new immigrants learn English. Father Yimmy is an electrical engineer who helps out at many events in the riding.

The Yapeter family are exemplary new Canadians, and I thank them for all their dedication and for their leadership in Oak Ridges–Markham. And to Jonathan and Maraan, congratulations again.

LOCAL HEROES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I would like to tell the House today about three constituents of my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry whose brave actions should make us all proud to be Ontarians.

Dan Regnier, a volunteer firefighter in South Stormont, was on his way to his Long Sault home from Ottawa on Friday, January 25, when he came across a burning vehicle involved in a multi-car collision on Highway 417. Mr. Regnier, with the help of three bystanders, freed a father and his teenage daughter from the front seats before going back to rescue the youngest son and another 12-year-old boy who were stuck in the backseat of the car, saving them just before the car burst into flames.

A city firefighter from Cornwall and resident of South Glengarry and a personal friend, John Vandrish, on his honeymoon at the Daytona 500, was a first responder to the fans that were injured in the NASCAR race that day. Mr. Vandrish and another unidentified man didn't hesitate to jump to help a couple who were bleeding from pieces of metal debris that had ripped through the stands.

Thirdly, a resident of South Dundas, 10-year-old Tyler Barkley, saved the life of his 70-year-old neighbour, Elsie Knight. She had fallen and broken her leg, lying outside the house for more than 30 hours unable to get help. Tyler heard her calls and immediately investigated and with the help of his dad assisted Elsie, and she was taken to a hospital in Ottawa.

These are just three examples of true heroes, selflessly helping others in time of need. We take immense pride in their actions.

LAKEHEAD THUNDERWOLVES

Mr. Bill Mauro: Today I want to give a big shout-out to my hometown: Thunder Bay's Lakehead University Thunderwolves men's basketball team. The Wolves, for the last four years, have made nationals four years in a row. This year, not only did they make nationals; they made it all the way to the final championship game, unfortunately succumbing to a pretty strong Carleton University Ravens squad, who won their third in a row.

Congratulations to Carleton. But the Lakehead University Thunderwolves have had a fantastic run for the last four years, culminating this year in an appearance in the championship game.

A special shout-out to six of the seniors who played their last game for LU: Joseph Jones, Greg Carter, Yoosrie Salhia, Ben Johnson, Brendan King, and hometown boy Matthew Schmidt, who played his last game as well. Congratulations to Matthew.

The rest of the roster included Alex Robichaud and Brandon Myketa, both from Thunder Bay; Anthony McIntosh; Dwayne Harvey; Joey Nitychoruk; Nathan Wainwright; Ryan Thomson and Joe Hart. They had a great run as well. Congratulations to them and to coaches Scott Morrison and Matt Erdman, the entire assistant coaching staff and the training staff.

Not since the early 1970s, when I used to hang around the Thunderdome in its earlier days, when they were called the Norwesters—Howard Lockhart coached the team, and he had a pipeline down to Texas. We had some amazing teams. LU was nationally ranked every year. Not for over 30 years have we seen the LU program achieve this kind of success when it comes to men's basketball.

Congratulations to everybody. We're looking forward to next year already.

DARLINGTON NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to inform the House today that an important step has been taken towards extending the life of the Darlington nuclear reactors by another 25 or 30 years. Last week, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission approved the environmental assessment for the refurbishment of the Darlington nuclear generating station.

Refitting the Darlington generating station will be one of Canada's largest capital infrastructure projects. It will create a significant number of local jobs and opportunities for business across Ontario.

The environmental assessment included a hearing by the commission in Courtice last December, where 690 intervenors commented on the refurbishment in the environmental process. I appeared before the commission myself in support of the project.

A refurbished Darlington generating station will provide 35,000 megawatts of clean, reliable, cost-effective electricity for Ontario. I should be clear that Tim Hudak is the only leader who's clear in his position of support of nuclear.

I'd like to commend the OPG vice-president—Wayne Robbins—chief nuclear operator, and all the members of the OPG team on the success of this application. Further, I'd like to extend my appreciation and thanks to the site manager, Brian Duncan, at the Darlington site, and congratulate them on the progress and work on the Darlington Energy Complex.

Mr. Speaker, energy is the future of Ontario. We must get it right, and Darlington serves a very important function in providing safe, reliable, cost-effective energy in Ontario.

POPE FRANCIS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As a result of unanimous consent by the member from Ajax–Pickering, we would stand and offer a silent reflection and prayer on the ascension of the Pope.

The House observed a moment's silence.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Standing order 63(a) provides that “the Standing Committee on Estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 60 and 62 no later than the third Thursday in November in each calendar year.”

The House not having received a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates for certain ministries and offices on Thursday, November 15, 2012, as required by the standing orders of this House, pursuant to standing order 63(b), the estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Ministry of the Attorney General; Cabinet Office; Ministry of Children and Youth Services; Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration; Ministry of Community and Social Services; Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services; Ministry of Consumer Services; Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation; Ministry of Energy; Ministry of Education; Ministry of the Environment; Ministry of Finance; Office of Francophone Affairs; Ministry of Government Services; Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care; Ministry of Infrastructure; Ministry of Labour; Office of the Lieutenant Governor; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Ministry of Natural Resources; Ministry of Northern Development and Mines; Office of the Premier; Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport; Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; Ministry of Transportation; Office of the Assembly; Office of the Auditor General; Office of the Chief Electoral Officer; and the Ombudsman of Ontario are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Pursuant to standing order 61(b), the estimates 2012-13 of these ministries and offices, not having been selected for consideration, are deemed to be received and concurred in.

Report deemed received.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CANADIAN MUSIC WEEK

Hon. Michael Chan: Mr. Speaker, this is Canadian Music Week here in Toronto. Over the past three decades, Canadian Music Week has grown. Today, it is the marquee music event in North America and the largest in Canada. Spanning six nights of performances, showcasing 1,000 bands and artists, highlighting over 60 live music venues, Canadian Music Week is a celebration of our thriving music industry that unites our leaders and talent together to explore, expand and enhance their competitive edge.

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Mr. Speaker, I can't think of a better place to host Canadian Music Week than right here in Ontario. Home to one of the world's most diversified music sectors, one of North America's largest live music scenes and a wealth of creative talent, Ontario is the music capital of Canada. The success of our music industry is the result of the vision, innovation and passion found in our artists and our music industry champions.

That's why our government is proactively partnering with this dynamic sector. We have established an industry working group that includes members of music associations, concert promoters, venue managers, festival organizers and individual artists to create a live music strategy in Ontario, a strategy that will allow the music industry to speak up with a unified voice; a strategy that will give audiences here at home and around the world increased access to the dynamic and diverse performances that are synonymous with Ontario's live music scene. It is a strategy that will promote Ontario as a premier destination for live music.

Speaker, our government is getting the word out. We are turning up the volume and amplifying the economic impact and opportunities that live music presents by boosting audiences, increasing visitor spending and encouraging greater economic activities throughout the province.

Today, the live music sector generates over \$450 million in revenues and contributes more than \$250 million to the Canadian economy. But beyond economic impact, music plays a leading role in enriching our quality of life. Our artists, our exciting events and our songs give us all a pride of place that defines our identity as a people, as a province and as a society, because music has the power to move us. Together, in partnership with our government, Ontario's music sector will continue to prosper.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and our critic, Mr. Chudleigh, I'd like to offer my support for music week in Ontario.

It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to respond to this statement on Canadian Music Week, taking place here in

Ontario from March 19 to 24. You could say, let the music begin.

Canadian Music Week began in 1981 and has grown to become one of Canada's largest and most influential media events. Now in its 31st year, Canadian Music Week draws top industry professionals to participate in a week-long program of activities designed to stimulate the exchange of market intelligence and provide networking opportunities in the music and entertainment field. This year, more than 2,000 national and international delegates are expected to attend from every corner of the globe.

Canadian Music Week is recognized as one of the premier events in North America. Canadian Music Week features innovative discussions, a cutting-edge trade show, an awards show, a film festival and a comedy festival as well. More than 1,000 bands will electrify 60 live music venues across Toronto's downtown core.

Throughout the duration of the event, performers will put on shows at world-class venues including the Air Canada Centre, Massey Hall, the world-famous Horseshoe Tavern and the El Mocambo. The event also makes its way to some trendy smaller venues, such as C'est What?, the Virgin Mobile Mod Club and the Annex WreckRoom.

Many emerging new bands use the festival as an opportunity to get spotted by prospective producers and record labels. This year's festival interview series will feature some of the industry's greatest-known talent. Legendary producer Bob Ezrin, famous for producing bands like Kiss, U2, Taylor Swift and Rod Stewart, will give a talk on the pressures of producing musical giants. Also, Ann and Nancy Wilson, of the well-known band Heart, will discuss their lengthy careers in the music industry.

Canadian Music Week wouldn't be possible without the support of dozens of important sponsors. Notable recognition goes out to Bell, Rogers, SiriusXM radio and Astral Media group for the flagship support over the last several years.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our leader and the entire PC caucus, it gives me great pleasure to extend a warm invitation to all members of this House to come out and support this great Canadian event. You surely won't be disappointed by the vast talent, great excitement and overall good vibes that Canadian Music Week brings in Ontario.

More on a local note, in my riding, I'm very proud to say that Greg Keelor, of Blue Rodeo fame, has a home not far from where I live. Also, the road leads to the Canadian Tire Motorsport Park for the second annual Boots and Hearts festival, scheduled for August 2 to 4, 2013. Canadians performing at the festival will include The Stellas, a band from my riding—a very successful band.

A venue within my riding that showcases music is Port Perry's Town Hall 1873. The Scugog Choral Society celebrates music yearly with the festival—the Borelians Community Theatre.

Uxbridge, some might know, was home to Glenn Gould and also is famous for the Uxbridge Choral Society and OnStage. Uxbridge is also a vibrant community celebrating music, as we all do in Ontario. I enjoy the music festival.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses? The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, whom I will assist even this afternoon.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you for your help, Speaker. It's much appreciated.

Over the past two weeks, not only Ontarians but Canadians everywhere have had their minds, hearts and Canadian souls broken with the passing of Canada's own Stompin' Tom Connors. A true Canadian, he steadfastly remained within the Canadian music world, forgoing the lure of foreign exposure and what would likely have been a more lucrative living. Ontarians are so proud that he chose our province to call home.

He was the storyteller of our Canadian lives, put into music that plays to the core of our nationalism. Although we will miss him tremendously, we have a chance to honour him and to encourage more talented musicians like him when many descend upon Toronto this week. We have the opportunity to support our homegrown Canadian talent so that they can write, perform, entertain and make a viable living within the confines of our country.

Speaker, tomorrow is the beginning of Canadian Music Week. It's a jam-packed week of music showcases; the Crystal Awards dinner; radio, film, music, comedy and indie events; radio music awards; the Independent Music Awards; industry awards; filmfest screenings; the Canadian International Comedy Fest; and the songwriters' and music summits—every day offering a tremendous range of events, both learning and entertaining, that showcase the best of Canadian talent we have right here at home.

Those fortunate enough to be attending the Canadian music awards will be given opportunities such as the mentoring café, where they can speak one-on-one with experts in the field, helping them to move forward in their careers.

Since November, many talented Canadian musicians have competed regionally for a spot at Canadian Music Week, where they can receive national attention and recognition as well as financial and career support. They will also have the opportunity to attend various workshops and showcases, attend the trade show and get a clearer understanding of what the industry has to offer.

The Digital Media Summit will help our Canadian talent to optimize digital and social media strategies. Although so many of our youth are completely plugged into modern social media, they will learn how to turn their knowledge into a marketing tool to help their careers. At this summit, participants will learn to connect with the right people and organizations to further their careers, not only by speaking with those in the know but by being involved through interactive workshops. This hands-on experience will be sure to take them to the next

level they want to achieve. Those interested in a career in radio will enjoy many of the same opportunities through the Radio Interactive: International Radio Summit.

As with all the events, workshops and summits, the panelists, the speakers and other participants represent the best in our industry. And of course, the three-day Music Summit will include the Social Music Summit, the Live Touring Summit, and the Songwriters' and Publishers' Summit, all jam-packed with a significant variety of talented presenters, composers, agents, music business experts, peer engagement and professional advice.

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For those interested, they can attend a summit on integrating music and multimedia, including film, television and games—an opportunity to expand one's scope, to think outside the box and perhaps give their career a kick-start in a different direction.

Speaker, the opportunities that are available for our talented Canadians during Canadian Music Week seem to be endless. The work in organizing Canadian Music Week has obviously been extreme, and by a quick trip through the website—a very inclusive and well-planned schedule of significant events.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I extend our sincere thanks to all those who have put their time, energy, talent and love of the industry into making Canadian Music Week 2013 the success it seems destined to be. I wish each organizer, participant and all who have been part of such a significant undertaking all the best for a very successful event. You make Ontarians and Canadians proud.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure, for a change, to get up and speak here in the Legislature.

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

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

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

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis," and not when it's raining, "during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario" Legislative Assembly "support Ontarians who collect and restore" older "vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure" that "vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be ex-

empt from additional emissions requirements enforced," quite rigorously, "by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into" older "cars and trucks."

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to the Minister of the Environment on this issue. I'm pleased to sign it and support it on behalf of enthusiasts across Ontario.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I couldn't agree more. I add my signature to the many thousands who have already signed, and I'm going to give it to Emily to deliver to the table.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a "Stop the Trades Tax" petition, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

That the Liberal government stop their "job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately."

Mr. Speaker, I support this petition and shall sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data show that there are more than 30,000

Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

“Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase the funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

“Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and under-regulated;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

“(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

“(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of regulation, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers.”

It’s signed by over 500 people, my batch, and I am in agreement and would send this down with page John.

WIND TURBINES

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

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

“Whereas the provincial Liberal government’s study back in 2011 failed to conclude anything more than that it needed to continue to study the turbine sound impacts; and

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

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

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

I support this and will send it with page Ellen from Huron–Bruce.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: “Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data show that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

“Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase the funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

“Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and under-regulated;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

“(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

“(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of regulation, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers.”

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

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean

testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks.”

I affix my name in full support.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of hundreds in my riding, in particular the Graham family. It reads:

“Whereas Avastin is approved for use in the treatment of glioblastoma by Health Canada; and

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“Whereas Avastin is currently covered for this treatment by the provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia; and

“Whereas in a clinical study Mr. Kevin Graham had a positive response to this medication and his tumour stopped growing; and

“Whereas Mr. Graham and other glioblastoma patients have not had positive responses to other chemotherapy drugs currently covered by the government of Ontario;

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

“We respectfully request that Cancer Care Ontario be directed to reassess the importance of funding Avastin for brain cancer patients in Ontario to ensure equal access for Ontarians to the benefit of this treatment.”

I agree with this petition and will sign it, and I wish Mr. Graham all the best in his treatment.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition signed here, by a great many—I think over 2,000—constituents from Oxford county.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for all future generations;

“Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

“Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents’ physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

“Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

“Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as

a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

“That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as not to require disposal in landfills.”

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to present this petition. I affix my signature to it, Mr. Speaker.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jonah Schein: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data show that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

“Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase the funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

“Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and under-regulated;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

“(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

“(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of regulation, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers.”

I agree with this. I'll put my name on it and give it to page Emily.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

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

“Whereas beginning 1 January 2013 WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals

who had previously been exempt from WSIB and had private insurance; and

“Whereas this new financial burden does nothing to improve worker safety and only drives up the cost of doing business in Ontario; and

“Whereas the chair of the WSIB,” in community meetings last year, “admitted this will not help cover the accumulated WSIB debt, but” will only “make the problem worse by adding further liabilities;

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

“To repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119.”

I agree with this and will be signing it.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition, which is part of a 6,000-signature petition that comes from all over Ontario.

“Whereas Ontario ranks ninth of 10 provinces in terms of the total per capita funding allocated to long-term care; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care data show that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care placements and wait-times have tripled since 2005; and

“Whereas there is a perpetual shortage of staff in long-term-care facilities and residents often wait an unreasonable length of time to receive care, e.g., to be attended to for toileting needs; to be fed; to receive a bath; for pain medication. Since 2008, funding for 2.8 paid hours of care per resident per day has been provided. In that budget year, a promise was made to increase the funding to 4.0 hours per resident per day by 2012. This has not been done; and

“Whereas the training of personal support workers is unregulated and insufficient to provide them with the skills and knowledge to assist residents who are being admitted with higher physical, psychological and emotional needs. Currently, training across the province is varied, inconsistent and under-regulated;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately increase the number of paid hours of nursing and personal care per resident per day to 4.0 hours (as promised in 2008);

“(2) develop a plan to phase in future increases so that the number of paid hours per resident per day of nursing and personal care is 5.0 hours by January 2015;

“(3) establish a licensing body, such as a college, that will develop a process of regulation, accreditation and certification for all personal support workers.”

I thank all the 6,000 people in Ontario that have signed this petition, will affix my name to it, and ask page John to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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 second 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Labour for his lead-off speech.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. It is a great pleasure to rise for the second reading of the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013. It is a pleasure, Speaker, to speak to this proposed legislation because this bill goes to the heart of what a government should do. Our legislation would help the working people of our province to be with their loved ones when they're needed the most: at times of major health issues and in tragic situations involving children.

The Leaves to Help Families Act, if passed, would provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job-protected leave so that employees could care for loved ones who have a serious medical condition. The leave would have to be taken in one-week increments, and an employee could be take up to eight weeks per year per family member.

A family member for whom an employee could request unpaid time off to care for could include the employee's spouse; a parent, step-parent or foster parent of the employee or the employee's spouse; a child, step-child or foster child of the employee or the employee's spouse; a grandparent, step-grandparent, grandchild or step-grandchild of the employee or the employee's spouse; the spouse of a child of the employee; the employee's brother or sister; or a relative of the employee who is dependent on the employee for care or assistance.

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Importantly for many in our province, it could be taken to care for family members who live in other countries. We know that many Ontarians were born outside of Canada and, in the greater Toronto area, that percentage is about half. So the importance of having job-protected leave to take care of family members who have a serious medical condition is all the more important when distance separates us from those we care about, and we must travel to be with them.

Our proposed legislation would also entitle parents up to 37 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to provide care to a critically ill child.

In addition, this bill would show compassion by providing up to 52 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for parents of a missing child due to a crime. It would also provide up to 104 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for parents of a child who has died where the disappearance or death is probably the result of a crime.

The hard-working people of our province and those who depend on them deserve nothing less than this.

Every member of this House and all those who are listening to these proceedings today share a common experience. We're either sons or daughters; we have parents and grandparents; we may have spouses and children. In short, we are all part of a family, and when those family members have major health problems, we want to be there because we care.

There are many things that members of this House may debate and have varied opinions on. However, the need for compassion for our loved ones when they face a medical crisis is not one of them. That is because everyone in this House, and those who may be watching these proceedings on television, know that when loved ones face a major health problem, we need to be at their side. We need to care for and reassure those we are closest to: our family.

It is when we face a major medical problem that we realize just how dependent we are on those who care for us, and it is when our family members have major health issues that we realize how dependent they are on us. At these times, our concentration and concerns are not on our day-to-day work but on working to restore those we love to health.

We all know that time stands still when our loved ones face such crises, and nothing else matters—certainly, not that project or email or that deadline we thought required our full attention—because, at such times, our hearts and minds are elsewhere, with those we love who are suffering, who need our attention, who need our care.

This bill, if passed, would give working Ontarians the right to take care of their loved ones during very difficult times without having to worry about losing their jobs. That time of need could be the result of a heart attack or cancer or a car accident. This time of family crisis could also come when a child is rushed to hospital or when a child is missing or dies as a result of crime.

This legislation, if passed, would protect both full- and part-time employees and even those on temporary contracts, and it would help protect their families as well.

We have asked our federal counterparts to provide employment insurance entitlement for those who qualify under this bill who are caring for family members with a serious medical condition, just as they do under our family medical leave legislation. We want the federal government to enter into a partnership with us on this so that these caregivers would also have the income security they deserve.

If passed, this legislation will give the province's working people time: time to care for their elderly parents, time to be with their hospitalized child, time to be with their spouse who has had a stroke or heart attack.

All Ontarians are part of a family. We know that both employers and employees alike can face these difficult situations when loved ones need care. There is an obvious need for this legislation that is all too familiar to anyone who has ever faced the challenge of balancing work with family members who are struggling with major health problems.

I think we can all probably speak of personal circumstances where we may have had to take some time off in order to look after a loved one, someone who is close to us, who is a member of our family and had to face some sort of serious medical condition, and therefore had to take the time off. I think what the challenge really becomes is this: Should we have to make a choice between looking after a loved one in their prolonged need of care or protect our job? This legislation tries to reconcile those two realities that many Ontarians face on a regular basis.

I think all members can tell stories in that regard. It's true for my own experience as well. My father has faced a serious medical condition; he is a heart patient who has gone through a quadruple bypass surgery. I recall very much—I was young at that time; I was a student—when he went through his very serious heart surgery. He was home for a long period of time, and we at home all had to take time to look after him through his rehabilitation, through that whole surgery. Of course, that could be very taxing.

I remember, as a student, missing classes and taking time off—a slightly different situation than somebody who has employment and may have to take time off, but the point being that, when a member of a family goes through a serious medical condition such as my father did, with a very significant heart surgery, you look to your family members. Family members are the best people available to stay at home and to look after them.

That's where we want to provide help. That's the kind of peace of mind I think that we collectively, as an elected body, want to be able to give to the people of Ontario, to say, "In your time of need, where you may have to decide between looking after your loved one—your parent, your child, your spouse—or going to work so you can protect your job, we're making the choice easy. We're going to give you time off; we're going to protect your job so that you are able to look after your loved one."

There was a time when our society moved at a slower pace, but the world has changed. We now have what has been called the sandwich generation: busy parents who often both work and are trying to care for children, and yet, at the same time, often face the additional challenge of caring for aging parents or one another when major health problems arise.

It is at times like these that we realize how much we need the social safety net that we, as government, can

provide. It is then that we realize just how important, how critical, it is to have our jobs protected when loved ones with major health issues need us most. It is then that we realize our human limitations in dealing with family crises that may involve children and may require 100% of our time.

Without the security of knowing that our jobs are protected, sometimes those who need us can be afraid for us and not want to ask for our help, nor want to jeopardize our employment—a livelihood they may depend upon as well. They can be legitimately worried that they are taking us away from our jobs, and this worry is made all the more real in challenging economic times.

For the family and for the parents of working Ontarians, this reluctance to reach out and ask for help can come from the knowledge that their child or spouse does not currently have the job protection they need. They may fear that their request for help might leave their loved one vulnerable or even unemployed. These fears are not unfounded, and that is why we are proposing this bill, but there are also other pressing reasons.

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I would like to speak about some of those who need to care for their aging parents, for instance. As we all know, we have a growing aging population. We are going to have 43% more seniors a decade from now and twice as many seniors 20 years from now, and that is a good thing. I'm sure all those in this House hope to be among them eventually. I, for one, for sure want to live as long and as healthy as I can. But of course, as we all know, people do need more care as they age. There are times involving serious medical conditions, like a broken hip or a stroke, when that human need is critical. Our seniors, our aging parents, naturally want to be at home as long as they can, and it is care by family members that helps ensure that ability to remain where they want to be: at home, where they are most comfortable and feel most secure; at home, where there is less expense for our health care system and less pressure on needed health services.

Our government, through my colleague the Minister of Health, Deb Matthews, has launched a care strategy to help seniors remain healthy and provide better-quality care in the home, where they desire to be. Our proposed family caregiver leave recognizes the wider role family members play in health care. But to provide that care and fulfill that role, working Ontarians need to know their jobs are protected and will be there while they look after their loved ones.

As we all know, taking care of a loved one who is ill does not solely consist of accompanying them to MRIs or chemotherapy, but involves staying with them afterward and helping them in every way necessary. It is a job that has no breaks. It is a job that does not concern itself with the fact you may need to be up in the morning for work but that you need to tend to your loved one at night.

The last time we introduced this bill, we heard from a woman named Marcella. Her experience is touching and compelling. Marcella told us the following story about her experience:

"I took care of my mom for about three years. I'm the sole caregiver for her. I've been living here in Canada for about 28 years. The only family that I have now is my brother, who is in Montreal, and my mother, who lives with me. We're not fortunate to have a lot of relatives ... so all of the pressure and her care is on me. Two years of the three that I've been taking care of my mother I was in a full-time job. I don't know how I did it, but I managed to do both things.

"Those very same two years were the worst years for my mother. She was on radiation, chemotherapy, surgery. But what I have to say is that caregiving is not just bringing them to the appointments or bringing them to CT scans and MRIs—being a caregiver is also being there in the middle of the night, being there all the time. We don't have a break; you can't tell a disease" or injury, "Okay, I need a few days off and then I'll be back and take care of you."

So I really hope that you will support this bill.

"As caregivers, we are not invincible and we need support. I definitely need to feel, if I get a full-time job and my mother winds up being eligible for surgery, I can be there for her and not worry about it. Right now I am in a part-time job, and this is something I have to think about every day."

Clearly, Marcella's story would resonate with many, many Ontarians across the province—stories we may have shared in some way or another, stories we definitely must have heard in our communities across the province. This true and genuinely touching account resonates with many of us who have aging parents or other loved ones with a serious medical condition and who, at the same time, are trying to juggle their work responsibilities. Stories like Marcella's put a human face on the need for this bill. My heart goes out to all those in these situations and to their loved ones.

Again, I know from my own experience and the experiences of my constituents the real need for time to care for those we love. Needing time like this can be stressful and difficult for working Ontarians where they don't have the security of knowing that their employment, their means of providing for themselves and their family, is protected and is secure. At times like this, the very last thing we need to worry about is being out of work. In those situations, where parents are faced with a critically ill child, their attention and time must be focused on the crisis at hand. That is why the leaves in our bill, leaves for parents of critically ill children and children who are missing or who die where it's probably the result of a crime, are so important.

These leaves complement the newly extended federal income supports by providing up to 37 weeks of job-protected leave to care for a critically ill child, up to 52 weeks of job-protected leave for employees who are parents of a child who has disappeared where it is probably the result of a crime, and up to 104 weeks of job-protected leave for employees who are parents of a child who has died where it is probably the result of crime. And as I said, Speaker, employees eligible for

critically ill child care leave may also be entitled to federal employment insurance for most of their leave, while employees eligible for crime-related child death or disappearance leave may be entitled to the Federal Income Support for Parents of Murdered or Missing Children grant. All parents can sympathize with other mothers or fathers who face these difficult situations.

Ontario currently provides a number of supports to parents who face crises. Ontario victim services, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, provides direct services to victims of crime across Ontario and funds community organizations that deliver support services to victims. The direct services include the Financial Assistance for Families of Homicide Victims program. The Financial Assistance for Families of Homicide Victims program helps eligible parents, whether biological or adoptive, and spouses of homicide victims by providing up to \$10,000 per homicide. The Vulnerable Victims and Family Fund helps victims of crime and families of homicide victims participate more fully in the criminal court process. Financial and court-based supports include helping both victims of crime and families of homicide victims to travel to attend court during key points in a criminal proceeding—for instance, at trial—and providing vulnerable victims with interpretation services when they are observing a criminal proceeding. Victims of crime and families of homicide victims would apply through Ontario's Victim/Witness Assistance Program, which is available in all 54 court districts across the province.

Our province also provide a variety of supportive services to parents of children who face a health crisis. The Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program, which is managed by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, helps parents with some of the extra costs of caring for a child who has a severe disability. A parent or a legal guardian whose child is under 18 years of age, lives at home and has a severe disability may be eligible to receive help under this program, depending on the family's income. Parents can get between \$25 and \$440 a month to help with costs such as travel to doctors and hospitals, special shoes and clothes, parental relief, wheelchair repairs, assistive devices, hearing aids, hearing aid batteries, prescription drugs, dental care and eyeglasses. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services funds two programs that can give families a break or respite from the day-to-day care of their child with special needs. Under out-of-home respite, families of children with multiple special needs can receive up to seven days of respite per year, provided in a location other than their own home. The child must be under 18 years of age, have multiple special needs because of a physical or developmental disability, and live at home and need care 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

There is also enhanced respite funding. This grant is paid to families who are caring for a child who is medically fragile and/or depends on a technological device, needing care 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and is paid in addition to other respite services. Families may

be eligible for up to \$3,500 per child per year. The child must be under 18 years of age, live at home, and need intensive care and constant monitoring on a 24-hour basis.

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Speaker, to illustrate the need for our proposed legislation, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013: This past Thursday, I held an event in the Ottawa area to help spread the word about the need for this bill. At this event were two parents, Carlos and Patricia Munante, whose child Gabriel, affectionately called Gabo, had been diagnosed with cancer in the past year. Carlos Munante, a federal government worker, was fortunate to have accumulated enough leave to take time off when son Gabriel, who is seven years old, was diagnosed with leukemia.

This is what Carlos said at that particular event: "I can't imagine having had to go to work those first four months. I think this [legislation] is very important for families."

His wife, Patricia, who works for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and has had to take significant time off to look after her son Gabriel, believes the proposed changes would be helpful as well. She said to me, "We have seen some families where ... if they're from out of town, one of the parents is unable to be with their child because they do need to work."

Speaker, we need to ensure that Patricia, who is in a provincially regulated workplace, can access the same job-protected leave and EI benefits that Carlos can as a federal employee. We desperately hope the situation here never becomes critical, but for families across Ontario, it may be.

It was really generous, of course, of the Munantes to welcome me and the MPP from Ottawa-Orléans, Phil McNeely, into their home to talk about their family situation and the health of their son Gabriel, a beautiful young man. I think it would be difficult for any parent. As the father of a young 10-month-old, my heart was sinking as I was talking to the family.

The family, of course, had a really strong, bold face, as any parents would do, smiling, laughing, making sure that Gabriel has everything he needs so that he can work through this critical time.

But that whole meeting with Patricia and Carlos and Gabriel highlighted to me how important it is that we have legislation like this, how important it is that we ensure that parents, who love their children so much, have that opportunity to stay at home and focus on their child and nothing else: not work, no other things in life but their child, so that they can be with him or her, to ensure that that child is growing, is strong and is able to fight any challenge that he or she may be facing.

That's why we need critically ill child leave so parents can take up to 37 weeks to take care of a child and so that all Ontario parents can access the federal benefits.

This is also a family that has chewed up a lot of vacation time, in the case of the Munantes. It's good that dad Carlos had vacation time available, but that's not true

for everyone. That's why we have introduced family caregiver leave, so if mom Patricia needs up to eight weeks off, she has the job protection. A family like this illustrates why we have urged the federal government to follow our lead and provide job protection and EI access for family caregiver leave.

Not every situation, thankfully, is a critically ill child. There are also a lot of other situations where workers have to take care of a brother, sister or parent. They need to be protected, too.

Speaker, in relating the story of these brave parents who are caring for their child with cancer, I will take the opportunity to thank the Canadian Cancer Society for their support for our proposed legislation.

Canadian Cancer Society Vice-President Rowena Pinto has said, in a March 6, 2013, news release, that, "Bill 21 is welcome news for those who need to take leave from work to care for a loved one with cancer.... This legislation will allow families to concentrate on supporting their loved ones instead of worrying about losing jobs." Ms. Pinto also explained that, "Cancer is more than a health issue. It is also a complex social issue. With approximately 22% of Canadians grappling with caregiving responsibilities for seriously ill family members, the physical, emotional and financial burden on caregivers is a veritable strain on many families."

That is why we introduced this important proposed legislation. And we have received other supportive words of encouragement regarding this proposed legislation.

Sue VanderBent, the executive director of the Ontario Home Care Association, has said, "Home care systems are dependent on the support of families and loved ones. For many, the caregiving responsibilities are intense, emotional and lengthy in duration and the demands can result in absence from work. The Leaves to Help Families will provide family caregivers with peace of mind related to their employment. The members of the Ontario Home Care Association are hopeful that all parties will move quickly to pass this legislation."

Emanuel Carvalho, executive vice-president of health care for the Service Employees International Union, has said the following: "This legislation will provide urgently needed relief to overstretched families who are caring for a loved one while juggling responsibilities like work and raising children."

Mary Lewis, the executive director of mission of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario has said, "We are very pleased to support the Ontario government's proposed legislation, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013, and congratulate the government on taking this important step to protect the job security of Ontarians caring for loved ones. The Heart and Stroke Foundation recognizes that the health and support of caregivers is a vital aspect in a person's recovery from heart disease and stroke. We look forward to working together to further support caregivers through our health and information programs, like Living with Heart Disease and Living with Stroke, in order to

give Ontarians much-needed support when filling this role after a tragic event."

David Harvey, who is the chief public policy and program initiatives officer of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, commented the following: "The Alzheimer Society of Ontario recognizes the commitment of the new government to improve the supports available to family caregivers. Families value being able to support their family members to live in the community. Families indeed are the front line of community care and it only makes sense for new 'enablers' so that people can integrate family and employment responsibilities."

Lastly, Lisa Levin, chair of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, said the following in supporting this bill: "The Ontario Caregiver Coalition, a collaborative that works to advance the interests of caregivers, is pleased that our decision-makers are recognizing the important contributions made by caregivers. Based on national data, it is estimated that caregiving contributes between \$24 billion and \$31 billion annually to maintain the health of Canadians. Caregivers need our support to continue their critical role. This is the beginning of a broader dialogue on economic and social supports to help those who take care of their loved ones."

Speaker, our bill is for those struggling to balance work and care commitments. And in the most difficult and most tragic of situations, where parents face the disappearance of a child or the death of a child as the probable result of crime, our proposed legislation reaches out and compassionately provides job-protected leave for those who face these trying personal times of crises.

We shouldn't have to worry about being unemployed on top of struggling to deal with the medical crisis of a loved one or a tragic situation involving our children, because when the chips are down, you want to know that someone is there for you, that someone is watching your back. This is an opportunity for government to show the compassion our citizens need and deserve in their time of need. That is what is at the heart of this proposed legislation, and that is the motivation for our bill.

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If passed, our proposed legislation would assist working people and the economy in other ways as well. It will help protect and retain needed employees who might otherwise have to leave their employment or might lose it. Keeping skilled labour is good for employers, employees and the overall Ontario economy alike. The Ontario Ministry of Finance projects a shortfall of employees ranging from 200,000 to 1.8 million by 2031, according to a 2010 study entitled *People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People*, by former Seneca College president Dr. Rick Miner. Skilled labour helps keep our province competitive, and that is important, especially in these times. Job-protected leave during periods of crisis is one thing we can do to help our skilled labour force on the job.

Our new government, in the past 30 days, has worked hard to protect working Ontarians and families. Since being sworn in on February 11, Premier Kathleen Wynne

and members of her cabinet have visited communities across the province, met with important partners inside and outside government, and introduced a number of new initiatives and investments to get government working for the people of Ontario.

To help build a job-creation economy, Premier Wynne has held five jobs round tables with private sector, labour, education and training partners across Ontario.

Last month, Speaker, Ontario created 35,300 jobs, including nearly 21,000 jobs for young people. In February, Ontario created nearly 70% of all new jobs in Canada. In fact, Ontario employment has increased by 415,500 net new jobs since the economic low in June 2009, with full-time employment up 380,600 and part-time employment up 34,900.

To help strengthen communities, the government held the first northern cabinet meeting since 1995.

We're also investing \$100 million over five years to support world-leading brain research which will improve health care.

Ontario is also providing grants for community groups to clean up Great Lakes beaches or shorelines and to restore wetlands.

To build a fairer, compassionate society, our government has introduced this legislation that would, if passed, create these three new categories of job-protected leave: family caregiver leave, leave for the parents of critically ill children, and leave for parents of children who are missing or who die as the probable result of a crime.

We've introduced this bill so people can take care of their loved ones without fear of losing their employment. Speaker, our proposed legislation would provide reasonable protection for both employers and employees alike. And while we will ask our federal counterparts to provide employment insurance to those who would be eligible for the family caregiver leave to care for family members with a serious medical condition, it would, for these working individuals, be unpaid.

If passed, this proposed legislation will be enforced by Ministry of Labour employment standards officers, who could step in if employees' rights are denied. I will add that the strategies, tools and resources that we have developed over the past few years to successfully deal with employment standards claims give us an enhanced ability to enforce this proposed legislation, as well as other provisions of the Employment Standards Act.

Speaker, this legislation would be in the interest of all workplace parties, and that is because, whether we are employers or employees, we are all part of a family. We know what families go through in times of major health problems. It's in nobody's interest, if you have a loved one not well at home, that you have to go to work and, instead of focusing on your work, your mind is at home thinking about the loved one. That doesn't help the employer. That doesn't help your work. That doesn't make the workplace any more productive. It's probably best that that employee is at home, looking after their loved one so that they can help their loved one, their child, their parent get healthy as soon as possible so they can be back

at work as soon as possible with no worries in mind, and with focus on work, not at home. This type of leave will create a win-win for both employees and employers.

This bill is for young working families or single parents needing to care for their child in hospital with a serious medical condition. It is for the wife seeing her husband through a difficult period of chemotherapy. It is for someone helping to care for that elderly parent who is suffering major health problems as a result of a fall or the aftermath of a stroke.

This proposed legislation is our way of saying to the people of this province that we will help protect you as you protect your loved one. The same spirit of compassion that inspired this bill also led our government to introduce family medical leave back in 2004. The current family medical leave legislation provides unpaid job-protected leave for employees when a family member is facing a terminal condition.

Our proposed family caregiver leave would apply in cases of a serious medical condition, even where there is no significant risk of imminent death. Our proposed family caregiver leave would be in addition to family medical leave. This means that if you are caring for a loved one under the proposed family caregiver leave and their condition becomes terminal, you would also be entitled to family medical leave.

Our province also provides personal emergency leave. This leave may be taken for personal illness, injury or medical emergency of an employee, or the death, illness, injury or medical emergency of or matters concerning certain family members or relatives who are dependent on you for care and assistance. Personal emergency leave is unpaid job-protected leave that allows you to take up to 10 days per calendar year away from work in workplaces of 50 or more employees.

Our proposed family caregiver leave legislation would assist those Ontarians who are most vulnerable, and that is because the burden of caregiving lies more heavily on those without the financial means to provide care. Our bill will assist the poor. It will help the immigrant family new to Canada, already burdened with adapting to a new land. It will help single parents. It will assist single adult children caring for an elderly parent. And it will assist women, to whom we all know a disproportionate share of the responsibility of caring for a family member still falls.

When we and those we love face these very difficult situations, the last thing we need is to fear being left unemployed because we need time away from work. Working Ontarians should not have to choose between their jobs and helping family members with major health problems. That is why our new government promised to reintroduce this bill. That is why we have fulfilled that promise and taken this action for the working people of this province.

Another goal of our new government, which I'm sure we all share, is to make Ontario the healthiest place in North America, both to grow up in and to grow old in. We all know that, across Canada, we have an aging

population, and it is clear that this puts pressure on our health care system. So when the opportunity is there to help seniors facing a serious medical condition stay in their home, where the financial cost to society is lower, we believe making that happen makes sense for everyone.

We can and should recognize the vital role family members play in health care and make sure they can play this role without fear of job loss. As both the Minister of Health and the minister responsible for seniors have said, our proposed family caregiver leave would support our government's Seniors Strategy. This strategy recognizes that providing good care at home allows our older Ontarians to remain where they want to be, while at the same time relieving the stress on our hospital and long-term-care system. This is an important step forward. But to take the step, family caregivers have to be able to be there. Caregiving for our older loved ones, of course, is not new, but due to medical advances, families are now providing more complex care for a longer period of time than ever before. Stresses on the health care system mean that more and more family members are taking on more caregiving responsibilities, and they need support and preparation for their new role.

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That is why our government introduced Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors. This plan, introduced by the provincial government at the beginning of 2012, represents a significant shift in direction for health care in the province, with an unprecedented focus on providing better community care and, specifically, home care. Over the next three years, funding for three million additional personal-support-worker hours will provide care at home for 90,000 more seniors.

The plan also specifies that the Hospital at Home model of care promotes increased patient satisfaction, reduces treatment complications, increases provider work satisfaction and reduces pressure on the acute sector as a result of fewer patients waiting for hospital admission from emergency departments. Our government is planning on providing more care at home across the province through innovative models such as the Hospital at Home program.

Speaker, Ontario provides other assistance to our seniors and their caregivers. Our province offers the Assistive Devices Program, which includes the Home Oxygen Program. The objective of the Assistive Devices Program is to provide support and funding to Ontario residents who have long-term physical disabilities and to provide access to personalized assistive devices appropriate for an individual's basic needs. Eligibility includes any Ontario resident who has a valid Ontario health card issued in their name and has a physical disability of six months or longer. The Assistive Devices Program pays up to 75% of the cost of equipment; for example, breathing aids. For others, such as hearing aids, the Assistive Devices Program contributes a fixed amount. The Home Oxygen Program pays 100% of the Assistive Devices Program price for oxygen and related equipment

for seniors 65 years of age or older and for individuals 64 years of age or younger who are on social assistance, residing in a long-term-care facility or who are receiving professional services through a community care access centre, and 75% of the Assistive Devices Program price for all others.

The Ontario Drug Benefit program covers most of the cost of 3,800 prescription drug products, some nutrition products and some diabetic testing agents. A person is eligible for Ontario Drug Benefit program benefits if he or she lives in Ontario, has a valid Ontario health card, and at least one of these statements applies: He or she is 65 years of age or older; he or she lives in a long-term-care home or a home for special care; he or she is enrolled in the Home Care Program; he or she has high drug costs relative to income and is registered in the Trillium Drug Program; or he or she receives social assistance through Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program. The Trillium Drug Program helps people who have high prescription drug costs relative to their household income. The Trillium Drug Program covers all drugs approved under the Ontario Drug Benefit program.

Our province also provides the Special Drugs Program, which covers the full cost of certain outpatient drugs used to treat a number of serious conditions, including:

- cystic fibrosis, which is a lung disease;
- thalassemia, a blood disease;
- zidovudine and pentamidine for HIV infection, a disease of the immune system;
- erythropoietin for anemia due to end-stage kidney disease;
- cyclosporin after solid organ or bone marrow transplant;
- children with growth failure;
- clozapine for schizophrenia; and
- Gaucher's disease, which is a genetic disorder.

Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care also supports a number of community programs for persons with acquired brain injury. An acquired brain injury is an injury that occurs after birth and may result from a trauma or externally caused physical injury—such as a motor vehicle crash, assault or fall—or may result from an internal medical condition such as an aneurysm, tumour or meningitis. There are adult day programs for people with acquired brain injuries in a number of communities across the province. Acquired brain injury outreach services provide support to individuals with acquired brain injuries, living alone or with families, in the community. Acquired brain injury services are also available through the community care access centres to support individuals with acquired brain injuries at home.

Asking for help is often hard for aged loved ones, because they don't want to be a bother or think they will be a burden to busy younger family members. Our proposed legislation would help ensure that needed and necessary time to care.

As Minister of Labour, I am aware that our province faces a skills shortage. Whether it is the high-tech or construction industry, skilled employees are one of the important keys to a prosperous future for our province. Without the right skilled employees to do the job, the job will be done elsewhere, outside of Ontario. Keeping these skilled workers here when they encounter the same family health crises we all face is a matter, then, of keeping our Ontario economy strong and secure. It would make good economic sense to provide this caregiver leave rather than see these skilled employees leave their employers.

For those who have questioned whether this proposed family caregiver leave could be taken advantage of, our bill provides reasonable protections for employers as well. First, for an employee to be entitled to the leave, a physician would have to issue a medical certificate stating that the family member has a serious medical condition. A copy of this certificate would have to be provided to an employer upon request. Secondly, this proposed leave for those taking care of family members who have a serious medical condition would be unpaid. We will ask our federal counterparts to make those who take this leave eligible for employment insurance benefits. If passed, these proposed leaves would have reasonable controls in place to balance the interests of all workplace parties.

All Ontarians, whether they are employees or employers, can, in a heartbeat, face a situation in which a family member suddenly has a serious medical condition. Major health problems do not discriminate. We share a common bond both as family members and as human beings vulnerable to sickness and injury, and it is the most vulnerable among us who would benefit most from this bill. We know that those who financially have the least have the least ability to use resources when caring for family members who have major health problems. For those for whom normal, everyday life is a struggle, how much more is this true when they face the additional burden of caring for family members dealing with serious medical conditions? It is these caregivers who may also have the greatest fear of job loss. It is also these employees who may have the least in terms of benefit provisions that would assist or protect them.

Again, our bill, if passed, would help the most vulnerable among us to protect those they love who are struggling with major health issues. A working mother should not have to hesitate to take time away from her critically-ill or injured child or her husband with a serious medical condition because she fears losing her income. A single parent should not have to choose between their employment and being there for an elderly father or mother who has just suffered a stroke or broken hip.

I know, as well, from the experience of my constituents, the struggles of those who immigrate to this country, of those who are dealing with learning a new language and those who may face job barriers or who are making an adjustment to a new culture. For these individuals, their job may be the one security, the one

anchor of hope, in a life surrounded by challenges. This proposed job-protected leave for family caregivers will help these immigrants during their period of adjustment to a new country and province.

There's another group, of course, to whom an unequal share of the responsibility of caregiving has fallen, and that is the poor and the marginalized. Those who have the least have the least resources to deal with health crises, so they are vulnerable. I do not believe that anyone in this House would want a mother to worry about providing for her child, who is critically ill or injured, because she fears she will lose all her significant part of that family's livelihood.

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Certainly, any employee who is working part-time or on a temporary contract can also be among those who are among the most vulnerable and who may have the greatest fear of losing their job when they need to take time off when family health crises occur. Our bill would make all employees who are covered by the Ontario Employment Standards Act eligible for this proposed job-protected family caregiver leave. Whether they are full-time, part-time or on a temporary contract, Ontario employees covered by the Employment Standards Act would be eligible for this leave. That is only fair and only just.

Speaker, since I've introduced this bill in this House, I've heard from many parents from across the province who have written to me, demonstrating their support for this bill and how it will help them personally. I just want to read a small paragraph from one email that I received shortly after I introduced this bill in the House two weeks ago. This couple, which has a young child who is fighting a particular kind of cancer, said this to me in an email:

"I saw you are advocating for helping families for care for sick loved ones and wanted to reach out and say thank you, and to ask if there's anything we can do to help. Do you need photos of families? We did a family photo shoot around Christmas and have high-res versions. Do you need photos of you talking to affected families to help with promotion? Signatures? I'm sure you are connected to Candlelighters, but if there's anything we can do, please let us know."

This is from a mother who wants to ensure that this type of leave is available for her and her husband so they can look after their child—a direct plea of support, of endorsement, so that we, as members in the House, are able to do the right thing and pass this legislation in law.

Speaker, we know that the one thing working Ontarians need most when it comes to caring for family members with major health issues is the time to be with their loved one. This proposed legislation is part of our new government's commitment to ensure that families across Ontario have the support they need when they need it the most.

Our proposed Leaves to Help Families Act is a matter of compassion and caring for those who provide care to their loved ones. It is simply the right thing to do for

Ontario families. With our proposed legislation, we will be able to tell working Ontarians, “Go. Go and take care of your loved one’s needs. With the protections we have provided, you can make that a priority. Go and be reassured that your job will be there when you return.” It says, Speaker, that, “We understand why you care and why you need to be there.”

I really hope that we as legislators, duly elected by the people of Ontario, as we debate this legislation, remember those stories in our communities—perhaps remember our own personal experiences where we may have had to take time off, where we were faced with a choice of either looking after our loved one at home—our key priority—or to be at work so that we can protect our job. I hope we can think about all those situations and that we work together in a direction where we are able to pass this bill.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that I have heard and received very supportive words from both the critics from Her Majesty’s opposition and from the third party. I thank them, and I look forward to working with them as we go through this debate and, of course, to committee and third reading, because I think families are looking at us. Families are hoping that we will go through this important process, that we will pass these leaves and that we’ll pass them into law so that they can have access to these leaves as soon as possible so that they can start looking after their loved ones now, not at some other time in the future.

Speaker, this bill is the right thing to do for the working people of our province and for those they love. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. I look forward to further debate on this bill. I look forward to working with all members on this very important piece of legislation so that together we can do the right thing: pass this bill into law as soon as we can and give the relief that families deserve so much so that they have the freedom, the choice, to look after their loved ones at home.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the minister’s remarks regarding this very important bill that I know we’d debated before the prorogation of the House.

There’s a couple of things that I have concerns about. One is the way it’s mentioned regarding the federal government in hopes that they pass on the information. We requested the federal government to support through EI. I would hope that further negotiations—when legislation comes forward like this, that there’s in-depth negotiations to ensure that those sorts of things come forward.

But the one concern that I brought up when this legislation was debated previously, Mr. Speaker, was the concern with my own aunt, for example. She had a knee replacement and was paralyzed through an improperly placed epidural. The difficulty there is that she has trouble getting to and from any appointments now—she’s

paralyzed—and my mother tries to assist her on a regular basis. But in order for her to utilize this potential legislation, if and when it comes about and passes, if she had to take time off work, she’d have to take a week off in order to take her for a half-day appointment to find out what can be done regarding that. That’s where the concern comes in: the ability or the flexibility of the legislation to accommodate individuals in such situations. I mean, it’s horrendous to think that an individual would be paralyzed through an epidural being put in for a simple knee replacement, but those things are happening. In order to assist those individuals—the siblings, the kids have moved away, and it’s very difficult. If she can get in for an appointment on short notice, then my mother, when she was working, would have had to take the entire week off to assist her for half a day’s appointment.

So anything that would be able to come along with some flexibility that way would go a long way in ensuring that the right thing is being done for a lot more people in the province of Ontario to assist in the best manner possible.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened to nearly the entire hour that the Minister of Labour stood up and spoke about this bill. There’s little in the bill that one can criticize, save and except that one has to know from the outset that this is unpaid leave. This is unpaid leave to people who have to take time off work, many of whom will have a very difficult time finding the wherewithal to continue or to give the kind of care that they might want to give to a loved one for a period of up to eight weeks.

I am mindful that there is going to be some negotiation with the federal government, but also remember, if this comes out of EI claims, that nearly 50% of the people of the province of Ontario find themselves, when they require employment insurance, not to be eligible for it. And so I don’t know how this is going to work when more than 50% of the people get laid off from their employment and they find out that EI does not help them. Is the same more than 50% not going to happen in this case as well? I would hazard to guess, probably. That’s something we cannot tie ourselves to, and we cannot look at this bill as going to solve the problems of anyone. Will it help someone to retain their job over that period of six to eight weeks that they might be off? Yes, it will. Is that a good thing? Yes, it is. But is it going to help a family to survive when there may, in fact, be no money coming in, is a totally different story.

I’d just like to comment, in the 30 seconds—I listened to the minister throughout, and he has done what many ministers do: talk about the new government—the new government. It’s the same 50 members that are over there. It’s the same 50 people who were here under the McGuinty government. It’s the same cabinet, by and large, although they’ve shuffled around. It is not a new government. It is a recast government, if you want, but it is hardly a new government, and what is coming out in this bill and in other bills is not much different than we saw under Mr. McGuinty.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to congratulate the new Minister of Labour for this bill that he has introduced, Bill 21. It's a wonderful, wonderful bill. I was listening carefully to the minister when he was presenting. As a former nurse, I was thinking about these individuals that I know that went through a very difficult time, like Louise, who lost her son Jean-François at one year old. Three or five days of absence didn't help her to recover from this very tragic incident in her life.

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I was thinking about this neighbour of mine who suffered from cancer not one time, not twice, but three times. She could have received the help of her family members, but this was not either in their collective agreement or in their work standard, where they could take a leave of absence, with or without pay, to take care of a family member without putting their job security in jeopardy.

Also, I remember these parents who had a very critically ill child. They needed to take time off to come to Toronto for a very specialized treatment, and they had to quit their job to be able to do that.

Bill 21 will help out these parents that I've mentioned, and others. Thank you.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's great to stand up and talk to Bill 21. It's good to see it come back. There were some issues with it before the prorogation, and we're glad to see that some of the comments and recommendations that we have made as a party have been brought in.

I myself am from a family with a mother who's 95, and we're able to keep her at home. We're one of the few lucky families that have eight brothers and sisters in the area, who are required to clean the house or to take meals in every day. This is clearly something the vast majority of this province don't have access to or aren't lucky enough to have.

This is a required bill that will look after some of the needs as we try to keep our elderly parents and, actually, brothers and sisters at home. That's really where they want to stay. It's better for the province and better for the parents if they can remain at home as long as they can.

One of the deficiencies, as mentioned by my colleague from Oshawa, again, is that minimum of one week. I think that a lot of the events that we have to look after—doctors' appointments, or just different trips, maybe only shopping—don't require a minimum of a week off. To make it much more flexible, we think we would need to allow people to take that on a daily basis. It just makes sense, and I think it would help contain the costs of such a program and of the person involved as well. It's unpaid leave, and you'd want the flexibility to take the time as needed.

As well, it's something that we have to look forward to in the future. We want to make sure the rules are there to allow us to live in dignity and remain in our homes as

long as possible. This bill goes a long way towards that, and we're hoping to see some changes through the committee process so we'll fix this up. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for questions and comments in this round.

I return to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the members from Oshawa, Beaches–East York and Stormont–Dundas–South Glangarry for their remarks and comments on this bill.

One thing at the outset, Speaker: I noticed that pretty much everyone had a personal story to share. I think this is one of those issues that we all know about personally, either be it from our very own personal experiences of family circumstances or those in the communities that we represent.

I will say again, like I said earlier in my comments, that I think we have to draw on those personal experiences as we're debating this bill, because we will probably see a lot of those situations reflected in this bill. And if not—it will allow us to improve the bill. I've already heard a few of those comments, and I appreciate that, as to how this bill could be improved. I look forward, as the Minister of Labour, to working with the members from the opposition and members from the government side to see how we can improve the bill so that it does capture all the situations and the circumstances that we need to in order to look after our loved ones.

There are three different kinds of leave that are in this bill. One is the family caregiver leave, which is up to eight weeks of unpaid job protection. The member from Beaches–East York is right: That particular leave does not have employment insurance attached to it, and that's something that we are working on with the federal government. We're stressing to the federal government to extend EI protection, and I encourage the members opposite to write to the federal minister responsible as well, asking that EI protection be extended.

As for the other two leaves, which are the critically ill child leave and that leave dealing with missing or dead children because of a crime, those two leaves do come along with EI protection or a federal support grant, so there is financial support that has been extended through the federal government.

Again, Speaker, I look forward to the debate and look forward to working with all members. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 21 today. It was also nice to see the former Deputy Premier of the province, George Smitherman, here earlier this morning with a delegation of South Korean businessmen from Samsung and whatnot. I'm sure he's knocking on a few more doors around Queen's Park, looking to get a few more contracts signed up now, even though he's no longer in the House permanently.

When this bill was introduced, we had a number of reservations. When this bill was originally introduced, before prorogation, we had a number of reservations about that bill. As I mentioned when the minister first introduced the bill, there's a good way to do public policy and there's a bad way.

Fifteen months ago, the previous minister presented the previous bill, and we criticized it and we had reservations about it. We brought forward points that demonstrated that the legislation was inconsistent with federal legislation. It's nice to see that the minister, the new minister—not the new minister of the new government, but the new minister of the old government—has listened to us and has taken those thoughtful recommendations and suggestions into account. They did come back with a better bill, and of course they do deserve recognition for it.

But there are a couple of things in the bill that I think—I hope the minister will listen and the bureaucracy at the Ministry of Labour will listen—and that goes along with what some have already suggested about having to use it up in weeks instead of in more flexible daily periods.

Also, a week in the bill is defined as seven consecutive days starting on Sunday and ending on Saturday. This is just a little bit of a legal technicality, but as you read through the bill, it suggests—no, it doesn't suggest; it states very clearly, for example, that if you had a child who died, your leave would come to an end in the week of your child's death—just think of it—and you have to end that leave. If your child did pass away on a Friday or Saturday, Saturday would be the last of your leave.

I think there are really important considerations that we provide some flexibility in what a week is, and the terms and the criteria for this. I think it would be much better if we defined a week as any seven consecutive days or up to any seven consecutive days. I think it would be far more beneficial.

Speaker, I failed to mention that I will be sharing my time with my deputy critic for labour, the member for Chatham–Kent.

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It's great to see that the minister has listened, but they still need to do a far better job of listening. Take, for example, the treatment that this government is now subjecting our independent contractors to with Bill 119. Just a couple of weeks ago, we had over 500 construction contractors here at the Legislature, demonstrating and rallying against the new restrictions and costly burdens this government has placed on independent construction contractors, forcing them to buy needless insurance, doing nothing to help their safety—actually, doing everything to drive more people into the underground economy—and putting more people out of work. This is what this government is doing with Bill 119. Even though the minister spoke very clearly, in Bill 21, that they recognize that jobs, and skilled jobs, are exceptionally, fundamentally important, and suggests that Bill 21 will help this, at the same time, Bill 119 is destroying jobs, destroying independent contractors.

At that time, I gave the example of a young contractor from Hamilton. He's a young fella, 25, married, has a six-month-old daughter. He now has to choose between saving for his child's and his family's future—their education and their well-being—or purchasing unnecessary, useless, redundant, costly WSIB insurance.

I do hope the minister can take a few moments out of his busy schedule and actually look out the window, when there are hundreds of contractors demonstrating, and think of them and think of the people who work, and work hard, to pay the bills and help contribute to the social safety net we all think is so important in this province.

WSIB Bill 119 is about insurance, and of course Bill 21 is insurance as well. Like the member for Beaches–East York mentioned, the eight-week family caregiver portion is not part of EI; the other components are. And this bill now comes more in line and is more consistent with the federal legislation.

Insurance is what's supposed to cover us in events like family illnesses or tragedies. Our workplace insurance is failing our workers and our contractors throughout the province. That's why we on this side of the House, in both our white papers and in our private members' bills—we've introduced a bill that would not only repeal the onerous conditions of Bill 119, but also free up the marketplace and end the monstrous exclusive monopoly of workplace insurance by the WSIB and allow private sector insurers to compete and provide workplace insurance at a competitive price, and provide value to the people who would be obliged to buy insurance.

Of course, we know that whenever you get any monopoly, costs go up and service goes down, and the WSIB is no exception. We see them now with a \$14-billion unfunded liability, and there are those in the Liberal Party who would actually like to change the rules, which would increase it up to \$18 billion.

I was actually speaking, the other day, to one fella, Roger Tickner, who is a renowned safety expert in the province on insurance. He was telling me about how in 1984, he attended a meeting with the WSIB—the Ministry of Labour at the time—and they said they were going to get that unfunded liability wrestled under control. That was in 1984, and they were going to do it quickly and soon. That's only about 30 years ago, and what has it done but grown and grown and grown?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: They didn't do it under the Tories, too.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The minister is right. That has been all over all parties—parties on this side of the House—the third party—and the Liberals. That unfunded liability has continued to increase—

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the minister are having quite an interchange here about blaming each other, but listen: How can you blame each other? We're all to blame for creating exclusive monopolies and allowing them to remain in force. It's not a case of just pointing our

fingers; it's a case of looking in the mirror and saying, "Let's fix things."

There's a real financial fiasco, debt-and-deficit debacle and jobs crisis in this province. The party opposite, the government, seems intent to continue. They don't really listen to the winds of change that are about their policies that continue to kill Ontario jobs. Two weeks ago, the Minister of Labour spoke in the House regarding repetitive stress injury day. I spoke that day as well, and I spoke about how our rules actually prevent us from progressing that day.

This was the story: I had an injury to my wrist that was aggravated. I was an electrician at the time, a member of the IBEW—the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers—

Mr. Paul Miller: A union guy.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I know the member for Stoney Creek would like to hear that, but anyway: At the time, whenever I used a screwdriver, this repetitive action aggravated the injury. This was back in the early 1980s. The union's prescription or remedy to it was to go out and get an expensive wrist brace fashioned up, which cost a couple of hundred dollars. I wanted to buy a battery drill, but it wasn't on the prescribed union tool list at the time, and they prevented me from using a battery drill. That would be too productive and prevent the injury, but they wouldn't do it, so spend a couple of hundred dollars instead of actually addressing the problem.

It's reasons like that—laws and rules and regulations like that—why we've lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs in this province since the McGuinty-Wynne government took power. Of course, they continue to kowtow with every union boss who comes to Queen's Park; I saw that, two weeks ago, they were having a good chat-fest with our friends from the Working Families coalition who came in to Queen's Park.

I do hope the minister does look at changing what a "week" is in the legal definition of the bill. I hope they do look at providing some latitude. That's going to be our position when we hit the committees, and I do hope that they take those considerations with good intent. I also do hope that the minister starts looking at workplace insurance in a broader sense in this province. I'd also like him to make some of those changes to our labour laws, as you mentioned, that he felt are so important—that we need to make sure that our skilled trades and our labour force grow, instead of its diminishing and shrinking role that it has had under this Liberal government. Things like the closed tendering that just happened, another closed tendering contract with the city of Kingston: All non-union contractors will be excluded from doing any municipal work in the city of Kingston, just like what happened to the city of Hamilton a number of years ago when the carpenters' union certified those guys.

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We also saw it with the TDSB here—the Toronto District School Board: closed tendering, where we saw those outrageous examples of \$150 to install a pencil sharpener or \$3,000 to install a receptacle. If I could have

got those prices when I was an electrician, I would never have ever dreamed of becoming a politician, I'll tell you—\$3,000 for a receptacle—

Mr. Paul Miller: You could afford that drill.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I could have afforded more than just that drill.

Interjection: And the brace.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I could have had the drill and the brace. At \$3,000, one receptacle a day—a week—would have been pretty bloody good work.

So I do hope the minister will take a look at that legislation and start providing some flexibility and options and not be so prescribed and regimented.

Our labour and our work really, truly is our most fundamental of human rights. This Liberal government denies so many of us that fundamental human right of our labours. Workers want a choice whether they're to be part of a union or not to be part of a union. I think it's time that we bring our legislation in line with the rest of the civilized western democratic worlds.

There's only one nation out of 47 in the European bloc that has labour legislation like ours. The Soviet satellite of the time, Belarus, still has legislation that is much like ours. All other western European democracies allow workers the choice to be a member of a union or not.

Allow members—our workers—to choose whether to go and be represented by a collective bargaining unit or to be included in the union. We don't. In this country, in this province, we don't allow people to have the choice. The freedom of association is denied and deprived to all of our workers.

I think it really is a shame that Ontario's laws are reflective of—similar to—a Soviet state when it comes to that, as compared to our European members.

Mr. Paul Miller: Comrade.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. I know the member from Stoney Creek loves being called "comrade," but I kind of shy away from using that word.

But study after study has shown that giving workers a choice to be part of a union or not drives real wages higher, increases economic growth and increases employment growth. Those are the things that we need. Those are the things that we need if we want to have those social safety nets.

We shouldn't forget that Ontario's unemployment rate has been higher than the national average for over six years. Speaker, the Liberals don't really seem to want to fix the problems at hand. They just want to keep people out of work more than working.

But it was interesting two weeks ago when the Premier was going on. We know about all this new government conversation from the government, even though, as the member from Beaches so clearly pointed out, it's all the same members. They have shuffled a few of the deck chairs, but there's nothing new about this government. They're still travelling in the same direction, but now they're having conversations and respectful conversations.

They're having conversations, but who are they having conversations with? Again, they're having conversa-

tions with the Working Families Coalition. They're not having any conversations with the people on Amherst Island, who are furious with this Liberal government for imposing that ridiculous green energy wind turbine, industrial wind turbine, project on them. There's been no discussion with the people of Amherst Island.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to have to remind the member that we're discussing Bill 21. I would ask him to bring his remarks back to the actual content of the bill.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. I'll just finish that thought and then connect it up here.

As the minister spoke, he said they've had all these conversations with people on the family caregiver act. I don't know if they have or haven't; I know that they have made some changes. What is also clear is, I know there's been lots of people wanting to converse with them over the Green Energy Act, and they haven't had a seat at the table, and there's been no repeal or any changes to the Green Energy Act by this supposedly new government—none whatsoever.

So, Speaker, there are things that need to be done in Bill 21. It is great to see that this government has finally—I think this is the first time in my six years here that I have seen a bill advanced by the Liberal government die on the order table through prorogation and then actually come back with changes, fundamental and good changes. I think that's the first that I can recall in six years. Maybe the member from Stoney Creek can correct me if I'm wrong on that. I have seen some minor changes in the committee process, but typically, we have seen this Liberal government just charge and ram straight ahead on their predetermined course, come—I can't say that—or high water; there was a word in there I guess I can't say. That is one thing, but I do believe that this bill will hopefully go through a fairly expeditious period of debate, move into committee, and that we make those changes as proposed by ourselves, proposed by the bill.

I do want to mention one other thing: that transparency is required in these discussions and in these bills. I think it's important that the Ministry of Labour look at that transparency throughout the whole labour portfolio, through all their labour legislation; that they start looking at their legislation, that it ought to be transparent; and, like this bill, where they have pulled it back and brought it back to make it more consistent with federal legislation, that they do the same thing with our other labour legislation with respect to things like union financial disclosure. We know that has changed at the federal level as well, and that there's a bill that has passed through the House, Bill 377 I believe is the number, that will make it mandatory for unions to disclose their financial activities. So I do expect that the provincial government will follow suit on union financial disclosures as well, just as they've changed this bill around to make it consistent with the federal legislation and the federal EI act.

I do have to make one other mention, Speaker. I was driving down to Toronto yesterday on my way from Lanark, and I took a little detour down Lakeshore Road near Port Hope. It was interesting. There's been a lot of

discussion in the House recently about gas pipes; I think we all remember that. But anyway, as I was driving down Lakeshore Road on my way to Queen's Park, I drove by this place called Wesleyville. Does anybody know about Wesleyville? It's a beautiful 1,700-acre Lake Ontario waterfront parcel serviced back in the 1970s. The Ontario government of the day had spent over \$250 million assembling that package—

Interjection: That was a Conservative government.

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Mr. Randy Hillier: It was a Conservative government. But due to the high cost of oil at the time, they never completed the job. They were going to build a 2,000-megawatt generating station in Wesleyville. Now, you can drive by Lakeshore and you can see Wesleyville. I put pictures up on my Facebook. It has all the signs: "Do Not Enter." "Unauthorized." And again, this goes back to the earlier discussion. But here, you know, all this discussion about where to put the gas plants—and I'm glad to see that the House leader for the Liberals is here, because he's been a great defender of the Liberal gas plant program. Why don't you go out to Wesleyville, House leader, and take a look at this marvellous package of land and buildings and smokestacks out there? Where we have, as a province—our taxpayers—paid hundreds of millions of dollars to assemble and build it, it lies dormant and decaying; it's a public asset that has been sitting for 40 years now. I don't know how many millions of dollars we're spending to keep it there, with maintenance and stuff—millions of dollars. Can you imagine how many people we could help provide for in the family caregiver act if we weren't wasting all our money, or so much of it, on these white elephants over on Lake Ontario?

Take a drive between Bowmanville and Port Hope on Lakeshore; I think you'll find it amazing. There we have an asset that is not used, that is sitting dormant, and it has sat dormant through successive Conservative, Liberal and NDP governments and it still sits there today. Why don't we realize some value out of that asset? Why don't we realize some value out of it and pay down our deficit, pay down our debt, maybe, just as a thought or an idea?

Or instead of relocating that Oakville gas plant from Oakville up to Napanee, Bath and my area, there's a 1,700-acre OPG site that's right in between, right beside the GTA: much closer, much cheaper. There would be less line loss. I think maybe the government House leader, in all his interest to defend the government actions, should have taken a drive on a Sunday afternoon to Wesleyville, and maybe he would have been scratching his head, saying, "Ah, that would be a good thing to do."

Mr. Paul Miller: You should have told him, Randy.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm telling him today; you know, he's here today. He doesn't usually like listening, but I think today he's listening for a change.

So, in closing, there's a good way to do public policy and there's a bad way to do public policy. We have seen earlier with the previous minister, Minister Jeffrey, how bad public policy can be advanced and how it can be taken over. We've also seen from the government House

leader how bad government public policy can be advanced and defended. And then we can see how good public policy can be done. Good public policy does take consideration, does take an interest of the parties to actually be engaged in thoughtful discussion—not just pointing their fingers at one another, not just getting their backs up like the government House leader does during the gas plants, but actually having a discussion and realizing what the best value is, how to achieve the best value for our taxpayers and our residents, how we can get the laws crafted in a way that provides latitude and discretion, and achieve the things that we would like to do.

So this Bill 21 should serve as a bit of a lesson to the Minister of Labour. And I think what I can say in closing—I know the Minister of Labour has been in the news somewhat of late. I think maybe he read this bill before he endorsed it this time around. That I enjoy; I'm glad to see that. I think that's a good case in point for all Liberals, because I've seen it in the past. They obviously like endorsing things without actually reading or understanding them first.

Anyway, I think these are some good lessons learned. Now I'm going to be glad to turn the floor over to my colleague from Chatham–Kent to finish off. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker. I am pleased to speak to Bill 21 today, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), and to follow my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

As I'm sure you're all aware, this bill was originally introduced last session as Bill 30. I enjoyed the opportunity to speak to Bill 30 and outline a number of concerns that the PC Party and I had with the legislation, including the fact that this bill was tabled without any proper consultation with stakeholders or demonstration that there was actually a need for these changes.

According to ministry personnel, last year they had little or no evidence that there were people being denied time off from their employment to provide care for their loved ones. The Ministry of Labour staff also said that there hadn't been any significant demand for the legislation at that time. I wonder if there had been an increased demand or if the government was simply solving a perceived problem just for the sake of solving a problem. It's the illusion of action, Mr. Speaker.

Although I am unaware of the demand for this bill, I think it does have merit, and our debate last session actually proved to be valuable. You see, one of the few good things to come out of prorogation—if there is anything that really can come out of prorogation; anything good, that is—but one of the few things that would come out of prorogation was in fact the improvement of this bill. Somebody somewhere, at some time, was listening to our list of concerns last session and actually improved this piece of legislation significantly. This goes against the Liberal trend by eliminating inconsistencies

between the federal labour code and provincial labour laws, instead of creating a mess.

I'd like to congratulate the other side for finally listening to some of the concerns raised by the official opposition last session. Perhaps the government could incorporate some additional PC ideas and get this province back on track.

Speaker, as we all know in this Legislature, we are in fact facing an economic crisis in the province. If the Liberal Party were to take some of our suggestions, like they have on this bill, maybe we could finally get moving in the right direction.

We need to eliminate the deficit—they know that—and we need to bring down the debt; I hope they realize that. Here in Ontario, we are careening towards a \$30-billion deficit, and we're continuing to spend, spend, spend. To ensure that there is a health care system to even provide care for those who experience health care emergencies, and to have jobs for the loved ones to take a leave from, we have to get our fiscal house in order and our economic fundamentals right.

My colleague the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington made some very astute points about this government's unwillingness to listen when it comes to certain bills. While the government seemed to listen to our advice on the former Bill 30, it failed to listen to our criticism of Bill 119, as an example—the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, as the deputy labour critic for our PC caucus, I'd like to add that it's not only the PC Party who was criticizing Bill 119. I'm not sure if you're aware of it, Speaker, but probably you are: Just a few weeks ago, there were hundreds of independent contractors who took the time to come here to Queen's Park and to protest the unfair and unwanted WSIB coverage that they're being forced into. They took time off—work, that is.

Essentially, that WSIB is a tax on independent contractors, who have to pay many times the amount of private insurance for less effective coverage under WSIB. That's all under WSIB: Pay more, get less. The failings of this Liberal government are once again borne on the backs of hard-working Ontarians.

1530

Now, I must ask: Why did this government listen to recommendations and adopt them in this new bill, yet fail to listen time and time again on Bill 119? Let me go back to Bill 21, the bill I'm fortunate to speak on today. Speaker, this bill has some positive aspects, and I'd like to address them. Our federal cousins have made numerous changes to the Canada Labour Code on the issue of caregiver leave, and it is time for Ontario to echo those positive changes. Many other provinces have similar legislation, with Saskatchewan leading the way with 12 weeks of potential unpaid leave.

For employees, the benefit of this bill is obvious. The ability to keep one's job but devote the time required to help a sick or injured family member or dependant is a welcome reduction of stress during a time of crisis. As a matter of fact, Mike from Chatham would certainly have benefited from this piece of legislation.

You see, Speaker, Mike is an only child. His father passed away when he was very young. Last year his mother severely broke her leg, and instead of taking up a hospital bed, she elected to stay home while her leg healed over the course of a couple of months. At the time, Mike was working and had to struggle to care for her while seeing to his work commitments. This created a lot of stress for Mike, as he tried to balance his responsibilities and also his responsibilities for his mother—she could see how hard her son had to work. Even a brief leave would, in fact, have assisted him greatly.

Employers can also stand to benefit from a well-thought-out, sound policy on caregiver leaves. Productivity decreases as employees struggle to cope with the stress and challenges associated with providing care for a loved one in need. You see, Speaker, what happens is they may be at work physically, but mentally their mind is elsewhere. Their mind is wandering. Their mind is wondering, “Who is looking after my sick, dependent family member at home?”

Beyond the legislation, many employers have already begun to work with their employees to provide additional access to benefits and services to assist them as they provide temporary emergency care for their families.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation does not live in a vacuum. It would be a disservice to the people of Ontario, and in particular the good people in the great riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, to look at this legislation in and of itself. Let me be perfectly clear: I support this bill; at the same time, I have some overarching concerns. I’m afraid that this government will use this as a feel-good bill to pat itself on the back while the underlying problem goes unresolved. Any doctor will tell you that you don’t just treat the symptom; you have to treat the condition itself.

We all know that there have always been seen and unseen benefits and consequences of each and every bill passed in this Legislature. The seen benefits in each piece of legislation are held up as triumphs. The seen benefits are what families read about in the next morning’s newspaper. But I fear this bill will be used as something to point to as though the issue of health emergencies has been solved. While this bill represents a helpful small step, there is much more work that needs to be done. If this bill passes, and I hope it does, it will go to committee for further review and perhaps have a few amendments to make it even stronger.

This bill touches upon the broader issue of health care, and I think we should focus on this. In fact, I’d like to take a moment to shed some light on a significant issue in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex. Chatham-Kent residents in need of knee or hip replacement are being forced to wait for surgery they desperately need because of an inefficient and broken system. We know that. We know it’s happening. Some of my constituents may be forced to take time off work to help their loved ones before they can even have surgery. Well, what happens then? Would they be entitled to two separate leaves in this case? It is increasingly clear that there is a lack of communication between the Erie St. Clair Local Health

Integration Network and the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance.

Speaker, back in December, more than a dozen area people in need of hip or knee surgery complained to one of our local papers, the Chatham Daily News. They came forward and stated that their procedures have been put off until 2014 because of a lack of provincial funding.

As a matter of fact, my office went over to the Erie St. Clair LHIN, along with some of the constituents from my riding, and we actually had a meeting with the LHINs. Not a whole lot was resolved because of that, because the LHINs claimed they didn’t have any money to provide funding for knee and hip surgeries. But we put enough pressure on them, and, remarkably, they found some money to do a few more surgeries. That in itself is a triumph, but there’s still a broken system, because way too many people are still suffering pain and agony because of the need for knee and hip surgeries.

Speaker, 2012 was the second year in a row that our LHIN had prematurely run out of funding three months early, potentially causing an additional six-month delay to the already long waiting list. The same inefficient system is failing to provide adequate funding to those places that have available surgeons, facilities and, yes, beds.

It is these people who are most at risk of sustaining potentially serious injuries from a fall as they wait to receive care.

I’m sure that most families would prefer that their loved ones receive the care they need in a timely manner, instead of forcing loved ones to take unpaid leaves to pick up the slack for the government.

What is ultimately important is doing right by Ontario families. No matter the quality of health care in the province, illness and injury are unavoidable. Health care is a very serious issue in the Chatham–Kent–Essex area, as it is throughout this entire province, and it will only become a larger issue as the population ages.

Here’s something that we may find of interest, especially in that great riding of—yes, you guessed it, Speaker—Chatham–Kent–Essex. According to the 2011 census, the median age in Chatham-Kent is almost 44 years. The national median age is 40 years. Additionally, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over in Chatham-Kent was 17.9%, compared with a national percentage of only 14.8%. We have an aging population in Chatham-Kent.

It doesn’t take a doctor to realize just how significant these numbers are. Quite simply, our population is aging and it will take a collaborative effort to provide care for all Ontarians.

Our province needs a holistic approach that takes burdens off the system and allows families the flexibility to care for their loved ones, alongside a supportive health care system.

We need to have a serious discussion about what services will be in place to provide care for our population as more and more Ontarians experience health issues. It’s no secret that the number one expenditure of this government is, of course, health care.

For its part, this bill takes away at least one source of stress for loved ones going through health emergencies.

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When a spouse, a child, a grandparent or even a sibling has a serious medical condition, it takes a tremendous toll on you as you try to do everything you possibly can to be there for them. Oftentimes, people feel like they are being pulled in opposite directions between their work responsibilities and the need to be there for their family when times are tough. You know what they say: When the going gets tough, the tough get going. And people somehow find a way. But it's not fair; it puts undue stress and pressure not only on the caregiver, but also on the one in need of care. This bill ensures that Ontarians will not have to choose between a job and their loved ones, and I do applaud the minister for providing a sense of security for people who need it most.

At a time when we are in the midst of a job crisis, with over 600,000 people unemployed in this province, we can at least let those providing compassionate care for their loved ones know that they will not—and I repeat, that they will not—be added to this number. I'd like to mention that number again: There are 600,000 Ontarians who will see no benefit from this legislation. Why? The answer is simple: because they have no job to take a leave from.

As a Legislature, we need to do more to address the jobs and debt crisis here in Ontario. It would have been beneficial if the government was able to provide some statistics on how many Ontarians this bill could actually benefit, or any significant public demand for such legislation. To qualify for the leave, the employee must be caring for an individual whom a physician has deemed to have a critical injury or illness and cannot care for themselves. Again, I go back to the example I cited earlier. Mike from Chatham had job responsibilities. His mother severely broke her leg; she needed the care. Well, what criteria will be provided to physicians in regard to what exactly constitutes a critical injury or illness? Will doctors be left to their own devices to decide? I have every confidence in the physicians of Ontario, despite the fact that there is a huge shortage of doctors in the Chatham-Kent-Essex region.

Just recently, I was privileged to be doing some job-shadowing at the Leamington District Memorial Hospital, where I spent three hours in the emergency department working alongside doctors, triage nurses, volunteers, GEM nurses—these are the gerontology emergency management nurses. They, in fact, address and meet with every person who comes into the emergency department who is 65 years of age and older. It was amazing, the care that was being provided at Leamington by those people. They went above and beyond. Yet that entire region of Essex and leading into Chatham-Kent—there's a huge doctor shortage in there. I'm told that they're in need of over 100 doctors, just in Essex county alone. And of course, that also bleeds into Kent county, and of course the municipality of Chatham-Kent; there's a huge doctor shortage there as well.

Again, will doctors be left to their own devices to decide? Well, as I have mentioned before, I have every confidence in the physicians of Ontario. But you know what? I'm somewhat concerned with the potential of creating a system of varying criteria from office to office. We must do all we can to ensure that Ontarians receive uniform access to this leave of absence. By setting clear guidelines and requirements, we can ensure that this bill helps out those who truly need it and protects employers from those who may wish to exploit this law just to get time off. We need to give employees the freedom to act on their own responsibilities to their family, while at the same time protecting employers.

While care needs often increase during the last few months of a loved one's life, there is strong evidence to suggest that the length of time providing care can often exceed three years. This bill addresses part of the issue from a labour standpoint, but we must do more to assist those who require assistance for more than simply eight weeks.

Mr. Speaker, while there are certainly overarching concerns that cannot be addressed in one bill alone, I do look forward to this bill's progression to second reading and committee. Let's make a good bill great for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments. Do we have any questions and comments?

Hon. John Milloy: I listened with great interest to the comments that were made by a number of members of the opposition about this bill. I think the most important comment that came through is the fact that the bill has taken into account some of the concerns that were raised when it was last introduced in the fall session, and we have a good piece of legislation—I think all members put that forward—which would benefit Ontarians.

It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that this spirit of compromise which has come forward cannot find its way into other aspects of the Legislature. I think I share the feelings of many people on this side of the House and perhaps even some across the way at our great disappointment when the Leader of the Opposition noted publicly that he and his party would be voting against the budget. The fact of the matter was that the budget was not even and has not even been written at this point, and we are undergoing right now consultations, both with the public and also with the opposition parties.

I guess when I hear the spirit of compromise that exists within the Legislature here today, I would hope that we could take that spirit of compromise to the next budget that comes forward. I know the Premier has reached out to both leaders of the opposition to talk about that. We have heard from the New Democratic Party various proposals that are under consideration, and I would love to see that same spirit of compromise with the Conservative Party and not have a Leader of the Opposition who stands up on behalf of his party and says that they're going to vote against the budget before it comes forward.

I'm pleased to see this spirit of compromise. I hope that it can extend forward. I also hope, Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as House leader, although we welcome all members who wish to speak on this matter to come forward, that we can get it to committee so it can have the type of scrutiny a number of the members spoke about, about some of the details of the bill.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to compliment the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for his remarks as our critic, and the deputy critic from Chatham–Kent–Essex. I did listen to the minister earlier today. It seems, from my impression, that they have listened from the last bill presented prior to prorogation.

It's kind of alarming here to see the House leader from the Liberals today talking about our lack of ability to compromise. I think he should look in the mirror on that issue.

But technically on this bill, there were a couple of things I said the last time we debated the bill. One is the idea that you always have to take a week at a time. They've harmonized that with the federal bill—a good move. If you look at reality, for instance, say you had a member of the family who had cancer. They're disabled only to the extent their life has been altered, which is tragic in itself. But let's say that their inconveniences right now are just being escorted to the hospital for radiation or chemotherapy. You may only need a day off if it was a spouse, for instance. I personally know of this myself—for those particular occasions, to go with them and drive them to the hospital for these events, or for some other treatment, for example. But then you'd have to take a whole week off. The thing is, there's not one nickel of money in this from this government—there's not one nickel of provincial money in this, for this bill. The person has to take the day off without pay. Let's say a person is in sales or it's their own business where they're working, in a small business setting. I think they could improve this bill.

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The other one is that seven days are not entitled, because the week starts Sunday to Saturday. There's another case where someone in a bereavement situation may need seven days with a child in a situation that's described in the bill—

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to speak and make some remarks from the members from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Chatham–Kent–Essex, the government House Leader and the member from Durham on G21, the family caregiver leave.

It is kind of a unique time in this House; all three parties are talking like this bill might need some improvements, but it's one that should go forward. I think, having listened to the government House leader, who said he likes to see some co-operation—he wished there'd be more co-operation from this side, and how they've taken some good ideas. I hope he takes that to

heart, and that, when the budget comes around, they actually take some of our good ideas and actually put them in the budget. That would be pretty important.

Some of the comments from the member from Durham—I'd like to echo them, because I also know of cases where people don't need a whole week. They might need one day or two days, or two days a week for a longer period. By itself, this bill isn't that great, because there's no money involved for the people taking the time off. If it could be a bit more flexible, because we are dealing with families at their most vulnerable. When someone in your family needs your help, that's where this bill should come in.

Once again, I think we've all had agreement that it should go forward, but there should be some changes, at least, in this one. Although this isn't a monumental bill, it could make a difference in someone's life. I hope it passes this reading, I hope we improve it in committee, and I hope that, at least with this, we can make a difference for that one person or for the two people who really need it when they need it.

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

Mr. Vic Dhillon: It's an honour to speak to Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013. This bill is about compassion. This bill, if passed, would recognize the importance of family and job security by creating unpaid job-protected leave for hard-working families, whether it is to provide care and support to a family member with a serious medical condition, care for a critically ill child or just to take some time off to deal with the death or disappearance of one's child as a probable result of a crime.

I just want to highlight some of the reasons for this leave:

—family caregiver leave: Employees would be entitled to a new, unpaid, job-protected leave of absence of up to eight weeks, to be taken for certain specified family members with a serious medical condition each calendar year;

—critically ill child: Employees would be entitled to a leave of up to 37 weeks to provide care to a critically ill child;

—missing child: Employees who are parents of a child who is missing—and it is probable, considering the circumstances, that the child disappeared as a result as a crime—would be entitled to up to 52 weeks;

—deceased child: Employees who are parents of a child who has died—and it is probable, considering the circumstances, that the child has died as a result as a crime—would be entitled to up to 104 weeks.

I'm very pleased that many organizations have pledged their support for this bill, which include the MS Society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Caregiver Coalition. I'm sure that, as we move forward, there'll be other organizations that stand behind this very important bill so that we can help families in times of need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd like to thank the government House leader for speaking to our turn to actually address Bill 21. Although he did use the word “compromise,” I'm surprised he didn't use the word “collaborate,” because when you compromise, that means you win-lose, and what we really want to have here is when you collaborate, you create a win-win—and that's a W-I-N win, I might add.

I also want to thank my colleague from Durham as well as my other colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane and, of course, my distinguished colleague from across the way on the government side from Brampton West.

Bill 21, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, really is all about leaves to help families. As mentioned earlier, Speaker, we as a PC caucus are in fact going to be supporting this particular bill. I'm very, very grateful that although we had prorogation, which I'm not grateful for, during that time members from the government had the opportunity to review this bill and they actually listened to our concerns to in fact make it a better bill.

It's not a great bill yet, and I suspect that—provided this bill is passed at second reading, when it goes into committee, I'm sure that there will be a good discussion amongst all parties to look at it and say, “You know what? We've gotten this far. How much further can we go to make it an even better bill?” As a deputy labour critic, I'm concerned for employers, but again, my heart goes out to family members. We all in our lifetimes will experience challenges and issues of family members who do in fact require care, and that does put undue stress and pressure.

I look forward to the passing of this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for further debate, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item number 15, Mr. Hardeman assumes ballot item number 59 and Mr. Hillier assumes ballot item number 10.

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)

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to be here. It's a pleasure to speak on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party as our party's labour critic on the bill previously known as Bill 30 and now, in its most recent incarnation, as Bill 21, the family caregiver leave act, which is an employment standards amendment, 2011. I think for the sake of the viewers at home who have been listening in and those who are in the gallery today who may have lost track of exactly what it is the bill is intended to do—because the discussion has been convoluted, I would say. We've gotten on to different topics, ranging from—I've heard about wind turbines and cancelled gas plants. You could be mistaken here if you didn't know exactly what we were talking about. So I'll give viewers and other members an overview of this bill.

It is a bill that provides an unpaid, job-protected leave of absence to provide care or support to certain family members who have a serious medical condition. The bill is a very small positive step forward, but there will be relatively low take-up if the federal government does not change employment insurance so that caregivers taking advantage of the leave have some form of income.

The background on this is that all employees who are covered by the Employment Standards Act, whether full-time or part-time, permanent, short-term or contract, would be eligible for this leave. The leave is up to eight weeks. Also, the reforms to the bill from its previous incarnation bring in some other aspects that involve the disappearance of a child or the imminent health of a child; I believe they're two as well that are extended further than the eight weeks. It has been formatted to mirror federal legislation that has been recently changed. Those are about the only changes that have been made to it.

1600

Secondly, there will be no requirement that an employee be employed for a particular length of time or that the employer employ a specified number of employees in order for the employee to qualify.

A qualified employee would be able to take up to eight weeks per calendar year per family member, and here's an important point: A physician would determine whether the condition of the family member is serious, in the meaning of the act. In other words, the physician's recommendations trigger eligibility for the leave.

I had heard that there may be some concerns of abuse of this caregiver leave act. I think the fact that it's triggered by a physician's letter and acknowledgement that there is a family member who is ill and who requires special treatment should protect and should give members of this House some confidence that we could be protected from any abuse. Nevertheless, I think where the abuse lies would be certainly just in the implementation of the act, where employees actually require or are required to use the act or to demand its use. I'll touch on that.

But first and foremost, typically—what this does is it offers protection. It offers a worker, an employee, the ability to, upon acknowledgment from a physician,

request a set amount of time, up to eight weeks, to care for a loved one.

My colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex made note of our changing demographic in this province. I think that's ultimately what the impetus of this bill is, because we know we have a demographic that is getting older, that is living longer, thankfully, but that requires potentially some advanced or special home treatment that could be provided by a family member. That's what this bill, I think, attempts to address.

I think it's well intentioned. I think it's something that is almost what we would call a no-brainer, in the sense that who in their right mind—what employer in their right mind—would want to prohibit an employer from, or even punish an employee for, wanting to take care of a family member, or needing to take care of a family member, especially if it's under doctor's orders, if it's something that can alleviate that entire family unit's strain and stress, as well as eliminating the stress on our health care system?

Mr. Speaker, a family member who is providing care in the home of their aged parent, let's say, is one less health care professional, one less nurse professional, one less home care professional that the system needs to provide what we are assuming are basic functions. Let's also assume that these are things that could be easily performed by family members, such as blood sugar monitoring or the giving of eye drops into a family member's eyes. These are the things—the basic levels of care—that are identified in this bill that we think are important. So that's the one component.

The second thing, and the problem that we have with this bill, is simply that it requires the employee to take blocks of weeks at a time. So, again using the idea or the scenario of my mom, who requires cataract surgery, requires eye drops, I just need to go and get to her house to drop some drops in her eyes once or maybe three times a week during lunch, just to make sure she gets her drops while her eyesight comes back. I would then be required to take a full week off for what certainly would be only a five-minute process. I could not—I don't think anyone could—afford to do that.

So we're concerned about the overall take-up of this program when it should and could have some more flexibility built into it to be able to actually deliver on the intent of the bill.

We believe also that those are going to be the majority of the scenarios that we see if and when people do realize that they have this ability to leave their work for a period of time to deliver care to a family member.

Secondly, there's no financial envelope attached to this bill. That means, in politician speak, that there's no money for this bill. It is simply protection under the ESA. That means that your employer can't fire you if you have to go and deliver care to your family member, which is a good thing. Certainly, we need people to be protected and not to fear that they'll lose their job. But wouldn't it be nice if we could ensure that they weren't going to lose income, given that a family member has fallen ill, that

the employment insurance system could kick in and should kick in as it does on other issues of health care leave, whether it's pregnancy leave or parental leave, or family medical leave or organ donor leave or personal emergency leave or declared emergency leave. Those are areas where we've already identified that the employment insurance system can play a part in protecting a person's wage and should be able to do that. I think it certainly would be a positive and progressive attribute to our overall social safety net.

What I would say also is that this is a reform to the Employment Standards Act. On this side of the House, as New Democrats, we have many ideas where the Employment Standards Act could be reformed and should be reformed. In its basic form, the ESA delivers some fundamental protections to workers, but also, it falls short in protecting some of the most precarious workers in our province, those who, to this day, make up 37% of the workforce in the province. Thirty-seven percent of workers in Ontario are outside of the full-time model that we all used to know and love. We are now relying on part-time, precarious, contract, temporary workers to fill the gap.

Now, this bill does offer them protection—don't get me wrong. But how is it that those who, again, are already in economic peril in terms of the nature of their work, can then afford to take a week off without any financial—backstop, I guess I would say—there? These are issues that need to be addressed in terms of the protection that they have and the assurances that they have that they aren't being taken advantage of.

Another issue that's coming up very often, one that I touched on last week, is the use of interns as almost full-time employment these days. It's a problem that is being more and more recognized and pervasive as corporations realize that—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Welcome, Speaker. I'll let you get adjusted.

I was talking about the pervasiveness of internships, and not the historical use of an intern where somebody could get their foot in the door to gain exposure to an industry. We're seeing, more and more, the identified interns working for years at a time, having multiple internships and never being employed. And this is different from being a volunteer. You guys can come and cut my grass; that will be a good deed, a volunteer. But if I get you to do it every day for the next two years, that's work and that's something you should be compensated for.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Absolutely. What we're talking about is those young students, typically, who are saying, "Okay, internships: If I have to, if it looks good on my CV, I will do that." But less and less they're being protected. Actually, there is no protection for them because they're unclassified. So New Democrats have a lot of ideas on where the ESA falls short.

I got into the chamber here early enough to hear the labour critic for the official opposition rail against

unions, as he typically does. I would say it's entertaining, at the least, to hear him lambaste the union bosses and union workers who only strive to enhance their workplaces not only for themselves, but for others and for un-unionized and unorganized workers. I would say that that member operates in somewhat of a parallel universe to me. I've only known my experience in union environments as being one of being protected, whether it was my personal safety or whether it was that of my coworkers and colleagues and also of my family—to know that the job that I had was afforded benefits under a group benefit package that we all paid into through our dues and our deductions, and also job security under the collective agreements that we operated under.

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So, I don't know—I have a totally different experience: one that afforded me to raise a family; one that afforded me to have pride in the workplace, in my work that I did; and one that actually, I think, having been compensated fairly and justly and one that I agreed to by being party to a collective agreement, aided the overall economy. Because if I was making more money as a labourer, then I was able to spend more money in my community, at my small businesses in my small town and in and around the area. I would shop local each and every time that I absolutely could, something that—I think the opposition misses the entire point of having a collective that is able to bring itself up and raise its standards.

I think actually the Family Caregiver Leave Act has already been addressed in multiple collective agreements. It supersedes anything we've done. It's higher than the Employment Insurance Act. I couldn't point to any specific collective agreement, but I know these types of specialized leave issues have been addressed in collective agreements, and that's why so many times when we're looking for progressive labour legislation, we look at current, existing collective agreements that go well far and beyond what society normally is at, at that time.

I have to say that the member attributed trade unionism as—what did he say? It was somewhat of a social throwback: the USSR. He said something about the Soviet Union—again, why it triggers the parallel universe that I think he operates in. So what he's saying is that trade unions like the CAW, CUPE, OPSEU, IBEW, OSSTF, the teachers, the police, the firefighters, the nurses—guess who else has a union? The hockey players, the NHLPA; they decided they needed a union. The NBA, the NFL: Those guys needed unions, too. So those are “Soviet throwbacks.”

I would say that that member should sit in the nose-bleed section the next time he goes and sees a sporting event because those are workers.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's the only place most people can sit because of the exorbitant salaries.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, because they've negotiated good contracts and the fans get a good product, except for the last couple of days, but they certainly have had some good entertainment coming out of Toronto here, with the Toronto Maple Leafs, and I wish them well in this shortened season.

Back to the point, the Family Caregiver Leave Act: We're not too sure if there's significant demand for this program. As was mentioned, what we think is that those who are going to be potentially caring for their aged family members will make up the majority of those who take it up. But the broad demand, especially to necessitate a massive amount of contention or debate or anything in this House, I think, is unwarranted. Again, I mentioned it should be a no-brainer; it's one that I think all members can support in terms of the intent of the bill, and it should not be contentious. But we're concerned that there won't be enough people to actually make it worthwhile.

I hope the government is cognizant of that, and I hope that they do some advertising or some promotion of this to ensure that people understand that it's out there. So many times there are programs that are developed with all of the best intentions, but yet the take-up is just not there because people simply don't know that it exists. It's one of the aspects that I think—actually, one of my private member's bills that was introduced last year did that, in terms of informing workers of their rights under the Employment Standards Act, where it should be posted in each and every workplace. Those are things that I think are just basic, fundamental responsibilities that the government should have and can play a role in.

I mentioned flexibility. Ultimately, let's talk about how people get to the position where they need care. As I said, we're living longer. We are aging more and more, hopefully in our homes, but we also face more complex medical issues than I think we ever had. Along with those complex issues come complex levels of care. My point is that the government should be responsive to that and understand that as it does make up the bulk of our spending here in the province, and I would assume throughout the Commonwealth, let's ensure that we have a proactive, preventative model and we're doing everything we can to allow people to live healthier longer.

It's not good just to live longer in your home but be suffering from a chronic illness or disease. Let's try to eliminate that or alleviate that as best as possible. That means addressing some of the core issues of a civilized society. One would be the social determinants of health: poverty, access to food—to nutritious food—access to exercise and the knowledge that exercise and preventative health care actually alleviate the burden on our health care system.

What we've seen is a shift. I'm not going to blame it on you as a government, as I am so often inclined to do. I'm not going to blame the societal shift of getting away from physical activity and moving toward fast food—I will blame that on an influx in pressures of corporations.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: What about Mike Harris?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, I'm not going to blame it on Mike Harris either—he's so convenient to blame it on. But what I will blame it on is potentially just our reality as human beings in this era where we are bombarded by fast food; we're bombarded by easy access. But are we actually inclined to take the healthier route? Are we

promoting the healthier route? Are we ensuring that those who are marginalized, those who are having a difficult time escaping the grip of poverty in this province, are given the support to be able to stay healthy?

One of the issues that is raised quite often in my area, in working with anti-poverty activists—I'll give them a shout-out: Pathway to Potential and my good friend Adam Vasey, who is doing a remarkable job in Windsor, and his volunteers and support sphere. They've talked about putting food back in the budget, which was removed, I believe, in the 2008 budget, if my colleague Mr. Tabuns can recall?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Nope.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It was removed. The \$100 special food allowance was removed from those on social assistance, and it has reverberated through those low-income Ontarians. They are no longer able to meet their dietary needs. They no longer have access to fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables, and that produces a downstream cost for us.

Why am I talking about fruits and vegetables when the bill addresses care for a family member? These are the determinants of health. These are things that can avoid our even needing to use a bill like this. If we can ensure we have done all we can to eliminate the hideous disease that is diabetes—

Interjection: A little upfront investment.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: A little bit of upfront investment goes a long way. A pound of prevention—what is the old adage?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Thank you, my honourable colleague from Toronto—Danforth, who is health-minded, who understands the adage, who actually applies it to his own lifestyle, as we all should and I hope we do.

But this is ultimately about protection under the Employment Standards Act where workers will now have the ability to provide care, and I think it's a worthy endeavour. It's one that I think acknowledges one of the most basic impulses of humanity: that if your family member is sick—someone in my family, or my friends, any one of our loved ones—and we have the ability to take care of them and provide care, we will do everything we can do. We will, of course, jeopardize our own employment. This is what the bill does: It says you won't have to jeopardize your employment; you will be protected for at least eight weeks. Whether that is long enough or too long or too short, I guess, is up for debate, as we see the evolution and implementation of this bill, but it's a start. It's one that I think is worthwhile, and it's one that I don't mind and I don't think other colleagues mind adding their support to, and that is, of course, exactly what I will do.

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Mr. Speaker, I'm always proud to stand in this chamber as a 35-year-old New Democrat—35, can you believe that? I know.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Proud? Yes, I am. I'm 35 years old, always knowing and carrying the legacy, championing the cause of one of the founders of our party, Tommy Douglas, the initiator of universal health care in Canada.

I'm making the link here between the principles of doing what you have to do as a family member and doing what we should do as legislators—the principles of universality, the principle of taking care of one another regardless of your social status, or your economic status, or your spot on the economic ladder. It should be a basic fundamental tenet of our society that no Canadian, no Ontarian, should lose life or economic ability because of illness or injury. This ties along with that. Yet I think we have strayed away from that principle over the years, Speaker. Governments have taken their eye off the principles of universality and the positive aspects that come with a system that actually doesn't have profit built into it, a system that is focussed only on delivering a high level of care. What has happened is that because that model is so efficient, they have taken money and spent it in other areas that have not proven to be as efficient. As a result, we have been faced—and not only this province but other provinces—with budgetary constraints that have left them scrambling.

It's unfortunate. Where do we turn to find remedy to a system that was built to succeed, the universal health care system? We turn to the private sector. So often that system, especially when intertwined with health care, does not deliver adequate results, and it certainly doesn't deliver them in a fiscally minded framework.

I call on the government to recommit itself to the principles of universality. I believe this act, again, is trying to connect those values to the law under the Employment Standards Act—and one, as I have mentioned, that I'm fully willing to support.

Later on this week, I plan to address an issue that I think all members in the House are facing, one that comes from the elimination of the Special Services at Home program. Speaker, I don't know if you are aware of it, but young people in this province who are disabled and who have been under the Special Services at Home Program are now, as of January 1 this year, cut off completely from any support. We are dealing with a system that on the surface says, "Yes, we understand that family members require support if they are ill," but when there's money to be attached to it, when we need to actually back that sentiment up with some money, well, the purse strings are cut, the wallet is clamped shut, and the money has dried up.

For families like the Chauvins in Stoney Point, Ontario, and Joe Chauvin, who is an 18-year-old, beautiful young man—his mother presented at the finance committee in Windsor on the effects of the Special Services at Home and how absolutely detrimental that was going to be to their family. The father has now realized that potentially, with this service being cut off and being put on a wait-list for the Passport program, he may have to quit his job. He may have to exit from the workplace and the labour market in order to care for Joe—and who

could blame him? That's what I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker: Who could blame him? Who could blame us, if we need to?

I have two beautiful kids. They're the most precious things in my life, and I would give up everything I had to be able to care for them if I had to. Thankfully, I don't. Thankfully, we have a health care system that is there. Thankfully, we have programs that are in place. But if we don't keep our eye on the ball, they're at risk. They're at risk because when governments get in trouble, where do they run? They run to the health care system to make little cuts. It's death by a thousand cuts. It's not right and it's not fair.

We can find efficiencies, and I certainly did do that, as I had the same experience that many members had over the last couple of weeks. I don't know if anyone partook in the Take Your MPP to Work Day with the nurses in Ontario, but I did and I was able to tour Windsor regional, Hôtel-Dieu and the Windsor teen health centre. I was exposed to so much of what our front-line workers are doing in this province to find efficiencies and to find mechanisms that will not only save the system money but also deliver an enhanced level of patient care.

The answers are found right in our communities—or can be found, rather—but I guess there are bureaucratic walls and lines of communication that don't necessarily actually intertwine. So often, those good ideas get lost that could certainly pay dividends. In some cases, what it came down to was simply logistics, simply space and the reorganizing and proper planning of space in our health care system that actually could deliver efficiencies—downstream, interdepartmental—and provide us with a system that functions properly.

But sometimes it takes investments, and in an era where we see cutbacks and closures and the elimination of beds, and actually the elimination of nurses too—the laying-off of nurses—how does anyone have faith indeed that the system will be getting better?

We need a government that is ready to back up its intentions with some tangible support. Everyone else is getting the support, but it seems as though those who don't need it are the ones who are getting support: the insurance companies, the banks. They're doing all right. The pharmaceutical companies as well are doing pretty damn good. But yet the people in our ridings, Mr. Speaker, are the ones who are suffering, more often than not.

I think this debate has been going on—well, we know how long it has been going on: over a year. Unfortunately, due to prorogation, it died in the last session, one that I had hoped this bill would make it through; one that saw, I think, all-party support, even given the fact that some of the mirroring legislation wasn't existing. Those are things we could have done, I think, within the timelines, had it been sent to committee.

Thankfully, I think it's well nuanced and ready to go to committee—something that I think should happen without any further—

Hon. Mario Sergio: Delay. Any further delay.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —any further delay. Merci, monsieur.

It should happen expediently, and it's one that I'm prepared to support quite immediately.

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Speaker, we can continue to take half measures, or we can actually realize that when we analyze an issue and analyze a problem, it might very well be more effective and more efficient—cost-effective—to address it wholeheartedly from the get-go. More often than not, that again means attaching and having financial support behind these types of initiatives. I can only imagine how much benefit it would deliver to those families that ultimately are going to take this up if they knew that a portion of their income was supported, as is the case under the employment insurance provisions under other medical leave acts. I can only imagine how absolutely thrilled someone would be to know they could afford to take this time off.

Many times, Speaker, I have told the House about my brother, who was injured in a mountain biking accident in 2005 and became a paraplegic as a result—sorry, he's a quadriplegic, not a paraplegic. Sorry, Eddie. But he's a wonderful inspiration, Mr. Speaker. He's a high-functioning quadriplegic—I guess that's why. The level of his injury was at about C7. But because he was a fitness professional and continues to be a fitness professional, the high level of his injury has actually allowed him to be one of the more higher-functioning quadriplegics that, I think, anyone has ever seen. He can do things that normal quadriplegics can't do, not only himself but, as I mentioned, as a health and fitness professional who continues to train individuals in his community.

He receives support in British Columbia—maybe I failed to mention that he lives in British Columbia. About three times a day he has somebody come over and support him in his home, to help him transfer if he's transferring from his bed or whatever, also to help around the house, just to do some of the things like laundry. Those are important things, especially when hygiene is important to your overall health—if you are compromised or if your health is compromised, keeping a tidy, orderly, hygienic place. That's a role that I'm hopeful this bill addresses. Eye drops and other medical procedures are something important that I guess we're under the understanding this bill will address, but it could very well be that somebody just has to go and do the laundry at their mother's house or has to do the dishes or has to prepare that dinner. These are important things.

I'll get back to my brother, Mr. Speaker. He's a high-functioning quad because he took such a proactive approach to his health—one of the fittest individuals I've ever met in my entire life, and still continues to be. Because he was so healthy—the injury he sustained was catastrophic, there's no doubt, and continues to be—he is higher-functioning, meaning he is lower-demand, I guess. He doesn't need some of the more—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Extensive.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —yes, extensive medical supports that other quadriplegics might. It's a case study in proactive investment, whether it's a proactive investment financially or a proactive investment in your health—just in taking basic care of yourself—and I think we can do more of that.

We can identify areas where the government can promote that in our communities in our province. One of the ideas I've always had was to incentivize, either through tax code or other, people taking up a fitness regime. Join a gym, and let's support you in doing that. These are ideas that I guess I'll wait till I'm in government and can start to initiate as a member of the government side. They're good ideas, and I'll give them to the government. They can take them. But they're initiatives I would like to see as proactive measures that have some support behind them, because that's the only way you are going to get take-up on these types of programs.

Mr. Speaker, again, I said I don't want to delay implementation of this bill any longer than I have to, and I don't think I'm going to. I'll leave some time on the clock, because I spoke to this when it was originally initiated—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: You're up, Mario.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And that's a heads-up to the government side—I've spoken to it throughout the two-minute hits that we do. I appreciate the comments of all the members; I appreciate them staying on topic, on some occasions. I appreciate my caucus, who, as well, have fully researched this and scrutinized the bill. We certainly are prepared as a caucus to support it, but let's do it as quickly as possible. Let's ensure that politics doesn't once again create a logjam in this House. Let's actually prove to the people of Ontario that our intentions are sincere, that we can do something collaboratively and provide that security and support that is built into the Family Caregiver Leave Act and also start to then address some of the other low-hanging fruit that I think we can all find consensus on.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the time that you've given me, and I appreciate the deep attention that has been given by my colleagues as well.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: It was a pleasure to listen, and I listened very attentively, to the member from Essex making remarks on the reintroduction of Bill 21. It is good to hear that he's supporting it and that his caucus that he is part of, that they are willing to support the bill as well.

As well, I have the desire and the wish to see it go through as expeditiously as possible. As you know, Speaker, we have this legislative mechanism in this place—it doesn't work as quickly as we would like it to sometimes, but at least it is a good sign that this is moving forward. I'm very pleased that the Minister of Labour has introduced this particular bill at a very appropriate time, I have to say—a year ago would have been better, or two years ago, maybe, better, but I guess it's good to see that it is here.

There is nothing better as legislators than to show compassion when some of our Ontarians are dealing with a very severe family situation. This bill does not address if it's a father, a mother, a husband, wife or whatever—any member of the family that needs particular assistance, the content of the bill will make that provision. This is an important time to recognize the need to do something, especially in the economic situation that we find ourselves in. Imagine the pressure that this would bring on a family member with respect to choosing either continuing working or assisting someone that is very sick at home.

I think it's good to see this going through, and it's good to hear that there is support in the House for Bill 21.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to comment on the member for Essex and his speech today. Earlier we had the pleasure of listening to our labour critic from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, as well—Mr. Hillier.

It looks like we're going to support the bill. They've made some changes in the bill since the last time. It's sad and somewhat bittersweet that we're debating this bill again, going through the whole process because of the shameful act of the first half of the McGuinty-Wynne government—the McGuinty part of it prorogued the Legislature back in October when this bill would have been closer to getting put through to fruition and could've been, probably, enacted by now already.

There are a couple of things that we're not entirely satisfied with in the bill. One of the things that we're concerned about is that it's eight weeks of leave, but it still has to be taken in increments of one week. In some cases where someone, for example, is being taken for treatments for a critical illness—cancer treatments, for example—they may not need a week; they may need a couple of days. I think we should have that flexibility so that it helps the people who need it the most, and that is the people who are being taken care of by another member of the family. I think there is some work that can be done on that, and perhaps at committee we can get to that.

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At the same time, this is something that I think we have to recognize. More and more family members are going to be taking a greater role in seeing that those who are ill get the care they require, and they're going to be a bigger part of it. This is a step in the right direction, and we'll be supporting it.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd like to touch on two points. One will be the idea of enforcement of this act. Secondly, one of the comments that my colleague brought up was the idea of proactive investments, and I'd like to touch on that.

One of the issues that does come up, though, is that if we pass this bill—and it looks very likely that we will

pass it, and it's a supportive bill for the people of Ontario—already we see lacklustre enforcement when it comes to labour laws and labour regulations. I'll quote someone from the opposite side, from the government, who made a great quote. The former Ontario labour minister, Minister Bentley, stated, "Rights without remedies will not be rights for long. Remedies that are not used are not remedies at all ... a more effective approach to ESA enforcement is long overdue."

Essentially, if we entitle a family to a right, but there is no remedy if that right is breached, it won't be a right for very much longer; it won't be a law that has any meaning for very much longer. So I encourage us in this bill to look at enforcement as an essential component by making sure families can actually make use of this time to provide care for their family and their loved ones—that there is some enforcement that employers are required to do this, and if they don't, that there is some remedy for those folks who may lose their job if they take time off.

Briefly, I want to touch on the idea of proactive investment. I think in many, many areas in Ontario, in our government and in the policies that we present, we could do a lot more if we invested up front and there was a little cost for a great savings in the long run. There are many examples, and my colleague from Essex brought up the idea of disease prevention. We're talking about caring for people who are ill, but if we put some investment up front, they wouldn't get ill in the first place. Diabetes is a great example of something that's completely preventable with good nutrition and great exercise, but there has to be some opportunity for folks to be able to exercise and have good nutrition.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today and make remarks about the remarks that were made by the member from Essex. I think the bill we're debating today is one that I hear all three parties are going to support.

It was interesting to learn a little bit more about the family of the member from Essex, but this bill is about some of the things we don't often think about. This bill is about things that we hope never happen to us. We're talking about if somebody in our family gets really, really sick; or a child gets really, really sick, gets critically ill; or a child goes missing—a child just disappears one day, or, in the worst-case scenario, a child passes away as a result of a crime. These are all things we don't like to think about, and certainly they do happen to individuals, as much as we wish they didn't, from time to time. It strikes me that the last thing you would want to be thinking about at that time is, "Do I get to keep my job? Do I get to keep getting paid?"

In this case, what we're saying is that you get to keep your job in the province of Ontario, and we're very specific about the time that that job is protected for: eight weeks for somebody in the family; 37 weeks for a critically ill child; up to a year for a child who goes

missing; and, for a child who is killed or dies as a result of a crime, up to two years.

It's no wonder that a number of societies have endorsed this: the MS society, the Parkinson's society, the Alzheimer's society, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Caregiver Coalition.

I think the remarks that came from the member from Essex were very balanced. I think the ones that showed support for the bill probably said that there were some other things that could be done to make it better, and there's nothing wrong with that; I think that's often a valid criticism. But now that I'm hearing that all three parties are supporting this bill, it's good to see the House working together again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments. We return to the member for Essex for his reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank the colleagues who have commented on my submission on this bill. It is good to feel as though the Legislature actually functions from time to time. That's ultimately what we're here to do: to scrutinize law and realize its effect on the people of the province. I think this bill will provide that in those very rare instances where—admittedly, hopefully, rare; we would hope no one ever needs to take up this bill, but the protection under the ESA will exist. I hope it opens up a broader dialogue on other areas within the Employment Standards Act that we can find consensus on.

I think if members take a close look at the gaps that currently exist under the Employment Standards Act, they would realize that not only are we addressing areas of inequality or inequity or fairness, but we could be addressing areas of productivity. Many members have mentioned here today, "How could someone perform their job?"—indeed, if they knew that a family member was at work, "How could you perform it to the full scope of your ability if your mind is consumed with a family member's health?"

I think there are other areas where we can ensure that members can concentrate on their workplace and not necessarily feel as though there are threats outside of their employment that may jeopardize that. It's called job security, employment security. These are issues that many in our province who are in precarious working conditions—you may have heard me say that many times—currently experience, and one that I think we can address wholeheartedly in this House.

Thanks again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this. I look forward to continuation of the debate in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased, again, to recognize the minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. It doesn't happen very often to get time in the House. As you know, the legislative agenda is so big, so wide, and there is only so much room for members to participate in the various debates, especially in today's debate. It's one of those debates that it's a pleasure to listen to members

of the House when they acknowledge the benefits of the bill, which the content would bring to our people of Ontario.

Bill 21, as was introduced today—the amendments to the bill today, Speaker, by the Minister of Labour indeed bring good news for the people of Ontario.

I was alluding to the member from Essex, Speaker, and he made a lot of sense when he said this is one of those bills that we wish we could move along as quickly as possible, especially when we have some of the rare moments when we have unanimous consent, if you will, from all members of the House.

It is one of those bills which calls for special attention from each one of us in the chamber and addresses some of the very painful issues or situations that sometimes we don't want to talk about, that sometimes we think will never happen to us or one of our family members or a close friend—but indeed, it's for real. It doesn't matter who it happens to, Speaker. All of us will suffer the consequences because it's expensive as well.

What is important to recognize, Speaker, is the intent of the bill. What the bill intends to do is to bring some peace of mind to someone who is caught in a very particular situation at a particular point in time in their lives—that at least they will have to deal with whatever issue they are facing, but their job is safe, even though they don't get paid. So if it's a family member that they have to look after, if it's a child who is severely ill and requires an extensive period of time, if it's a situation where a child, for example, goes missing because of a crime or what have you, the bill addresses that particular aspect. In the case that a child is lost or is dead due to a crime situation, then that period of time is extended.

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In every case, we say up to a particular time, someone would be entitled to have some time off to deal with that particular situation and to have the peace of mind that they can say, “Well, I don't get paid, but at least I can take care of the child, the wife, the father, a family member, and know that I have eight weeks off to think about it”—or up to eight weeks. I mean, these are guidelines and, as the member from Essex was saying before, we would like to see the bill moving along, going through the routine as we normally do, going through committee, and we hope to get an even better bill when it comes back.

The up to eight weeks—it is in there as a guideline, nothing more. The bill by itself, Speaker, is called family caregiver leave, and it would entitle someone to an unpaid, job-protected leave of absence of up to eight weeks to take care of some serious medical conditions.

In the case of a critically ill child, the employee would be entitled to up to 37 weeks. They don't have to take the full 37 weeks because, as the bill says, this will be an unpaid leave. But at least they would have the 37 weeks to provide care to the critically ill child.

If we are dealing with a missing child, then the employee who is the parent of a child who is missing would be entitled to take up to 52 weeks. Again, they are

entitled; they don't have to take them. It may be up to the economic situation of that particular person or family. But it's there, not only to give them peace of mind, but to deal sufficiently and efficiently with whatever particular family situation they are dealing with.

In the case of a deceased child, especially if the situation occurred due to a crime, then the parent would be entitled to 104 weeks, Speaker. Again, let me say that this would be an entitlement, but they don't have to go for the full period.

The bill has a lot of support because I think we all understand the compassionate feelings that are attached to the content of the bill. Who would not understand the particular situation of one of our fellow Ontarians in a particular situation and not feel compassionate about it? The MS society supports the bill very strongly. The Parkinson Society supports it as well, Speaker. The Alzheimer Society of Ontario supports it. The Canadian Cancer Society supports it, Speaker. The caregiver coalition supports it as well.

I know that our employers would be very amenable to allowing one of their employees to take time off and look after a family member—a child or any other family member.

Speaker, I deal with seniors in the ministry there, and I can see how deep the needs of looking after our seniors are, even when they are not in a very particular situation where total care may be needed.

Yes, we have those facilities—thanks that we have those facilities—where we can take our relatives, father, mother or whomever—at a nursing home. But sometimes we have to understand that you don't have to be a senior to be caught in a particular situation. It can be at any time, and even seniors who are still active and are living in an environment where they feel comfortable, their own home—I think we should do as much as possible. It's never enough, but I think we have to understand that a senior would feel nowhere better than in their own home, their own environment. I have to say that we have done quite a bit to see, indeed, that seniors will get the type of attention, the type of care, when they need it, if they need it.

It is good to know that there are alternatives. But considering our seniors just as one of the groups in our society—they need to be taken care of. We know they are living longer. Yes, they are living longer, and while they are living longer, we'd like to see them living better. I think it is a wonderful gesture of every member in the House, that we'd like to see that, indeed, our people are living healthier and living longer. If you cannot live healthier, Speaker, it's no fun, and being a senior as well. But at least we can address the various programs, the various plans, to assist our seniors to live well.

That is why not too long ago—and I'm pleased that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is here. We have addressed one of those issues that seniors like very, very much. In other words, if your condition does not allow you to go to your family doctor, well, you will have a doctor come to your home. If you cannot go and

visit the nurse, a nurse will come and see you at home. If you need a therapist, yes, indeed, a therapist will come and visit your home.

I think these are some of the things that distinguish us as Ontarians, as Canadians: taking care of our people, our seniors. Often we forget that—and I really don't like to say the word "senior" that much, Speaker. I would rather say our "aging population." Our aging population is living longer, it's living better and it's living more actively. They are more engaged. I think these are some things that often we do not recognize: How wonderful it is to see our seniors aging, living longer, living healthier, living more engaged, participating in more varieties of activities, more volunteering in their own communities. I think we have to recognize the value that they bring economically and socially to our province and our communities.

I don't think there is a college, a classroom, a teacher or a professor that can match the experience that our seniors bring—a lifetime of experience. I don't think anyone can match it. We should find a way, every time possible, to harness that experience and put it to good use in our community.

But we already have a lot of seniors in our province who do exactly that. Because they are living longer, because they live better, because they are healthier, they contribute—without compensation, I have to say—to the well-being of our communities. If we had to put a price on that, we couldn't. So it is in our interest to look after this particular fascia, if you will—bundle of people—in our province and see indeed that they are well looked after, that they live better, that they live longer and that they live happier. They are entitled to live with dignity.

1700

I'm going to pick on the seniors because they are easily recognizable. We are going to be judged as legislators and as members of our society partly on how we treat our seniors. I believe that our community will partially judge us on how we treat our seniors. If we treat our seniors well today, it will be the footprint for how seniors of tomorrow will be receiving care. So it is important that we do that.

I believe firmly that, in appreciating our seniors to the end and the experience they bring, we could say—I could say, and I'd like to believe that I am right—that they are the ones, the people, the mentors of our next generation. I believe that our seniors today are the mentors of the next generation, and we should use that. We should use that for the betterment of our next generation and for ourselves today.

I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that by 2017 we are going to have more Ontarians over the age of 65 than Ontarians under the age of 15. Where am I going with this? If we don't take care of our seniors, which is going to be this massive, large population in the next 20 years, the expenses to us, to the government and to the people of Ontario, are going to be tremendous. So it is in the best interest to look after the needs of our seniors today and the health care of our seniors today because I think it's going to be better for any government in the future.

Myself, I always had a very weak spot, if you will, for the very young ones and for the seniors—for the young ones because they need care, they cannot look after themselves; and for our seniors, or the ones that are aging very gracefully, because that is the time that we need to recognize and we have to appreciate the contribution that they have made to our society.

I do a lot of speaking with seniors; I speak to a lot of groups, and you know what? If there is one simple thing that they expect from us—from their politicians and from their legislators—it's just to recognize, to appreciate, who they are, what they are and what they represent, that acknowledgment, Speaker. They know that no government can do everything for everyone, including our seniors. The best they can expect is that we do our best for them. But when we can't, and then they cannot receive what they want, at least they recognize us for what we are. I think that is the most noble thing that we could do as politicians. Joining in that, if we can do anything to improve their life, to extend their good stay in our community, I am sure that not only are we doing the right thing, but also the benefits will be accruing to us as politicians and to the rest of the people of Ontario.

Time is getting short, Speaker. I'm grateful for the time that you have allowed me to speak today. I have to say to the members of the House that I'm very grateful to hear that they are supporting the bill. They would like to see it moving forward, going through, and I do hope that everyone will have the opportunity to address the bill, to bring some new ideas and make it even better. I have to recognize the Minister of Labour, who has very expeditiously reintroduced this particular bill in the House. We are all anxious to see indeed that the bill will travel, will have some, I would say, extensive consultation with the various stakeholders, and then bring it back to the House for some concluding remarks and passage.

I note that the Minister of Labour was in Ottawa today, launching the bill itself, if you will, and why not? I think it has wide support among the various communities, labour groups and other stakeholders. What is important to know is that we have not received any complaints from employers, after all, and I would hope there's less and less numbers of cases where the bill may apply. It would be wishful thinking to say it is good to have the bill but there is no need for it. The thing is, sometimes it's good to have it and not use it, instead of not to have it and have a need for it.

So we are here, Speaker, and I look forward to this bill going through and receiving extensive consultations. We'll look forward to input from the members of the House, from the two opposition parties, and let's bring the bill back to the House for quick approval and bring some much-needed relief to people in Ontario. Let's give them peace of mind.

It has been recognized as a small step, but it is a good step. So let's see if we can take a giant step and bring this bill to a happy conclusion. Let's see it go through, as it's a good bill and will go a long way in helping bring some tranquility, peace of mind and rest to our people in Ontario.

Speaker, I thank the members, I thank the Minister of Labour, and I thank you for the time you have allowed me to speak.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's important to get up and respond to the minister's comments today. It's important that this bill brings Ontario's legislation in line with the federal legislation that was passed some time ago. We would like to see some important flexibility put into this program, because it is fairly restrictive in the time frames, in the fact that you have to take a minimum of seven days off where, as we heard today, many times maybe it's only a day that you need. But I guess the overall goal is important. It's about keeping seniors in their homes, allowing that to happen.

It's interesting that the minister talked about the importance of quick approval. Bill 30 was a first attempt. Of course we had many recommendations, and they could have been handled through committee. But this government chose to prorogue the Legislature, and of course we're now going back and it has to be reintroduced and go through many of the steps it had already gone through, and many bills could already have been passed by this time.

We'd like to see it get through—there are some important things. Everybody's goal is the same. I think we heard today that many people, like myself, have elderly parents at home and we need the flexibility—ourselves or our family members—to be able to keep them at home, because that's where they want to be. They're happiest there, and really the province should be happiest if we can keep them in good health and give them the type of life they want to lead.

Again, we're looking forward to taking this to committee and making some needed changes to get the legislation out. We have a desire to see this get through, and I think the third party does as well, so this should slip right through without too many problems. Again, we look forward to this, and think it should have been done months ago.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again it's an honour to be able to stand here and speak about Bill 21 in response to the minister and in response to the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Speaking on this, this afternoon, I think we're all kind of getting a sense of *déjà vu*, but it's not really *déjà vu* because we've all done this before.

1710

This is a case of a good base of a bill. Is it earth-shattering? No, but on occasion for the people who need it, it could be. But this is also a case of, this bill could have, at first or second reading, gone to committee and been passed.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason, the government decided to prorogue the Parliament, and here—

Interjection: Oh, there was a very specific reason.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, I know, but I'm not here to accuse the government of what we feel they—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm here to say that this bill, in its past introduction, was a victim of that decision. Some of the people who could have been impacted by this bill in that time—I'm sure there were people who could have been impacted by this bill in that time—were also victims of that decision. This time—and it's a rare occasion; it's not often, I think, that all three legs on the stool of Parliament here actually are saying, "Let's let this one go forward, and let's do something with it." The base is there, and the people are also there that we need to help. This one, in its present iteration, is not going to cost anybody—or at least this House—any money.

So let's move it forward; let's make some changes, because there are good changes that could be made; and let's use it as a template to see if maybe we can get some things done in this Parliament if we actually work together.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise again on Bill 21 and speak to the comments made by the minister responsible for seniors, who I think did a very good job of explaining why this bill is necessary.

I think there are a couple of times when you know you've probably got a good piece of legislation. One is when one party thinks it's going way too far and another party thinks it's not going far enough; chances are, if you're in the middle there somewhere, you've probably got a good piece of legislation.

The other time is when all three parties agree; when somebody brings forward a piece of legislation to the House, or it comes forward to the House, and all three parties say, "We'll support this. We think it's a good piece of legislation. We'd like to see some changes; we'd like to see it improved. We'd like to get it into the committee system. We'd like a whole lot of things. But basically the concept is a good concept."

What people may not understand at home in TV land is that there are a few gaps right now in the Employment Standards Act. Right now, a person in Ontario is protected—their job is protected—if they have somebody at home they're caring for who may be in a palliative situation, but what they don't have right now is protection if that person is critically ill, the possibility doesn't exist that they could perhaps pass away in the next little while. What this does is it extends that provision.

Also, the federal government has passed some legislation called the Helping Families in Need Act. It has introduced some new employment insurance special benefits for those people who are looking after a young one at home. What this does is it matches up the provincial legislation with the federal legislation, to ensure that not only are you paid during that period when you're looking after a critically ill child, but your job is also protected. Unpaid job-protected leave for employees in federal

jurisdictions, banks, airlines, things like phone companies and cell companies, that type of thing, is also protected.

It's a good piece of legislation. All parties agree with it, and I think it just brings us into line with the federal protections.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, listening attentively to the minister responsible for seniors, I've had the opportunity of addressing and bringing forth to this Legislature my thoughts with regard to this particular bill. It's unfortunate that this bill didn't have an opportunity to get to committee, but of course we all know the history, and that was that former Premier McGuinty decided to hide—but you can't run. The problem is that he prologued. This should have been handled a long time ago.

Again, what I do appreciate is the fact that the government, over that period of time, have gone back to the drawing board. They've revisited this particular bill. They've looked at it and said, "You know what? Maybe there are some other things that we can do. Maybe we can incorporate some of those ideas that the official opposition had brought forth during debate the last time this bill, when it was known as Bill 30, was brought to this particular Legislature." It's very encouraging to see that.

Of course, when there is a vote on second reading, it is my hope that this bill will in fact be passed. As we have been listening to my colleagues throughout the Legislature, it will go into committee. I think that even though this is a good bill, in committee it will have an opportunity to become an even better bill, with perhaps some additional amendments that will be brought forward.

Again, one of the other things: As we know, this particular bill affects the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Of course, what we are hoping, and we'll see, is that this legislation, if passed, will take about six months after royal assent to in fact give employers time to adjust their employment policies as needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We return to the minister responsible for seniors for his reply.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I'm very grateful for the generous comments from the members from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry—that's a mouthful—Timiskaming-Cochrane, Oakville, and of course Chatham-Kent-Essex.

I was very pleased to hear the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex say that, yes, it's a good bill, and we hope that when it comes back it's going to be a better bill. I think it's incumbent on every member of the House, especially those belonging to the particular committee that will be delving into the content of the bill itself, and those people that will be part of the consultation, to indeed bring it back and bring a better bill. The people of Ontario are going to be the beneficiaries of an improved bill, and I think that's an intent of every member of this House.

I have to concur with the member from Oakville when he addressed the fact that this bill is to fill a particular

empty spot, if you will, or to fill in a gap which is not currently covered within the Employment Standards Act.

As well, I think the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane addressed the fact that this is a companion to the federal bill. Speaker, it's good to see as well getting provincial and federal governments agreeing on something of importance. When we see, for example, bank employees, airlines and telecommunications, this very wide field, they also will be enjoying the benefits of this bill.

So, Speaker, let's move it on. Let's bring it back. It's never too late. Let's approve it and bring something good for the people of Ontario.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Natyshak assumes ballot item number 12 and Mr. Mantha assumes ballot item number 13.

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)

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 21, Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013.

As with most things that I'm going to bring to this House when I speak, I always try to look for balance. I look to see and make sure that we're doing things that are the right things for the people of Ontario, the people that we are all given the privilege to serve. In this case, I think it has been good. There's compassion on all sides. All three parties are virtually singing from the same song sheet. I think one of my colleagues from the third party said that's very rare, that the three legs of the stool are always underneath that seat. It's very good to see that. I think this is one that we certainly all need to work on. We need to move it forward as quickly as we can. This is a time for a family when they are in distress. They are in a very significant, challenging period of their lives, and they only add stress to their life if there's a fear of not having a job there.

So how could any of us really dispute that? How could any of us really stand in this House and say we don't want that to happen? You need to have a sense, when you're caring for a loved one, whether that be a child, a parent, a sibling, your wife, your spouse, that you are going to be able to dedicate every single hour and every single minute of your energy to their care and to get them

better or through a process, particularly in the case when there has been a death in the family—a horrible, horrible circumstance.

1720

It's great to see that the bill has come back. I don't normally say much glowing about prorogation, because I think it was ill-advised, it was deceitful and it was the wrong thing to be done, for partisan reasons. But in this case, I think there has actually been an improvement to the bill. When it was first introduced as Bill 30, there were a lot of holes in it. It was a poor piece of legislation, and my understanding is that it was rushed to the table. They didn't give it true thought. They didn't really go out to the stakeholders. They really didn't consult us or the third party to get our feedback. So it is probably a good thing that we have brought it back to the table to have further discussion and further debate. It's a much-improved bill.

I do, however, have a couple of things that I still hope—when it gets to committee, if the vote takes it to there—that we will look at. One of those is that it says, “An employee may take a leave under this section only in periods of entire weeks.” The people in the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound who have actually spoken to me about this bill have concerns about that. That actually adds a bit more duress, because they may only have limited time: They may only need to take half a day off or a day off, or a couple of days consecutively, and then they can get back to work. The employer is going to be happier, because that seasoned employee is going to be there, doing their job as effectively as possible. But in this case, it says you shall take a full week. What if you need a ninth week—some time with your loved ones? You need to understand that there needs to be still some more flexibility built into this.

I think most of us with aging parents or children know that you don't always get sick a week at a time. You may have a couple of days and then not need anything for three weeks, and you want to be able to take it.

I think it should be accumulative over that eight weeks. I don't think the one-week time frame—similarly, I think there's a clause in there that talks about seven consecutive days, Sunday to Saturday. I believe my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington pointed out very astutely that if, for example, your child was to be deceased on a Friday—the week ends on Saturday, so that's saying you only get that one day. That obviously just doesn't make sense, Speaker.

Obviously, we need to all take a look at this and ensure that we're tweaking it more, so that we get what we need out of this bill, so that it really benefits everyone.

I'm going to give credit to the Liberals for doing this. They actually have brought back what I would suggest is a much better bill. They actually have listened, and I give them full credit for that, because again, to my first comment, we should be bringing legislation that is about people, for the people, to the benefit of people, and forget the partisan stuff. Certainly, through all the colleagues

that have spoken from all three parties today, I think we're on that same mindset, and that's really good. So I'm going to end my support and my giving of credit there.

I'm going to ask a few questions, though, because there are some other daunting things that I think are out here. This is a very important bill, but I would suggest to you that—why did they not listen to the Green Energy Act? Individual health concerns, community health concerns and economic health concerns that truly are going to decimate this province if we don't turn that bus around pretty soon are looming, leaning—they're glaring in the face of all of us every day, and yet there's no discussion. There's no willingness to open up, although we hear every day in question period, typically from the House leader, who answers on behalf of the Premier, “We want to have some conversations. We want to work with the other side. We want to do the right thing.”

This one is going to put the stress back on a lot of these families, because they're going to lose jobs. They're going to lose jobs at a time when maybe they do have an ill parent that they need to be taking care of. We need to have more discussions on things like the Green Energy Act, in the same way this bill has been constructed, where they actually listened to the concerns and constructive criticism and said, “Yes, we hear what you're saying. We need to back up from there.”

I believe the member from Oakville used a reference: One opportunity for good legislation is, if one group is way, way over here and one group's way over here, probably somewhere in the middle is good legislation. I would suggest to him that, again, the Green Energy Act is a prime example. There's a group way over here—them—that have just got the blinders on, and they're driving. I don't want to bring in any references to the horse racing industry they're going to decimate, but they have blinders on.

There's a party over here that's saying, “You know what? We care about the people, we care about the health of this province, and we're not going to give up until we actually get this thing turned over.”

Speaker, I go on to ask again, “Why not?” about horse racing? Some 30,000 to 60,000 jobs are at stake—again, those very people who aren't going to have a job to use this caregiver act, because they're not going to have any jobs. Yet they won't listen to that. They won't step out.

Now, they've talked a little bit about the lottery and, “We're going to tweak a little bit.” But they've already done a huge, insurmountable amount of damage to an industry. A lot of people have gone to the States already, and it's going to be tough to ever get them back, particularly if they keep going down this road with the blinders on.

Why not more listening about the gas plants? Just in this House today, we found out, in the last couple of days—\$828 million is the number that's being shared, and they're still sticking on that \$40 million and/or \$190 million, for a total of \$230 million.

All we're asking from the people of, certainly, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and I believe most of my colleagues' ridings—Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Chatham–Kent–Essex, the duke down there from Haldimand–Norfolk, Christine from Whitby–Oshawa—we just want to be able to work for the people. We want to work as a collective 107 people when we're all here—to be elected for all of the people of Ontario.

These gas plants—it is Project Vapour, because the vapour keeps coming back, and it gets worse as it comes.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a bad-smelling vapour.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a bad-smelling vapour in many cases.

Interjection: Mess up; fess up.

Mr. Bill Walker: When you mess up, fess up.

We just want to have some honest discussion. We don't want more redacted documents. We don't want more whiteout. We don't want to hear all the rhetoric. What we really want to do is, we want them to listen in all situations.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask—

Ms. Soo Wong: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member on a point of order.

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to ask, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: What does his comment just now have to do with the bill before us? I don't know what gas plants have to do with family caregiver leave. I just want some clarification, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I appreciate the point of order, and I would remind the member that it is necessary to bring his remarks back to Bill 21.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd be absolutely delighted, Speaker. It's great, because I think I've got about 12 more minutes and I can use all my time on this issue, if you like.

I would like to share with you that the whole context of that whole comment is about jobs. The care leaver act is to allow people to have time off from a job. But if you keep decimating our province through poor energy policy, we're not going to have any jobs to need to worry about a care leaver act. The only leave act we're going to have to worry about is all the people exiting to other provinces because they are the ones that are booming and Ontario isn't.

I do, Speaker, have a great opportunity here to expand to the member opposite—and I'm pleased at any time to reach across and have a conversation and share with you that your policies, in many cases, are driving—you're decimating our province. You've doubled the debt. The deficit—you're spending more every year than you bring in. That just can't be sustainable. How are we going to have any jobs to have a care leaver act to use if we continue to decimate and go down that path?

I think this is a very valid point that the member opposite—and I really appreciate that she has brought it up. It's really back to the fundamental principles of what we have been talking about, even before—I think it was

“prorogation,” that word was—where we spent four months. I went home and worked just as hard for my constituents. But do you know what? The issues didn't go away. They're still here. All we did was we deferred that time. But in that same time, 600,000 people are unemployed. The debt is still insurmountable; you doubled it.

Speaker, this comes back very specifically to jobs. A care leaver act is to allow people to go off with unpaid leave to care for a loved one, from a job that they actually have to have to pay their bills. But if we keep decimating all the big industries—energy, health care with the boondoggle of Ornge and all the money wasted there, the eHealth boondoggle and the billions of dollars wasted there. If we had all that money, we'd actually have more jobs and this act would be even more beneficial to the great people of Ontario.

Speaker, I just can't let go of this one. Bill 17, the WSIB insurance act—forcing people to take insurance, that there's really no choice, so once again we're saying, “We know better, and we're going to tell you you're going to do this, Mr. Small Business.” There were 500 people on the front lawn two weeks ago, and I believe the minister who is introducing this bill didn't even have the courtesy to come out and speak to those people and at least validate where his thought processes were coming from. That, again, ties back to jobs, Speaker, or the lack thereof that we're going to have if we keep going down this poorly-thought-out—although I don't think there's any plan over there. I think it's just cracking it out on the back of a napkin as each crisis unfolds. “We try to go into spin mode and try to get back out of that.”

From our perspective, it all comes back to the fundamental of having good, reliable jobs: then, people pay taxes; then, there's money for the programs that we actually want to provide for the great people of Ontario.

So I'm bang-on with all of my thoughts. I think that this all does come back to the care leaver act: to have the ability to take off from a job, but you have to have a job to do it.

Interjection: Caregiver leave act.

Mr. Bill Walker: Caregiver leave act; thank you very much. I just wanted to make sure everybody in the audience was listening.

Speaker, there's Bill 5, the public sector wage freeze. Again, why would they not listen to that? If we don't soon get this debt and deficit situation in order, there's not going to be anybody left in Ontario to work to pay any of this off.

1730

We again as a party—my colleague Mr. Shurman from Thornhill—brought legislation to this House, and I believe it actually passed second reading, if I recall. I think that was a Thursday afternoon, very late, and a few members of the opposite side apparently didn't think it was that important and didn't show up. It's great for us, because now we can open up those lines of dialogue; they keep saying that they want to have conversations for the benefit of the people of Ontario, which gets back to

jobs. We all need to have funding to be able to have the jobs.

At this point, for the life of me I can't understand why we can't have some discussion. The House leader stands up almost every day and says the same old thing: "Done, done, done." Do you know what we're coming to? We're coming to the end of Ontario as we know it: done, done, done. We need to ensure that everything we do in this House is collaborative. We need to be speaking for the benefit of and always putting first and foremost, as the primary concern, the people and the taxpayers of Ontario. This act is a pretty good act, now that we've actually brought it back with some amendments. I think there's still some more to do that we can do. I think we will probably, as a party—my colleagues who spoke to it today certainly seemed pretty supportive of it.

But we need to always come back to the essence of what we're talking about. We are a government. Our duty, our obligation, is to work as 107 representatives of the great people of Ontario. We need to bring legislation to this floor to be discussed in a timely manner. We shouldn't be proroguing just because of partisan political gain. This act actually probably could have been implemented if we hadn't had that four-month break that one side decided to do on their own in this House, of their own volition.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Run from the truth.

Mr. Bill Walker: Run from the truth, one of my colleagues says. I don't want to really go down those slippery slopes. I think the people of Ontario have cottoned on. The media is certainly getting on to this. We know what the damage is going to be, hopefully, if they will give all the documents at some point down the road.

This is a good example; they actually listened, and I've given full credit to the Liberals today for actually listening for a change on one small, little piece. But as I mentioned earlier, there are a number of pieces of other very, very important legislation that they have given no time for, no willingness to talk about. They don't want to talk about the Green Energy Act. They're not willing to concede that they had a terrible, misguided thought process. They tried to sell the buzzwords of "clean," "green" and "free." If you really look behind any of that hyperbole, it's not clean, it's not free and it's not green. They're actually turning off water in Niagara Falls, which is the cleanest, greenest and most economical. I don't even know how they get their environmental stance from their perspective, because it's just running us down into the ground. It's just crazy.

This global adjustment fee again is going to have a huge impact—and I come back to jobs. This global adjustment fee, if it gets to where they want to put all of their energy on the renewable side—and we're certainly not a party opposed to renewables. What we want is renewable energy that's actually going to work for the people, be cost-effective, be efficient for the businesses and attract people who might want to invest in the great province of Ontario, or actually add staff or add another wing to their factory or their small business, or add some

apprentices. We've talked about apprenticeship ratios in here, trying to bring the new, young, skilled labour force, which we're going to need. We see a looming crisis on the horizon. In fact, we're probably at the precipice of that today. Yet they're still pushing back at every opportunity to have these "discussions" and "conversations" to try to find legislation that will work for all of the people of Ontario.

The essence of what I'm trying to say today is that I've given them credit where credit is due. On this bill, they've done pretty well. I'm still quite concerned. I'm not certain why—and maybe one of the speakers after me will be able to stand up and say why—they're so beholden to this full seven days, and you have to take a week at a time. I'm a little bit perplexed. Most of our lives aren't quite built in week blocks, particularly when it comes to illness or injury or the tragedy of a child or a loved one. So I think that one definitely needs to have a fair bit of discussion before we go too far down the road. But I do want to get it to committee. I think all three parties are willing to do that, but then we need to expedite it and we need to get back to some of these other ones. If we can get this through in a timely manner, we can get back to talking about things like the Green Energy Act, horse racing, the gas plant fiasco, the Ornge fiasco and boondoggle, the WSIB—are you seeing the picture here, Speaker, that I'm creating for you a little bit?

This isn't just me; this is a lot of people across our great province who are bringing these things to my door every day. They're emailing me, they're calling me. This is what the people of Ontario are concerned about: "Where are the jobs going to be? Where am I going to have the chance to use the caregiver leave act if I don't have a job tomorrow?" I think I referenced maybe once or twice already, but I'll just throw it out there in case Hansard didn't catch it: 600,000 people unemployed, with 300,000 in our manufacturing industry alone. And what are we doing as the government to actually bring that back? We're continuing down a path of exorbitant—we're going to soon have the highest energy rates in the continent of North America. We used to be the proud leader in Ontario, with the lowest rates that attracted new development, new capital, new investment to our great province. Now, who would even think of coming here from that perspective?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: The decimation of Ontario.

Mr. Bill Walker: They're decimating. They've taken us from the engine to the caboose, and they're not prepared to turn those things around.

Mr. John Vanthof: You still have a train.

Mr. Bill Walker: Yes, at least we still have a train. My friends in northern Ontario are still struggling with that one, but that's another conversation. I think they'll hire a consultant and, "We'll get back to you." I think the buzzword is, "We can do better." Well, yes, again I can concur, they can and should do better on many things.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: But they won't fess up when they mess up.

Mr. Bill Walker: That's correct.

Again, we go back and all of these types of policies should be a little bit modeled after this one. They actually took in some consultation from us in the opposition and the third party and said, "Hey, you folks over there actually do have some good thoughts. Maybe we could work collaboratively, put a bill on the floor and we could actually move that through this House and enact it, so that actually the people who are paying the freight for all these services and programs get the benefit of it."

Mr. Rick Nicholls: The bill won't cost Ontarians any money.

Mr. Bill Walker: That's what we're here every day for. And yes, a very good point, my friend from Chatham-Kent-Essex, Mr. Nicholls. It won't cost the taxpayer a dime. What a novel idea.

I wonder if any of these other ones that I mentioned could ever be anywhere close to that. Do you think the Green Energy Act's going to cost us any money down the road?

Interjection: It has cost us.

Mr. Bill Walker: Oh, "has"; good point. What about the decimation of the horse racing industry and those 30,000 to 60,000 jobs? How about the \$828 million—it'll get to a billion, I'm sure, by the time we're done. The original numbers that were being given by some of the experts in the industry were a \$1.3-billion boondoggle. Think of the health care, think of the education that we could provide. Think of the affordable housing and the social programs we could pay for and provide the people of Ontario with if we weren't wasting those billion-dollar boondoggles.

What if we saved \$2 billion a year with our across-the-board wage freeze? I don't think anyone I've talked to in the public sector right now has said to me, "You know what? We get it. We understand. We're in a heck of a financial crisis after eight years, almost nine now of this Liberal tax-and-spend government. We are in a serious financial, fiscal situation, and we're prepared to hold back"—the only people it seems who aren't are the people across the aisle, the government, the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals. Probably some of the NDP may disagree with that. They might jump on that same train.

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: But, Speaker, I'm not going to let the sidebars interrupt me. I'll keep going because I'm trying to stay focused on this bill and what this bill will mean to the people of Ontario.

It's great to have caregiver leave, if you have a job. We need to listen more about the integral things that are prohibiting those jobs from being created, or in fact they're driving them out of our great province. We need to always come to the table with the people of Ontario, the taxpayer, the constituent, our next generation, like our pages sitting in front of you, Speaker, who are our future. We need to make sure that we're always putting them first and foremost, and every policy we bring into this House should be crafted with them in mind. Is this a good use of dollars? Is there benefit out of this? Is it

efficient? Is it timely? Can we all agree as three parties to get to that same common goal and leave our partisan things like prorogation and taking prorogation for granted in this great institution?

Speaker, we have to continually strive, as the other speaker says, to raise the bar. All three parties need to raise the bar. We need to all come into this House every day with the future in mind: How do we turn today's mess into tomorrow's hope?

We need hope. We need hope for things like the caregiver leave act. We need hope for jobs. We need hope to get out of debt so that those kids have a future to look forward to. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments? The member for Toronto-Danforth.

Interjection: Strong finish.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Strong finish.

It's my honour to follow the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. As has been said by a number of people today, it appears that there's general consensus amongst the parties that this bill should move forward, that it should go to committee. I would say that, although this may not be the position of the government, on this side of the House there's also consensus that this is a very small step indeed.

As my colleague from Essex has said, we are in a province where employment standards are often undermined by a lack of enforcement, so that those who take advantage of this legislation, if in fact an employer decides, "We don't want to have that person gone for an extended period of time. We're just going to replace them. We're going to bounce them and let's just roll with it"—this act is not going to protect them.

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There's no question: If you don't allocate the money for enforcement so that someone who is taking advantage of this act actually has protection and support when they try to hold on to their job, if they are unfairly treated—if that's not there, this act will be a dead letter.

The minister responsible for seniors' issues talked about the need to look after seniors. Speaker, if children of those seniors don't have income support to take the time off work to help their parents and their grandparents, frankly, again, this piece of legislation will be a dead letter.

I think it would be great to have this bill go forward to committee very quickly. We've had a debate on this already. Everyone knows where we need to go. Let's go to committee, amend it as necessary and get it in place. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to respond to my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound with regard to Bill 21.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker: His concern about the province having no jobs, or the deficit of jobs—well, I want to remind the member opposite that we have in-

creased employment by 380,200 net new jobs since 2009. Ontario has recovered 143% of job loss since the recession. So I don't know what data he's talking about.

With regard to this bill, I'm very, very pleased that our government and the minister are able to reintroduce this particular bill with respect to not just family caregiver leave; it's also dealing with children with critical illness, as well as children—because of death and disappearance.

At the end of the day, we are here to serve Ontarians. We are also about compassion. How do we reach out to serve the community as best we can as a Legislature, but also extend a hand when it's most needed, especially in a time of crisis? As a registered nurse, I know that every day, having been a nurse at the front line, dealing with critical care, and the families of lost loved ones—this Legislature has an opportunity with this particular legislation to provide the support at a time of need.

Furthermore—and I heard my colleague from Toronto–Danforth just say—almost all the speakers today have definitely indicated support for the bill. More importantly, the time debate is one piece, but moving forward, we also have to have more conversation about the caregiver piece. At the same time, how do we address the concerns that some of the members have? By moving this to committee, I think it's the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's an honour to get up and speak to the comments made by my learned colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I think it speaks a lot, the way he paraphrased something I've heard: “Jobs, jobs, jobs.” I mean, we hear something on the other side, but I think that's really the message we should be working on.

Interjection.

Mr. Jim McDonell: They can't say, “Jobs, jobs, jobs.” I hear the stats—they seem to refer to StatsCan—and it shows that we've had higher than the Canadian average in unemployment for—six years?

Interjection: Sixty months.

Interjection: Seventy-eight months.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Yes, 78 months. I mean, that doesn't talk to what we hear about the jobs that are created. Actually, we lost another 50,000, some 48,000 last month. Every time you turn around, there are more jobs being lost. I guess the answer of hiring 300,000 public servants may look good, but somebody has got to pay for that; the private sector has got to pay for that. We're going to lose another 60,000 in the horse racing industry.

We aren't listening to the Auditor General's report when they talk about the Green Energy Act and what that's costing the province. We lost 700 jobs out of Timmins, moving to Quebec because it's just a better deal, because they can't afford the electricity.

It's time that this government listens and wakes up to some of the things that are going on in this world, instead of spending money. The answer was, “Well, let's

prorogue Parliament, and maybe nobody will know what happened in four or five months.”

But the people who haven't got the jobs—600,000 people who are waking up without a job today—they're remembering and they see what's happening. They really don't care about this bill, because they don't have a job to worry about going back to. I think that's what we have to start worrying about: what's good for the province. The examples we have about waste in this government—eHealth, the gas plants—everything is in the billions of dollars. If it's not a billion dollars, this government is not interested. It's just waste, waste, waste. Maybe that's the new phrase they should be coining.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to stand up on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and speak for a few moments mostly on the comments from the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

This bill is different than any other bill since I've been here in this short time. I was trying to picture what it is: This one lacks the poison pill. There's not something in this bill that you really hate, you know? No, really. Like with the air ambulance bill—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no, with the air ambulance bill, with the no Ombudsman or with the protection for whistle-blowers. Now I know in reality whistle-blowers aren't protected, because in my riding, there's those nine people. Two of them have already lost their jobs for blowing the whistle, and now they risk losing everything because they're being sued with public funds.

That tells you that, although they talk about whistle-blowers, you're not sure if the intention is there to save them. But here in this bill, there isn't the thing you just go, “ugh.” You actually don't cringe when you read this one. You can say, “Okay, we can live with this and we can make this one better.”

Does it solve all our problems? Does it solve our job crisis? No. Is it a bill that will be the cornerstone in the next election campaign? I hope not. But it isn't the typical bill, where we say “Gee, we could live with half of it, but the other half, oh my, we just can't live with it.”

This one, we can move it forward and get to help the people it's going to help, but there are huge problems in this province to fix.

Every time I get up, I'm going to say something about whistle-blowers, because they aren't protected in my riding. Those people risk losing everything by being sued by public funds.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues from Scarborough–Agincourt, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I'm going to return for just a quick second here. The member from Scarborough–Agincourt, I think, made

some comments and asked a couple of questions. She talks about increased jobs, but what she leaves out very pointedly is that most of those are public sector jobs. Government is not in the sole business of creating jobs. That's why we have a private sector; that's why there's private investment, you know, those types of things we need, too.

She doesn't know where we get the facts. We kind of ask that question every now and again about the gas plant fiasco, because I think we had 20,000. They said we had them all. Then we get another 33,000. They said, "Now you've got them all." Then we get another 600 the day after the new minister said, "Absolutely, you've got everything." Then they were redacted, whited out, and parts were missing.

So I think we're really in a better position to be saying we don't have the facts. But at any time, I would like to reach out to that member and say, "I'd have a one-on-one with you at any time. Stop just listening to the left-leaning media. You'll see the facts. The truth will set you free if you're willing to look."

The other facts that I'd like to bring is that the party opposite, the governing party, in the last nine years did something that no other government in the history of our great province has ever done. They doubled the debt in eight years: \$411 billion staring us in the face. What future do we have for our young people if we keep doing that? It's no different than anybody's home budget. If you keep paying all your money to the debt, you never get out of that hole; you keep digging it deeper.

I spoke about jobs. I'll continue to speak about jobs because if everyone has a job then we all thrive, then we all prosper, and then we all have the education, the schooling, the health care that we have and the social programs we all want. But if we don't have jobs, it's a death spiral going the opposite way. So every chance I get in this House to speak, every chance outside of this House I get to speak, I'm going to be very critical of the government of the day, the Liberal Wynne-McGuinty government, who have decimated this province.

This caregiver leave act is only good if people have jobs to be able to take advantage of it.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We've all touched upon many of the salient points regarding this bill. I don't think those need to be touched on again.

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I think it's encouraging that we're all working together. It's very surprising, but it's also very encouraging. I like the fact that we're able to see beyond our partisan differences on this issue and recognize that this is an issue that does make sense. I particularly like the way my colleague framed it, that this bill does not have a poison pill. It's something that is crafted in such a way that it doesn't drive a wedge between any particular group or party. I think that's nice to see and positive to see.

I'd like to touch on a couple of points where I think we can improve the bill or just areas that we should turn our attention to.

One of the areas, again, that was brought up a couple of times but I think we need to focus on or that needs to be reinforced is that, if this act is passed—and it should be passed—and if there is not sufficient protection or enforcement, then employers may not support it or may not allow their employees to actually take the time off. We have seen time and time again that there are many labour regulations in place that are simply ignored by employers. If they are ignored and there's no repercussion, then, really, that regulation or that act or that law is rather meaningless.

Similarly, in this circumstance, I think we have to make sure there are some teeth to the act, to the bill. If an employee wishes to take advantage of this leave and take care of a family member who is injured or who is ill, there should be sufficient protections in place, and enforcement of those protections. That's something that's very key. I think we need to turn our mind to that. That may require some additional funding for labour enforcement issues, and I think we should think about that seriously.

The other area that's been touched on, and we need to touch on it just a bit more, is that while it's very encouraging that people can take time off from their work so they can take care of loved ones who are ill or who are not feeling well and have a serious illness, it still raises the question of those who are going to be financially in a very difficult position taking that time off. If the bill had some support system in place for those family members so that they could take the time off but also have some supplement in terms of income, that would be something that would be great to see. It would be very, very much a positive sign to the people of Ontario that, if they did have to take some time off and take care of their loved ones, there would be some financial support. Looking at that as an idea I think is very important.

The reason why I say that is that a number of these issues are tied together. So if you are working and the family caregiver act provides you an opportunity to take time off, leave, from your employment to care for someone at home, it's tied to ideas of home care and daycare. The reason why I say this is that this is one puzzle of a bigger picture.

If we had strong home care networks in place, if we had funding for home care, many of the issues that families face when it comes to caring for loved ones who are ill could be addressed with adequate funding for home care. If a family had affordable daycare, where they knew that their children could be taken care of in a healthy and safe environment that was affordable, then that would free their time up to take care of loved ones who were ill. With all these issues, there's an interplay between them. If we had a province-wide system that had effective home care that anyone who is injured or ill would have access to, ready home care with sufficient

hours, if we had a provincial daycare plan where folks knew that their children could be taken care of, this would free up resources so that people could care for their loved ones or, in some cases, rely on home care to do so.

If you want to frame this entire argument in an economic argument, it would be positive for a robust economy. Folks would be able to be productive, continue to work and have systems in place that would take care of their children, as well as their loved ones who are ill. It ties again into this idea of some proactive investment if, as a society, we start looking at some of the problems we face and recognize that investing a little bit up front would save a lot in the long run.

I have to talk a lot about my colleague's example of diabetes—the member from Essex. Diabetes is, at the end stage, one of the most costly diseases that we have that we can treat in our health care system. At the end stage of diabetes with kidney failure, dialysis is a very, very expensive procedure which we must do to take care of folks who are at that stage. But if you look at it, the cost of a dialysis machine and dialysis treatment versus the cost of making it easy to be healthy, if we made the healthy choice the easy choice, which is a catchphrase which is often used when we talk about health promotion, if the healthy choice was the easier choice and we made it so there was an incentive to get a gym membership or there were programs available where you could go out and be active, where an active lifestyle was encouraged, and we put some investment into that, we would save, in the long run, in the sense of the quite costly procedures involving dialysis. This is a way of putting some funding in place in the front end and saving in the long run or the back end.

When we talk about this issue of providing leave for families who take care of their loved ones who are injured or who are sick, yet if they weren't sick in the first place we wouldn't need to take that time off—all of these issues are very much interconnected. When we're talking about health and talking about the unfortunate circumstances that may arise, again, back to the member from Essex, people who are healthier to begin with can cope with illnesses and accidents much better. If you are healthier to begin with and you're faced with a traumatic injury, your chances for recovery are that much better.

If we look at this as a bigger picture, of course we want to give family members an opportunity to be able to take some time off of their work to take care of those who need that care. We can also look at it even deeper and, say, if we had a strategic initiative to promote health across the province, and we put some funding into that initiative and actually put some programs in place which made nutrition and education regarding health promotion a province-wide program, we could reduce the number of people that are injured in the first place, we could reduce

the number of people that would fall ill to preventable diseases and we could reduce the need for people to take time off of work to be able to care for those people. Again, it's a bigger picture, and I think we need to look at it with all its elements in place.

Again, many of the arguments—any issue that's raised nowadays we have to look at with the fiscal realities that we're faced with as a province. Of course everyone is aware that we're facing significant debt, and that is an issue that we need to address. For a robust economy and a province which is successful, it needs to take care of its finances, and that's of course a reality that we all accept, but there are strategies to address financial realities or debt which can support the members of the community, or there are strategies which cannot support them, which can leave the most vulnerable members in our society without any supports.

What I mean by that is, approaching a solution in a balanced way as opposed to slashing services and benefits and protections for people with a view to bringing down the deficit or bringing down the debt, we can look at it in a more balanced fashion and say, "If we made strategic investments in certain areas, those investments would result in savings in the long run; if we had a longer vision, we would create a more prosperous province."

This is an example of where we could have a broader vision. Looking at those who fall ill and looking at prevention and education and opportunities to prevent the illness in the first place would address many of the issues that people face, which is taking time off from work or not being able to work.

It's a known fact that we have an aging population, and in the coming years, we will see more and more folks—we'll have a larger percentage of our population which will be seniors. Naturally, as one gets older, there are health issues which increase as age increases, and it becomes more and more important for us to look for long-term solutions to address this as opposed to stopgap measures. Let's take this example that taking some time off to care for someone is not a sustainable solution. If someone is an aged senior who is facing a complicated series of health issues, their issues may not be solved by taking a week or a month or two months off. It may be a long-term disability, so we need some long-term solutions to be able to address that.

Again, some of those solutions are prevention and promotion—

Interjection.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Is it time? Okay.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I just wanted to draw your attention to the fact that it is approximately 6 of the clock and, as such, I am compelled to adjourn the House until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	London West / London-Ouest	
Vacant	Windsor–Tecumseh	

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Grant Crack, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Michael Harris
Rob Leone, Bill Mauro
Taras Natyshak, Taras Natyshak
Rick Nicholls, Michael Prue
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
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Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Mike Colle, Rosario Marchese
Laurie Scott, Todd Smith
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day (pro tem.)

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Joe Dickson, Jim McDonell
Phil McNeely, Paul Miller
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
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Jonah Schein
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Steve Clark, Mike Colle
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Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
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Toby Barrett, Dipika Damerla
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Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Jerry J. Ouellette, Shafiq Qaadri
Jagmeet Singh
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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Margarett R. Best, Vic Dhillon
Joe Dickson, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

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Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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