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Mercredi 27 mars 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct my record. Yesterday, when referring to testimony from cabinet staffer Tiffany Turnbull, who told us she saw at least one Project Vapour-lock email every week, I stood and said we had absolutely no Vapour-lock documents. I was, of course, referring to the Vapour-lock documents she swore she saw, which, as we confirmed, are indeed missing. They are indeed missing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member. As all members have the right to correct their record, the member has, and it is a point of order.

Point of order, the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a similar point of order to correct my record. I alluded to the fact yesterday that we saw some documents related to Project Vapour-lock and that we hadn't seen any documents. I was referring to the documents Tiffany Turnbull was referring to in testimony yesterday at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. I do acknowledge that 99.99% of documents that we have to date do not contain the words "Project Vapour-lock," and also in the same—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I accept the reality that people do correct the record, but it's not to add any comment other than to correct the record, I remind the members.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 20, 2013, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: First of all, I'd like to note that I will be splitting my time this morning with the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Premier McGuinty's—I'm sorry, Premier Wynne's—speech from

the throne. So meet the new boss; same as the old boss. With all due respect, perhaps I should say that it's the McWynnety government.

I believe the goal of government is to respect the people who elected it, to be committed and accountable to every taxpayer who pays the bills of the province. I have not seen that level of respect in the words of the speech from the throne, nor have I seen the commitment to accountability from this government in their actions thus far.

Mr. Speaker, over 600,000 men and women woke up this morning without a job to go to. In December, it was reported that the unemployment rate in Chatham-Kent-Essex was over 9%. Tinkering around the edges will not help these men and women; bold and decisive action will.

For over a year now, the Ontario PC Party have been putting ideas on the table that will help pull this province out of the mess created by a disastrous decade of the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals. These recommendations have gone unnoticed by this government.

Back in February, I sent out a news release to the local papers in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex with my initial reaction to the speech from the throne. One of my concerns with the speech from the throne had to do with farming in Ontario. At the time, I had mentioned I was concerned that the Premier and self-appointed Agriculture and Food Minister Wynne did not bother to mention any specific plans for agriculture. I wondered how seriously the Premier took the issues of farmers and their families.

The throne speech was made over five weeks ago, so let's take a look at what has happened over the past few weeks. Since that time, it has become known that Premier Wynne was forced to hold a second, secret swearing-in ceremony as the new Minister of Agriculture and Food after forgetting the word "food" in the title. Well, forgetting the word could have been an honest mistake. Perhaps there was little time to juggle a key ministry while fulfilling the duties of running the province.

We know that the Premier didn't have time to visit the 75th anniversary of the London Farm Show—Ontario's largest indoor farm show, by the way, Speaker. It is somewhat of a tradition for agricultural ministers, as the former Minister of Agriculture knows, to attend, and many rural residents, including many from my riding, were surely disappointed by the fact that the Premier was a no-show. It would have been an opportunity to engage with rural Ontarians, but photo ops are more important, it seems.

The government has since introduced its Local Food Act, but many in the agriculture industry do not feel that this bill does enough to support farmers and local food. Although it contains some pleasantries, it does little to address the challenges that farmers are facing, such as endless amounts of red tape and increasing hydro costs.

Looking back to February, I was skeptical of a promise made by the Wynne Liberals to increase local decision-making powers. At the time, I said that it was too little, too late for my riding, as we've already been impacted by many projects. This is from the throne speech, and I'd like to get this into the record:

"Your government intends to work with municipalities on other issues, too.

"Because communities must be involved and connected to one another....

"They must have a voice in their future and a say in their integrated, regional development.

"So that local populations are involved from the beginning if there is going to be a gas plant or a casino or a wind plant or a quarry in their hometown.

"Because our economy can benefit from these things, but only if we have willing hosts."

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I must be hitting a nerve, Speaker, because they're getting a little riled up on the government side. That's a good thing, I must add. That's a very good thing.

Interjection: When you're taking flak, you're over the target.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: That's right.

In my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, you know, you can hardly look anywhere without seeing a wind turbine. Recently it was announced that an additional 124 turbines would be installed from the Chatham Municipal Airport to the western border of Ridgetown, south of the 401. Residents who are opposed to them feel helpless. Does this sound like a local population was involved from beginning to end? Sadly, it was too little, too late for the people of my riding.

Two other communities recently made the news for their desperate resistance to wind turbines. Bluewater, in the beautiful riding of Huron-Bruce, and West Grey, in the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, have had their struggles in their fight against these projects.

The following is a quote from an article in the Toronto Star on Friday, March 22: "Two rural Ontario municipalities are putting expensive ... hurdles in front of wind farms in their communities.

"Councils in Bluewater, on the Lake Huron shoreline, and West Grey, about 165 kilometres northwest of Toronto, have passed bylaws squeezing more money from prospective wind developments.

"Politicians say they're trying to protect the interests of their communities, where many people greet large-scale wind farms with apprehension: West Grey, for example, has formally declared itself an 'unwilling host' for big wind farms." Good for them.

Specifically, West Grey passed a resolution back in 2010 asking the province for a moratorium on wind turbines until a proper study by a third party regarding the health, well-being and safety of residents near wind farms could, in fact, be established.

0910

They, like many municipalities around this province, are trying to do what they feel is right for their communities. They are voicing the opinions of their people, who are opposed to having wind farms forced upon them by the heavy and all-too-distant hand of this provincial government.

The Liberal way forward: Fill up ridings you don't hold with wind farms that residents don't want, and then tell them that you value their input after ignoring them for years? Does that sound almost like an oxymoron? I ask: Do Bluewater and West Grey sound like local populations that were involved from beginning to end, as mentioned in the throne speech? Well, I think not.

Further on the issue of expanding local decision-making, I was saddened to hear that Premier Wynne has opposed the notions of citizens having a direct say in whether or not casinos are built in their neighbourhoods. It's no surprise that the people of rural Ontario are so skeptical of Liberal promises.

One last element of the throne speech that drew my suspicion was the promise to work together and co-operate with the opposition. From the speech, I quote the following: "For the benefit of the entire province, your government intends to work with opposition parties, in a spirit of renewed co-operation, to get the people's business done."

Since the throne speech was delivered, it has been more of the same from the Liberals. Despite calls to be more co-operative, we are still faced with a government that must be dragged kicking and screaming to accountability. For example, in the last few weeks, we've learned that there are even more files on eHealth, and we have the justice committee still working hard, looking for answers in the gas plant scandal.

Speaker, I have a saying that I'd like to share, and I'm sure this House has heard it from time to time. It's really simple: When you mess up, you fess up. I call on this government to get everything out in the open and clear your record. It's one thing to quote renewal, but another thing altogether to achieve it.

In closing, I have some thoughts that I'd like to share with all members of this Legislature. It's something that I strive to live by as well, and here are the thoughts to think on: Keep your thoughts positive, because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive, because your words become your actions. Keep your actions positive, because your actions become your habits. Keep your habits positive, because your habits become your destiny.

Though we're only just a little over a month removed from the speech from the throne, the words found within have already given way to troubling actions. The Liberals have continued some habits—some of the same habits,

rather—that have gotten Ontario into such a financial mess, with the same unwillingness to admit the error of their ways. In doing so, they may have just cemented their legacy.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: Just taking a couple of minutes here, joining the debate—

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

There seems to be a mix-up here. There was someone sharing their time; they didn't stand up. So now we'll go to questions and comments.

The member from Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker. I'm happy to join the debate on a Wednesday morning here in Toronto. Grandma Grace, if you're watching, good morning. Thanks for joining us.

Following on the comments of the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex on the throne speech from the new Premier—and I want to extend my congratulations to the new Premier and my commitment and, I think, our shared commitment in this caucus to actually get results in this Parliament.

People I speak to in Davenport are less concerned about which party you represent and instead how this Parliament is going to deliver for people in this province. So they don't care if their food is brought to them by the Liberals or the Conservatives or the NDP; they just want to make sure that they have food. They don't care if their job is brought to them by any particular party; they just want a job. That's the thing we have to aim for here.

I heard some good things in the budget speech. The tone was kind. I think the member who just spoke speaks with a bit of resistance to actually working together. That is not a problem. I think that we absolutely need to work together, because the problems facing this province require co-operation. They're challenging, they're complex, and we need members in here to actually get to work and do that. I don't really love the kind of resistance to working together.

However, I do resent the fact that the new Premier would insinuate that this is a new government, because it's just clear: It doesn't fool anybody in Davenport, and I don't think it fools anybody in this province, to call this a new government. This is the same government, and it's a government that has had 10 years now to deliver. We need to see the good intentions, the good words in that throne speech, met by some action.

I'm happy to read the newspaper this morning and see that the Liberal government has considered now some of the proposals we're putting forward to actually regulate corporations in this province and make sure that people's lives are a bit more affordable. We've got other ideas that are practical, that would get things moving here. I hope that they'll include our proposal to close corporate tax loopholes so that we can actually get some funding that's badly needed for Ontario.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: I had the opportunity to listen to a very articulate speech from the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex. In fact, it would be nice to get that riding changed to Chatham–Kent–Leamington, which would actually reflect the geographic boundaries of that area, and I know the member wants to work on that.

Just a couple of things this morning: We're very pleased that the Premier, as Minister of Agriculture and Food, yesterday announced three more agreements with the horse racing industry in the province of Ontario: Georgian Downs, in Innisfil; Fort Erie Race Track—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: —and of course, Flamboro—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, could we get a little louder, if you could? Guess what, folks? The hammer's coming down today quickly.

Go ahead.

Hon. Jeff Leal: We're making progress on that file, which is important for rural Ontario.

But one of the things I'm very concerned about in the Leamington area, of course—we have that fine operation, HJ Heinz, that was recently acquired by Warren Buffett. The federal government has proposed some changes to container sizes, and we're troubled about that. The former Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Mr. McMeekin, has been pressuring the federal ag minister in Ottawa, Mr. Ritz, and the new minister has been pressuring him. We're very concerned about this unregulated container size that may have a tremendous impact on that operation in Leamington—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Nepean–Carleton.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I know that the member supports it. He needs to work—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay. I'm glad that the member's got her voice back, but the bottom line is, that's her last warning.

Continue.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, if I get a little time put back on the clock, I also want to acknowledge a response that was made to the member's colleague yesterday, the member from Perth–Wellington, when Minister Chiarelli said—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Your time's up. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to follow up my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex. He gave a fine speech and identified quite a few of the shortcomings of this throne speech, which are many.

The government has managed to avoid a lot of the serious problems—nearly all the serious problems—that we have in this province of Ontario. They didn't speak to our debt. They didn't speak to our deficit. We're not going to

be able to meet the elimination of our deficit by 2017, like they keep saying they will. They keep trying to tell us that everything is under control, yet they haven't talked about eliminating any serious spending.

The Green Energy Act is something we just cannot afford, and it's going to cost us tens of billions of dollars. They haven't talked about a wage freeze for public sector salaries, which is 55% of our budget in this province of Ontario, and we can't get away with not doing that.

They haven't talked about the unaffordability of our defined benefit pensions, which is a problem that is on the radar and that we can't avoid, and we have to make serious changes there to install sustainability in the pensions for our public sector for the future.

0920

They haven't talked about job creation. They haven't talked about the need to do labour reform. We have to do serious labour reform in the province of Ontario to create an environment where jobs can be created by the private sector. We need to change the apprenticeship ratio for trades; that would triple the number of apprentices that could be hired by industry when there's a demand for those workers. They haven't talked about changing training of people in community colleges to match workers who are trained to the needs of industry, which has been a shortcoming of our education system.

In short, they've missed the point, and we're not going to get the job done.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's with pleasure that I rise to talk about the throne speech. There's a lot of good things and very nice words that were said through the throne speech, which I can take back and talk to constituents back home. I'm looking forward to going back home over our constituency week and over the Easter weekend to have a chat with them.

One of the things that our party has been stressing, really, is a balanced approach and affordability. I can tell you what it doesn't mean: Cutting ServiceOntario services throughout the north is what it doesn't mean. That's not a balanced or an affordable way of providing those services, which is exactly what this government is doing.

Cutting the ONTC services and not having a proper transportation strategy for northern Ontario: That is not what affordability and a balanced approach is. Not assisting a lot of seniors and underprivileged individuals throughout this province on their HST, which is a direct savings that could be done through eliminating it on their hydro bill, which is something that we had advocated for, for a very long time—these are some of the things that we're looking to get done within this upcoming budget.

We've made suggestions to this government and we hope that we see them reflected in the upcoming budget that is going to come through. One of them is a 15% cut on auto insurance. That's something that is balanced and affordable, and that is plausible that we can do. A five-day home care guarantee: Again, this is not something that is going to take this province to the bank. This is

something that we know is needed in this province. Eliminating those corporate tax loopholes: How can I go back home and explain that, "I'm sorry but your trip that you're going to have at the restaurant or your evening that you're going to take your kids out to the hockey game, you can't write it off, but the bigger businesses can." And that would bring a direct \$1.3 billion back—maintain it—into this province. So, let's look at this. Let's take a balanced approach, and let's keep affordability at the forefront.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker. Again, I'd like to thank the members from Davenport, the Minister of Rural Affairs, from Peterborough; also the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills and, of course, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for your comments. I do appreciate that very much.

I mentioned earlier in my speech that when you make a mistake, you should admit to it, or like I like to say, when you mess up, you fess up. Well, since I've been privileged to represent the members from Chatham–Kent–Essex since being elected back in October of 2011, I've yet to hear this government acknowledge mistakes. They won't fess up, and yet we've seen lots of mess-ups, as I might add.

They talk a good game, Speaker; they truly do. I've got to give them credit for that. They talk a good game, but unfortunately, they've been talking a good game for the last 10 years, and we know where that's taken us so far. The debt, when they came into power, was about \$125 billion. Today, as it stands, it's around \$275 billion. I take a look at that and I say, "Well, that's quite a track record." Again, you know what? They talked a good game but they don't walk their talk. They don't do that. It's spend, spend, spend. And, unfortunately, that has now got our province in a dire, dire strait, and it's going to take a long time to start digging our way out of it.

Speaker, I'd like to remind the government and the opposition—the third party—that PCs have a plan. We have a plan to get this province back on track. We offer the hope that is needed; it's our Paths to Prosperity. So far, we've issued around 12 or 13 different Paths to Prosperity in different ways, looking at different ministries to pull things out. Right now, this government is killing, and we hope that everything will get straightened around.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to stand and speak, always, on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park, and in fact for all Ontarians.

Because this is the throne speech, in case people are wondering what we're debating—and it's actually the very first motion that the government put forward, and a confidence one at that—I just wanted to take the opportunity, because I haven't had that opportunity before, to congratulate the new Premier, Premier Wynne, the first woman—as a feminist, I applaud that—and also the first openly gay woman, and I applaud that as well, as some-

one who has been active on the LBGT file for 40 years now—40 years; who knew I was that old? So congratulations; two firsts. I just wanted to make sure that I extended that.

When we're talking about the throne speech, of course we're talking about something that deals in generalities. My first reaction, I have to say, to the throne speech and to the generalities that were put forward was that this was a pretty utopian document. I mean, if you actually look through it and read what has been promised, you're really looking at a completely and utterly transformed Ontario that looks, really, nothing like the Ontario that we all live in.

I know that she wasn't planning on being facetious, but towards the end of the throne speech it says, "We will not over-promise." Well, my goodness, the promises abound for the first few pages of the throne speech, so I wanted to look at some of those promises. After all, this isn't a new government. It's a new Premier, but it's not a new government. It's a government that has been in place for 10 long years—for 10 years—most of that time in a majority role. We all know in this place that when you're the majority government, you can do just about anything you want. The opposition can scream and yell, rant and rave, but the government has its way, and that's the reality.

So what has this government done with its way over 10 years? What is the end result? I remind everyone who's listening and watching that Premier Wynne was at the cabinet table for most of that time—not all of that time—and that she voted with the government, with Dalton McGuinty, on all of those major objectives.

For example, someone who came from a background in education as a trustee, who was known as "progressive" back then—this is a woman who stood up and voted with Dalton McGuinty and the cabinet for Bill 115, one of the most regressive pieces of legislation that collective bargaining and that unions have seen in this province for a long time—since the Mike Harris days. She voted for it. She did not absent herself; she did not vote against it; she did not sit on her hands. She voted for it. The damage of that bill is still being undone in our schools.

This is a government, I remind you, that has the worst record, the absolutely worst record, of investment in post-secondary education. We have the worst investment per capita in our students of any province in Canada. We also have the highest student debt of any province in Canada. We have the highest tuition fees of any province in Canada. Yet in the throne speech it talks a great deal about youth—youth employment, working with colleges and universities. Yet after 10 years, that's the net result of a Liberal government: the worst record on post-secondary education in Canada.

Let's take another file that's near and dear to my heart, and that's housing: the absolute worst record in Canada on an investment-per-capita basis on bringing forth any sort of new housing—any sort of new housing. Of course, this is a government that will say, "Well, it's the federal

government's fault." Well, of course it is, in part. Federally, we need a national housing program. But this government, this provincial Liberal government, has had a role to play and has not played it, has not done what it should be doing.

Hence, we have over 150,000 families waiting an average of 10 to 12 years for a place to live. That's an abysmal record. That's an abysmal record—over 70,000 in the GTA alone. These are real families with real stories. This is the record of this government after 10 years, most of which was majority, most of which the current Premier sat at the cabinet table and voted in lockstep with the designs of the rest of her party, and that's the end result of it.

0930

Look at the poverty file: We have high hopes on this side in the New Democratic Party for action on that file, but what have we seen after 10 years of Liberal rule? Again, with the current Premier at the cabinet table, we've seen one of the worst records in poverty. These are the so-called social justice portfolios. This is supposed to be a social justice Premier, and yet we have one in seven children living in poverty in the province of Ontario—one in seven. We have one of the worst records of families living in poverty, and again, under this government's watch, we cut back on the community start-up funds.

These are the funds accessed by people on social assistance if they have to move or if they're a woman who's fleeing a domestic violence situation in her own home. She has to access those funds, otherwise she doesn't have the money to get out and to get safe for herself and her children. This government cut those funds—they cut those funds. A social justice Premier cut those funds. That's the reality on the ground, the lived experience of Ontarians after 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot of talk about integrity and forward thinking in the throne speech, a lot of utopian language, one might say. Yet over 10 years we have seen one after another scandal—scandals that speak to a lack of integrity, scandals like the gas plant, the so-called Project Vapour; scandals like the debacle at Ornge; \$1 billion wasted on eHealth. When you look at what is similar about all of these scandals, you see Liberal appointees making huge sums of money, spending huge sums of money, billions of dollars that could have gone to help that woman fleeing that domestic violence, could have gone to help that child have a decent breakfast so that they could study in school. That money could have gone to all of the above. This so-called social justice Premier at the cabinet table was in lockstep with the political decisions, many of them to spend that money in that way and still continue to spend that money in that way in many of these government agencies, and yet not on the files that the spin would have us say is indicative of a progressive government.

Let's look at transit: It got a lot of play in the media, but might I point out that after 10 years of Liberal government, most of it in majority with the current Premier

at the cabinet table, almost \$5 billion was taken out of Transit City, setting us up for failure. We over here in the New Democratic Party supported Transit City. We supported uploading the cost of the operations of the Toronto Transit Commission, which is what past governments have done. This government had 10 years to act on the transit file, and what have they done? Has it affected one person, Mr. Speaker, waiting for a bus, waiting for a streetcar, waiting for a subway in the city of Toronto? I can tell you that in my riding of Parkdale–High Park, there is a great deal of concern about transit, and they look again to this government and their past record and they don't see much action at all. They see a lot of spin. Remember Move 2020? Remember that one? We're not moving, and we're getting closer to the year 2020. We're not moving at all.

One can say that the people of my riding of Parkdale–High Park treat anything that comes out of this government, now that they've pressed the reset button, with a fair degree of scepticism. Where's the transit? After all the announcements, shovels in the ground, where's the transit? So that's the transit file. Now we're hearing, "Well, maybe that will all change with the budget." We live in hope in the New Democratic Party.

In fact, a very loud message came through to me from my constituents that they want to see things done. As you heard from the member from Davenport, they don't care what colour it is that accomplishes what needs to be accomplished; they just need something—anything—to be accomplished. That's what they need.

They said to me, very clearly, "Work with the government. Get what you can done." That's what we're doing. But we're feeling frustrated because, after all, we've now seen the new Premier, the socially progressive Premier, in place for, what is it, just over a month now.

What are the bills that are coming forward from the government? What are the bills coming forward? Well, the good food act—I mean, please. With all the promises for a utopian Ontario in the throne speech, we get a good food week? Is that what we get? A good food week—is that really the best that can come forward?

After all the promises in the throne speech, after all of the promises, do we get a very, very limp bill, the Ornge bill, that even the current administration at Ornge says won't solve the problem—after all the promises for a utopian Ontario, is this what we get? Action on our member's bill on tanning beds? I mean, it's an important bill; it's an important action. But, really?

I don't see anything about tanning beds, I don't see anything about good food weeks, and I don't see anything about lip service to a new administration at Ornge in the throne speech. I see grand vision and huge promises of a utopian Ontario, but, a month in, I don't see the bills to back it up. I don't see the discussion or the debate in this place to bring anything of these promises into fruition.

Now, we're practical in the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker, as you know. We are practical. We are asking the bare minimum of this government in order to

support them in the budget—the bare minimum. We get that this will not be a New Democratic Party budget. We were not the government. We wish that we were; we are not. But we need a bare minimum—a bare minimum. We would be satisfied with a bare minimum, not the lofty dreams and goals of the throne speech—just the bare minimum.

Action on closing corporate tax loopholes is almost \$2 billion in corporate tax loopholes, so that would feed a lot of children breakfast. That would provide a lot of housing. That would provide transit. Almost \$2 billion, but nothing, nada: We're not seeing—we're hearing. We're hearing the talk; we're not seeing the action on closing those corporate tax loopholes. Again, a bare minimum demand.

We're asking for the First Start jobs youth program, a very concrete suggestion that we've put forward about jobs for youth because, after all, we've lost hundreds of thousands of good manufacturing jobs and replaced them, as we've heard, with precarious employment. Some 50% of all the jobs in the GTA are precarious. That means, in answer to the question, "Do you think you'll have your job next year?" the answer was no. This is the reality of working in the GTA, working in our province. We've asked for action on that; but good food week? I don't think good food week's going to cut it.

We've asked for a five-day home care guarantee. Again, over and over again, our leader, Andrea Horwath, has asked about a commitment to that one small demand. It's not a huge demand; it's a small demand, a bare minimum demand for support. We haven't heard, Mr. Speaker, a promise.

So we still have seniors and others languishing, and this makes no economic sense, of course, many of them in high-expense emergency-ward beds waiting for good home care, and they're not getting it.

0940

We have asked for a 15% cut to auto insurance rates. We're going to be debating that this afternoon. We're hearing some positive signs, but they're signs only. We haven't heard concrete commitments to reducing the insurance burden on our drivers. Many folk in the 905 have to get to work. They're in those precarious jobs as well. They need this. This is the bare minimum they need. And I want to say again that this is not the utopian grand vision of the throne speech. This is a simple, little, practical demand. Can they do it? We haven't heard yet.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On the poverty file—and I speak directly to my friend the Minister of Community and Social Services on this one—we are hoping for the bare minimum demand, the \$200 that people get when they work or if they get money from other sources and they're on social assistance, which, by the way, is so pathetically low. You can't live on \$600 in the city of Toronto, and yet we claw back earnings. You can barely live on ODSP, and that's just around the \$1,000 mark. And we

claw back anything they earn? What kind of justice or morality is that? We've asked for the bare minimum, that the clawbacks end for that \$200. There's lots more we need—my goodness, lots more we need—but this is the bare minimum. We haven't seen a bill yet; we haven't seen action yet.

We've also heard, of course, about balancing the books. We hear from our friends to the right of us, literally and figuratively, that they'd like to see more balancing of the books. They pointed out, and quite rightly, about how this government has doubled the real debt, as well as, of course, the deficit. What they failed to point out is that the New Democratic Party has the very best record of balancing the books across Canada in provincial governments—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not in Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: —except for one notable exception, and that was a gentleman called Bob Rae. All I can say is Bob's their uncle now. Bob is now the leader of the Liberal Party. He's the only exception to that rule. So not only have we got the best record of balancing the books, but of course, the Liberals, as one might expect, have the worst in provincial leadership.

Again, we have called—and I was heartened to read our leader's words, "A balanced approach to a balanced budget." I was heartened to read that those very words were used in the throne speech by the new Premier Wynne herself. A balanced approach to a balanced budget—have we seen that? We haven't seen that action yet.

This is the problem. Really, between the thought and the act falls the shadow, if I might paraphrase. Here we have the thought, the throne speech, with its grand vision of a completely new Ontario—not the Ontario any of us live in, particularly those who have lost jobs, live in poverty, are about to be evicted, youth unemployed. It's not that Ontario, but a new Ontario. It's all outlined. It's beautifully done in the throne speech.

Yet in the months that we have hit the reset button, that we have a new Premier, we have the same old actions. We have bills that accomplish virtually nothing, put forward with great debate as if they accomplish a great deal. We don't see anything in the throne speech reflected in the bills put forward in the last month. And this, after all, is a Legislature that deals with bills. It deals with laws and changes to laws. Where are the new laws? Where are the courageous bills that would bring us a new province? Where is the dramatic action that would feed the children, house the homeless, get kids who can't afford to back into universities, provide jobs for the young? Where is any of that? It isn't in this chamber. It isn't here.

We, in the New Democratic Party, want to make this government work. We want to see the government live up to its throne speech. That's what we'd like to see. We would like to see the action from across the aisle that they have outlined in this throne speech, and we live in hope. I'll leave it at that.

It's Easter week. We all live in hope, and we wait to see the actual legislation.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: I have listened very attentively to the member from Parkdale–High Park in response to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

On some of the things that the member has said, I don't fault her, and I have to agree. Of course, when we come into the House and we express our views, they are expressed in this House, and of course we are protected by our own laws if we are right or wrong.

But I have to say that I want to pick on one particular item, and it's transportation. As someone that has been around for a few years now—I have served in the good old city of North York; some of us may remember that. I also served on Metro council, and I served as chair of the transportation committee at the time, afterwards serving in this wonderful place here, sir.

I remember that when we had an NDP administration in the city of Toronto, we were delayed five years—five years—to get the content and approval for the subway extension to York University, which is a city in itself. On a daily basis, we have some 55,000 people, between students, professors and teachers.

But the fact is this, Speaker: When I came to this House, then we got the approval to go through, and the new NDP mayor delayed for three years, because they couldn't decide if they wanted the subway extension or they should have an LRT. They couldn't decide it.

We thought, personally, "We have \$8.4 billion on the table." We've been saying—the Premier has been saying, the former and the present—"Get on with it. The money is there. Get on with it." So it's not us, Speaker. Let's look at somebody else.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have a moment or two to respond to the remarks made by the member for Parkdale–High Park.

I would certainly agree with her that the question of over-promising in this throne speech is a point that we should certainly all look at in terms of what in fact was said. The throne speech is something that should set a tone and provide a vision and certainly an idea of what to expect in the future. But what we saw in this was the platitudes. One of them was "without letting anyone slip through the cracks." I couldn't help but wonder about the 600,000 people who are unemployed in this province and if they would see themselves as people who haven't slipped through the cracks.

Another one that I think is a little difficult to juxtapose against the realities we face is again a quote: "A clear message that Ontario's finances are in steady hands...." Well, when we look at the committees that are investigating Ornge and the gas plant move, we're looking at—maybe those are steady hands, but they're certainly not ones that operated in the interests of the people of Ontario.

It's very clear that there's a reason why, in the lead-up to her winning leadership of the party, Premier Wynne never once talked about fiscal responsibility. It is in no literature; it is in no speeches that have circulated.

I think that those things are reason for us to feel we cannot accept this throne speech.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It's a pleasure to stand up and respond to some of the comments that were made by my colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park.

I wanted to elaborate on one of the points that she raised, and that's about home care. In the throne speech, it does state that the "government will continue to expand support available for people in their homes, and to address the needs of men and women across Ontario currently waiting for the home care services they require."

0950

Last weekend, I was fortunate enough to go to Rainy River, where I met with a 90-year-old woman. She is very capable; she's very independent. She's really quite an amazing and impressive woman. She lives on her own; she takes care of herself.

She had the misfortune of injuring herself. She went to her doctor, and she was extremely concerned. She was concerned about her health, but she was also concerned about her independence. Her doctor then prescribed home care. He really tried to set her mind at ease, and he assured her that she would be looked after when she returned from the doctor in Fort Frances to Rainy River.

Now, Mr. Speaker, she has waited and waited. She has called the number that they've given her for home care services, and nobody has called her back. In the interim, she has had a bandage that has needed changing. She has had to rely on the emergency room services in Rainy River—thank goodness, they're still there—and she has had to rely on her friends. This is a woman who is falling through the cracks, and she's afraid. As I said, she's afraid for her health; she's afraid for her independence. She's otherwise very healthy and very capable.

This is a prime example: If we were to put these supports in place to help people to live in their homes longer, it's better for her; it's better for the system.

So I am calling on the MPPs to come together, to work together, and to implement the five-day home care guarantee, because this is something that is within our power right now and we can make these changes in the budget.

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

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to rise in this House this morning and talk about the speech from the throne. The speech from the throne, as we all know, is a document which sets out the government's vision and also a plan for the year to come. In this document, the Premier lays out our government's vision for economic growth, job creation and also building a fair society in this wonderful province of ours, Ontario.

In this document, the Premier talks about job creation. Over the past few weeks, since this government came to office, we have done quite a lot, actually. I'm just going to mention a few items.

For example, in my ministry, we have invested \$100 million in the Ontario Brain Institute. This investment is going to leverage a \$150-million investment from other sources. The scientists, the neurologists—500 of them in Ontario—are going to continue the world-class research on discoveries, on making people's lives much easier, and on making treatment of diseases such as dementia, Alzheimer's and other diseases—which have their origins in the brain—much easier for the people of Ontario.

We have invested \$36 million in 17 research projects in the city of Toronto, and we have invested \$50 million in the creation of the new venture capital, which is going to attract \$250 million from other sources, including from our federal government.

These are some of the economic measures we have done just in the past few weeks, since we came to office.

In the area of university students' fees, we continue to reduce the fees for 30% of students. Ontario university students have the lowest tuition fees in the province, actually, when you take 30% off—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

The member from Parkdale–High Park has two minutes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I remember very well the Minister of Transportation standing in this House and saying, in answer to a question, that it's a good thing for a politician to under-promise and over-deliver. I think, in summing up the throne speech, what I would say is it's a huge over-promise, and what we have seen is an enormous under-delivery. That's not just true of the throne speech. It's true of the last 10 years of Liberal rule in the province of Ontario, and it's beginning to tell. When the bills that come forward in the first few weeks of the new Premier's situation here in Ontario are things like a good food week, they're not delivering on what the people of Ontario need. They need jobs; they need health care.

We in the New Democratic Party have made some very, very small demands of this government, and we haven't seen action on any of them yet. We've asked for the closing of corporate loopholes. That's \$2 billion that could go to alleviating the problems of this province. We've asked for home care. We've asked for a five-day guarantee on wait on home care; we haven't seen it. We've asked for action on poverty, the very minimum action, to end the clawbacks; we haven't seen it. We've asked for action on youth getting jobs, and quite frankly, we haven't seen it. We've asked for action on insurance rates. We've heard some noises, Mr. Speaker, but we haven't seen it. Again, even on the modicum of demands we've made, we haven't seen action, and yet the promises of the throne speech are nothing if not grandiose and utopian. We have grandiose promises but very little

delivery. Let's see some delivery, I ask my friends from across the aisle. Let's see some action. We live in hope. All of Ontario is waiting. Let's do it. Let's get going.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 42(a), there have been 12 hours of debate on the motion for an address in reply to the speech from the throne. I'm now required to put the question.

On February 20, 2013, Ms. Wong moved, seconded by Mr. McNeely, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

"To the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

"We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session."

Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry?

All those in favour of Ms. Wong's motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be deferred until after question period.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Orders of the day?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I know everybody's anticipating this motion, and no further business this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There being no further business for the moment, the House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 0957 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to introduce to the House two guests: Catherine Duval-Russell and Helene Paulyn. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to welcome the Westwater family from my riding of Oakville. Noah is a grade 7 student at Maple Grove Public School. He wants to spend a lot more time here; he's applying for the page program. He's joined by his sister Brooke, who's in Grade 5, and his mother, Susan, one of Ontario's great elementary school teachers.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to welcome today, in the west gallery, Jeannette Chau and Scott Clark from the Ontario professional engineers association.

Mr. John Vanthof: Eric Guild is page captain today, and on this proud day, he is joined by his family, Kristen Guild, Angela Rowan and Dean Wallace. I'd like to welcome them to the House.

Hon. Michael Chan: From the wonderful riding of Markham-Unionville, I would like to welcome my constituent Joyce Riettie and Royston Richards from Jamaica.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I would like to welcome back into the gallery my good friend, a young friend from North Bay, Ishmael Van Der Rassel.

Mr. Norm Miller: I am pleased to welcome to the members' west gallery Harold Wilson, PC candidate for the riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Kyara Wendling is a page here, and her sisters are joining her today in the west gallery: Matteya and Justine Wendling from Port Colborne.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to welcome here at Queen's Park today Asquith Allen from my riding of York-South Weston. He is VP of the federal and Ontario Young Liberals.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think we need to put this down in history: I have to admonish somebody for heckling a guest.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And he's still at it.

Mr. John O'Toole: From the great riding of Durham, I'd like to recognize page Andrew Hodgins and his parents, Charisma and Allan Hodgins, in the west gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to introduce three people from my riding of St. Paul's. First is Mark Tishman, who is my constituency assistant; with him are James Molloy, an intern at my office, and Ehssan Taghavi, who is also helping to volunteer at my CO.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Save your voice.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. We owe an obligation to our youth to provide every opportunity we can for them to find good, well-paying jobs and to clear aside unnecessary obstacles to employment. We've heard quite clearly from Ontario manufacturers, industry, that the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio is an artificial barrier that belongs back in the 1970s. We have a plan that will help create 200,000 jobs—good, well-paying jobs—in the skilled trades today by modernizing our apprenticeship system and helping young people find opportunity in this great province.

I ask the Premier: Will you support the PC plan to bring our apprenticeship system into the 21st century?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is going to want to address this issue specifically. I want to make the overarching comment, Mr. Speaker, that we are very, very concerned about making sure that young people are prepared for and have the training for the jobs that are available.

I've said consistently through the leadership and into this first period as Premier that the mismatch between

labour force and labour market is something that really does have to be addressed, and I think it's something that can be addressed if government works in partnership with business and works in partnership with labour.

In the jobs round tables that we've been holding around the province, this is a theme that we've heard over and over again. There are businesses that are willing and wanting to work with government, Mr. Speaker. The education sector wants to work with us so we can make that matchup work much better for young people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I do appreciate that the Premier is very concerned, in her words, on the mismatch between training and job opportunities. We agree, and that's why we've brought forward initiatives to actually help address that, to clear aside an old, outdated piece of regulation from the 1970s. Granted, Speaker, the 1970s had some good things about it, but there are some things we should leave in the past: for example, disco, bell-bottoms and this outdated red tape that is having a real impact on our young people, preventing them from moving into good jobs.

I want to commend my colleague from Simcoe North, Garfield Dunlop, who probably knows more about the skilled trades in Ontario than any of us here in the assembly. Mr. Dunlop is bringing forward a bill for second reading tomorrow entitled Helping Ontarians Enter the Skilled Trades Act. It will modernize the system to help connect people with jobs.

I ask you, Premier: Will the Ontario Liberal Party support this piece of legislation that would create 200,000 skilled trades jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: First off, Mr. Speaker, their piece of legislation will not create any jobs. Apprenticeship ratios don't create jobs; projects create jobs. Investment in a skilled workforce creates jobs. A competitive corporate tax environment creates jobs. Apprenticeship ratios do not create jobs. I had the opportunity to meet with the CMA as well yesterday, and we had a very good talk about apprenticeship ratios.

Mr. Speaker, here's where we differ from the opposition: We're of the view that politicians should not be dictating this policy; that those that know the skilled trades—the industry itself—should have a say on apprenticeship ratios. We think that's a more responsible way to make those decisions. I don't know why the opposition are not onside with us on that.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I started out hopeful with the Premier's initial answer, and then she handed it off to the minister, who's just giving us these stale, outdated talking points that just don't reflect the realities of the economy. It's certainly going to be disappointing for all those young people who want to get into the skilled trades in our province, be it the electricians, mechanics or precision machine operators.

I ask the minister—he says that industry should decide this issue. When the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says the single biggest obstacle preventing people from getting into skilled trades is this outdated journeyman-to-apprentice ratio—if you believe industry should say it—and the CFIB has said this—then surely you will put your old Dalton McGuinty talking points aside, with all due respect to the gentleman in the House here today, and you will support instead somebody who knows far more about the skilled trades, Garfield Dunlop. Will you, Minister, support this important piece—

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

1040

Hon. Brad Duguid: If the Leader of the Opposition wanted to take a fresh approach, then he wouldn't want to be sticking to the status quo when it comes to making important decisions with regard to the skilled trades: apprenticeship ratios, issues to do with compulsory trades.

We're of the view that the days when politicians made those decisions in backrooms at Queen's Park should be gone. We're of the view that the College of Trades, which will take into consideration the expertise within the industry, is much better qualified—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: We're of the view that the people who work in the skilled trades are much better qualified to make these decisions than the Leader of the Opposition. So we're not going to stick with the status quo like the Leader of the Opposition wants to do. We're going to move forward to a new, exciting future—

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

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll go back to the Premier on the same topic. I had hoped for better.

Considering that the unemployment rate among youth today, Premier, as you know, is 16.2%—here in the city of Toronto, it's even greater: high double digits, near 20%—I regret that the minister seems to be putting the special interests and the status quo ahead of the 200,000 youth who could benefit directly from Garfield Dunlop's bill.

I'm for moving forward. I'm for moving into the 21st century in these policies. I'm for joining the other seven provinces that are moving in this direction. I'm for Garfield Dunlop's bill. I'm for more good, well-paying jobs in the skilled trades.

I'll ask the minister: If almost every other province has moved in this direction, why is your government stuck in the 1970s when it comes to how it's approaching this issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm not stuck in the 1970s. In terms of age, that wouldn't be a bad thing for me, but I'm not.

Mr. Speaker, all of us agree in this House that we want our young people to be able to find jobs. We have done so much in terms of providing opportunities. Yesterday I was in Clinton. I had the opportunity to meet with some students who are taking part in an agriculture Specialist High Skills Major. Specialist High Skills Majors were introduced under Premier Dalton McGuinty, and they have been a huge opportunity for young people to have co-op opportunities, to have the chance to learn—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and to get some very specific skills so that when they graduate from high school, they're ready to go into a skilled trade or they're ready to go into a college program.

That's the kind of thing we need to be doing: dual credits, Mr. Speaker, working to make sure that the placements, internships and co-ops are in place. That's why working with business, labour and government, we can solve those problems.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think the Premier is mischaracterizing this issue. There are graduates from the Specialist High Skills Majors, there are graduates from pre-apprenticeship training programs and there are graduates from apprenticeship programs who can't find job opportunities in our province. The jobs are actually there, to be clear, but this outdated rule on the apprenticeship ratios has prevented them from moving into jobs here.

By way of example, a young man I met in Cornwall wanted to be an electrician—a burning desire to be an electrician. He even had a small business—his name is Ryan—who would hire him. But because the employer, the small business, did not have enough journeymen, he was not able to hire young Ryan, who couldn't get the job.

I worry that young talent is going to leave our province. They'll go to British Columbia; they'll go to Alberta; they'll go to BC. When I talk to these students, almost universally they say they've lost friends and family to other provinces.

Premier, why are you putting special interests ahead of these young people who want—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The Leader of the Opposition is just plain wrong. We've doubled the amount of opportunities for young people, from 60,000 apprenticeships, when we took office, to 120,000. We want to do more. That's why we have an Apprenticeship Tax Credit that's providing incentives to businesses to hire apprentices.

I think, though, what the Leader of the Opposition is not doing is telling the full story here, because if we were to go to a one-to-one ratio across the board, what the Leader of the Opposition isn't saying is how many thousands of journeymen would his party be putting out of

work. What would that do to the long-term sustainability of the skilled trades as a career that we want to encourage our young people to get into?

Mr. Speaker, it's important that they tell the full story. We don't think politicians ought to be making these decisions; we think they should be left to the people in the skilled trades.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I would give a suggestion to the minister. Maybe if he could spend even one day travelling with Garfield Dunlop to every corner of this province, talking to people here, to understand better how this will create 200,000 jobs.

When I see the Heavy Construction Association of Toronto, Merit Ontario, the Ontario Electrical League, the Ontario General Contractors Association, the Ontario road builders, the sewer and water main, the CFIB—all of these employers that say, “We want to hire more people. We want to put more people to work in the skilled trades that are out there. We've got their resumé. We've got jobs lined up for them, but the Ontario Liberal Party and the special interests are putting roadblocks in our way.”

Clear those roadblocks aside. Take the system into the 21st century. Put 200,000 skilled trades workers in the province to work today. Help our young people. Extend that hand. Why won't you get out of the 1970s, join the 21st century and create 200,000 jobs—

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Just a reminder that when the Leader of the Opposition was asking the question, I was hearing the same comments coming out of almost the same people while he's asking the question. That means you're heckling your leader. And for those—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, I'm not finished yet—which also means that as soon as I ask for that attention, it does not mean that this side needs to carry on either.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As well, the member from Renfrew, thank you for your help, but I'll do it myself.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition's offer to spend a day with his colleague, but I would suggest maybe his colleague should want to spend a day with me as well, because he would spend some time talking to real tradespeople out there, people like a young man by the name of Jason Yull, a carpenter. This is what Jason had to say: “Somebody sitting behind a desk making decisions for tradespeople doesn't have the same effect

as a bunch of people who are out in the field seeing every day what goes on and what needs to be done.”

We agree with Jason. We think those decisions ought to be left up to those who know the field better than we do sitting here at Queen’s Park, the skilled tradespeople across this province. That’s why we set up the College of Trades, and the College of Trades will promote the skilled trades as a viable career opportunity for our young people right across this province.

Mr. Speaker, they should be onside with us on this. I can’t understand, for the life of me, why they’re not.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The leader of the third party.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Durham, come to order.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham, come to order. When I ask you for order, it doesn’t mean carry on; it means stop.

The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker.

My question is for the Premier. As the Premier knows, New Democrats have made it clear that we want to see results for people in the upcoming budget. One of the issues we’ve raised is the fact that Ontarians’ auto insurance premiums are the highest in Canada and they need to come down. Is the Premier now indicating that she’s prepared to act?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think I’ve been very clear that we want to take action on this issue. More than a year ago, I had a round table in my own riding where we talked about the cost of auto insurance. Through the leadership campaign, particularly in Mississauga and Brampton, I heard concerns about the cost of auto insurance. We are going to take action, and that’s why the Minister of Finance is working with the industry.

I’ve been very clear that the costs of fraud that are in the system need to be taken out, and implementing the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force is very important to me. So I am very willing to take action, and those conversations are happening in the run-up to the budget between the finance minister and the industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?
1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats have been very clear that we want to see a 15% reduction, and we want to see the Financial Services Commission of Ontario have a mandate, a real mandate, to get us there over the next year. What steps has the Premier actually taken to achieve this, Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think I said what we are doing. We are determined to take action. We are looking for the ways to do that. I think one of the

important ways that we need to do that is to implement the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force. I think there are hundreds of millions of dollars that can come out of the system. What we need to do is make sure that we can tie those reductions to a premium reduction for drivers, Mr. Speaker.

So the principle underlying the question from the leader of the opposition and the principle underlying the opposition day motion is a principle we can agree with: that the reductions in auto insurance need to be put in place. That’s why the Minister of Finance is working with the industry to find the ways of doing that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier forgot to talk about the \$2 billion annually that the insurance industry is gaining from previous decisions that this government has made, while reducing benefits for drivers. Ontarians are paying the highest premiums in Canada, and they’re expecting some real change to make life more affordable.

In the past, the Premier has indicated that a 15% reduction in premiums was going to be too big of a challenge. It’s clear that she’s hearing from the same people we are that life has become completely unaffordable and they actually want to see some real change in their rates.

When will the Premier be contacting FSCO and giving them a mandate to reduce rates by an average of 15% over the coming year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the House that it was this side of the government that introduced legislation at the time, in 2004, to reduce insurance premiums, and we did it in a gradual and a concerted effort in dealing with the industry. The NDP know this all too well, because they themselves have recognized that they need to take a gradual approach, recognizing that the impact is very complex. It’s not a direct, proportionate amount of a reduction unless we deal with the fraud and the cost of claims, and that is what we’re addressing.

We’re dealing with the industry. We welcome the input by the third party. We’ll continue to do what we always do on this side of the House, and that’s work in the best interests of the public and ensure that premium rates go down. And I should say this: Premium rates have gone down last year because the efforts that we provided through the task force are taking results. So we will continue to do what’s necessary, and we’ll continue to work with the NDP to make sure it happens.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier as well. We’ve been really clear that in the coming budget we need to see some results and not just conversation. We’ve laid out some very clear and achievable goals that we know people want to see to make life a little more affordable and to ensure the budget is fair.

Is the government still planning to open up a brand new tax loophole for Ontario's biggest corporations so they can get a break on their HST while Ontario families are paying more?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we're doing consultations around the province. In fact, the House should know that we have it on our website, so we're asking everybody out there to come out and provide some input. We welcome the additions that anybody has in respect to what we should do to put forward a very constructive budget that meets the needs of the public.

The issues around tax compliance, tax avoidance, the issue around "What we are going to do to ensure the integrity of our revenue stream?" are critical, and I again applaud the NDP for also bringing that to the forefront, which we addressed with the federal government.

We'll continue to work on those issues, as well as input tax credits, as well as the auto insurance that we've already mentioned and a number of other exemptions that have to be addressed, so that we provide integrity in our revenue stream as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, families in Ontario are feeling extremely squeezed, and the Liberal government is now talking about squeezing them even more. At the same time, this government is opening a new tax loophole so the biggest corporations can get a break on the HST. Can the Premier commit today that she won't be moving ahead with her new tax loophole?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As the member and the leader of the opposition, the third party, recognizes, the federal government's engagement in this issue is critical. That's why we have addressed the matter with them as well. We've called on the feds to work with us. We are taking steps to avoid those tax loopholes. We're also trying to address the underground economy. We're taking the necessary steps to ensure that the strong fundamentals of Ontario continue.

And let me rectify and correct the record that I hear oftentimes from the opposition. Ontario has produced over 600,000 new jobs since the recession—a net number of 400,000. What we're doing is making a difference. We're attracting investment. We've made it a very competitive jurisdiction in Ontario. People are investing in Ontario, companies are investing, and jobs are being created, and that's what matters, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier claims she believes in a balanced approach, but her government is planning to open up new corporate tax loopholes worth over \$1 billion annually. At the same time, they're firing nurses. They're scrambling to build casinos in communities that don't want them, and they're contemplating measures that will add new costs to household budgets.

The Premier says she wants an approach that's balanced and fair. When will we hear her say, "Handing out massive tax breaks to Ontario's wealthiest corporations

isn't something we can afford, and I'm going to stop it"? That's what we'd like to hear her say.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a balanced approach. We are talking about the best way to move forward so that we attract business investment and ensure that we create those jobs.

I find it odd to hear the members opposite talk about growth, and yet it was during their time in power that auto insurance rates went up very high, that the economy had made some suffering. They were the ones that cut nurses and doctors and investments in hospitals and infrastructure.

We have taken a position that we need to invest in the long term. Investments in infrastructure, investments in our services, be it education and our health care—that's what's critical for making us competitive. But we need to afford to do those things, and the way to afford them is to attract those businesses, to create those jobs and create those investments that are going to make us even more competitive. We need to work together, and that is what's a balanced approach.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Given the experience that we've had with Ornge and the number of times that the Minister of Health told us here that the reason that scandal was allowed to brew was because she had no idea what was going on at Ornge, at the last public hearings, we asked Dr. McCallum, the new president and CEO of Ornge, how many times the minister has asked to meet with him to get a handle on what's going on at Ornge. Dr. McCallum said, and I'll quote from Hansard, "I have not met with her." I said, "She has never asked you to meet with her?" Dr. McCallum responded "Not to date."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, the next day, the member from Haldimand-Norfolk asked the same minister if she had met with Dr. McCallum, and she responded—

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

Mr. Frank Klees:—"I have met with Mr. McCallum. In fact, I've seen him earlier this week."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Time's up.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Regrettably, I could not identify the individual saying so, but you will not be using unparliamentary language.

Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm very happy to tell the member opposite that I did see Dr. McCallum earlier in the week. We met because there were people here from Australia, understanding about what was happening at Ornge. I met Dr. McCallum at an event that was—so it's possible we were both right; that when you

interviewed Dr. McCallum, he had not met with me, but I had met him the other week.

There is constant communication between Ornge and my ministry. I have had conversations with Dr. McCallum. The ministry is very focused on continuing to improve Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: How incredibly disappointing that answer is. It was very specific. The question was: “Did the minister ask you to meet with her to report on what is happening at Ornge, the financial and operational affairs?” Dr. McCallum clearly said, “No; I was never invited to do that. I never met with her.” What the minister is doing now is equivocating.

The Premier wants civility in this place. I suggest that a good place to start is to direct her ministers to be forthright and honest when they are asked a question.

I want to ask the minister one more time: Did she or did she not meet with Dr. McCallum to discuss the operational and financial affairs of Ornge, yes or no?

1100

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I have regular communications with the chair of the board, Ian Delaney. Typically the relationship is between the minister and the chair. My ministry is in constant communication with Ornge—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The issue here is, is Ornge back on track? The answer, absolutely, is yes.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Either you’ve got brilliant timing or terrible timing.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I’m finished.

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

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: Yesterday, Jamison Steeve, principal secretary to your predecessor, testified at the justice committee that TransCanada came to him because they were concerned that local bylaws in Oakville would prevent the construction of their power plant. It looks like TransCanada came to you looking for a bailout.

Why did the Liberal government move heaven, earth and \$1 billion to make sure TransCanada was happy?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. I respect his tenacity on these issues as well, but all three parties made the same commitment to relocate both the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants.

We minimized some costs, Mr. Speaker, by not allowing construction to begin at the proposed Oakville site. The opposition suggests we waited until the middle of the process to relocate the plant. The sunk costs would have been higher had we waited.

As stated in committee yesterday, a number of options were considered at the time to relocate the plant. We have been very clear that the committee is doing its job. It has the opportunity to ask these questions.

The Auditor General is looking into it. He will be able to look into these issues. The Auditor General has the right to interview Mr. Steeve, and he can do that under oath.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, back to you: Jamison Steeve also testified that he was directly involved in talks with TransCanada. He said that he was directed by Chris Morley, Dave Gene and the Premier himself. It’s becoming increasingly clear that Ontarians are on the hook for a plant that nobody wanted, that apparently wasn’t needed and that couldn’t be built.

Why were the Liberal Party leader and his insiders putting Ontarians on the hook and taking TransCanada off the hook?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We have mentioned and referred to a memorandum of understanding, which is on the website of the OPA. It was put there September 24 or 25. There are three parties to that agreement. There’s TransCanada, the OPA and the government of Ontario. Yes, there were parties from the government involved in those negotiations, but the facts and the numbers that were provided were provided by the OPA.

Mr. Speaker, I think it’s important that Ontarians be provided with all the facts. That’s why we’ve asked the Auditor General to look into this. He will provide a report on both of those gas plant sites and their relocations. We also expanded the terms, the mandate of the committee to enable these things to be examined in further detail. We await the results of all the evidence and all the comments.

We have been straightforward, we have been honest and we have provided all the information.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Recently, I have heard concerns from traditional Chinese medicine health professionals about the new regulatory college that will be overseeing their practice. I am concerned that not all Chinese medicine and acupuncture practitioners who serve our communities will be able to be registered as required to continue their practice after April 1, when new rules come into effect bringing oversight to their practice. People throughout Ontario have come to rely on the health professionals who provide important traditional Chinese health care services.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: What changes are taking place and what must health professionals do to continue practising?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. We recognize that many people rely on traditional Chinese medicine. They turn to traditional Chinese medicine; it plays an important part of their health care. We also believe that citizens deserve to know what they are getting and the qualifications of the people from whom they are receiving that service. It's a basic principle of consumer protection, and never more important than when it comes to health care.

That's why I'm very pleased that Ontarians will now have a college to regulate traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture. We brought in legislation in 2006 that makes traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture services safer for Ontarians by ensuring that only regulated and qualified practitioners who are accountable to a regulatory body may deliver those services. They've been working hard developing regulations and policies, including entry practices.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Again, my question is to the Minister of Health. Regulating traditional Chinese medicine makes Ontarians feel safer and makes them feel assured that they are receiving good care. But there are two primary concerns that health professionals have. First, there is a lack of clarity about what happens if the health professional misses the April 1 registration. Second, many health professionals continue to practise in their first language and have concerns about new English- and French-language requirements.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: How is the Transitional Council of the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists addressing these very important concerns?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: After April 1 of this year, there may be applicants who are eligible for the general certificate but who have not yet completed the registration examination requirements. That's why the transitional council is providing a flexible approach to registration for these applicants by issuing provisional certificates to members. Once these members have written and successfully passed the registration exam, they will be issued a general certificate to practise traditional Chinese medicine. Furthermore, we do recognize that there will be issues around language that will need to be taken into account. That's why transitional services are being made available to those who need them in order to complete their testing.

The most important thing that health professionals can do, if they have concerns, is to contact the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists. We must remember that the role of the college is about continually improving patient safety. We need to ensure top quality professionals.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday I told this Legislature that Tiffany Turnbull of the Cabinet Office testified there was

“weekly email traffic” on Project Vapour-lock, the secret code name for the cancellation of the Mississauga power plant. The shock in that, Premier, is the fact that there were absolutely no Project Vapour-lock documents that she swore existed in all the 56,000 pages we received—none that she was referring to. In fact, your own House leader stood up and paraded five Vapour-lock documents, but by doing so, he proved that none of those had the ones that she was saying existed.

Premier, you continue to say that we have all the documents, and we continue to prove that we don't have all the documents. When are you going to quit playing these games and provide all the documents?

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

Hon. John Milloy: I think the member has to be very, very careful with the facts, as he found out yesterday and had to correct the record here this morning.

Mr. Speaker, there were more Project Vapour-lock documents I could have read from yesterday; I didn't have time. I have one here—a memo:

“Project Vapour-lock

“I recommend a similar governance structure to the Vapour transaction as follows:

“1. Government oversight committee (same as Vapour)....

“2. Government technical working group (same as Vapour)....

“3. Relationship between OPA and government is also similar to the Vapour transaction” etc.

Mr. Speaker, he can't stand up in this House and claim that these documents don't exist when in fact they were part of the 56,000.

In terms of the broader question of access to documents, he has some nerve, after he sat at the committee several weeks ago when the government offered to provide a much wider sweep. He, along with other members of the opposition, put their hands up and voted against it.

1110

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm going to ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to take that picture, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm also going to—I've heard the words “respect,” “disrespect,” “civility,” and I'm waiting for it.

I also told the member that I would admonish him, so to the Attorney General and to the Minister of the Environment, don't do it again.

I would now ask the member for his supplementary question.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I have to say to the House leader, thank you for your transparency. We can see right through you. We stand here—you're not fooling anybody with that nonsense, and I'm tired of games. My guest Ishmael is tired of games.

We're here to find out two things. We're here to find out what is the cost of this political cancellation, and who

ordered the documents not to be turned over to this committee. We stand here week after week providing testimony from witnesses under oath. They prove that the Mississauga cancellation was more than \$5 million more than they'll admit, and they swore under oath that the Oakville cancellation is between \$800 million and \$900 million more than they are admitting to.

So I ask the Premier, how much are the political cancellations of the two power plants, and who ordered the documents not to be turned over?

Interjections.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I have tried to let the committee do its work. If the honourable member wants to get into the weeds here on the floor of the House, let's get into it, because he needs to get his facts straight.

The original request from the committee was for documents from the Ontario Power Authority, the Ministry of Energy and the Minister of Energy's office. They were the 56,000 pages that were given to him.

When he raises other documents that might be provided, government members went to the committee and moved a motion to provide them to the opposition, and they sat there, raised their hands and voted against it. If anyone has some explaining to do, it's that member, it's the member for Renfrew-Nipissing and all his caucus colleagues, and why they voted against it and did not allow that motion to proceed.

CASINOS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, community groups all across Ontario, First Nations and the horse racing industry have been vocal opponents of the Liberal government's plan to push casinos on communities, yet the new government, just like the old government, is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay, start the clock.

Finish.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Speaker. The new government, just like the old government, is moving ahead with the OLG privatization despite strong—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean-Carleton is warned.

Go ahead.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: On top of this, there is mass confusion across the province over a municipal hosting formula that results in municipalities being completely in the dark about potential casino revenues.

Will the Premier commit to the people of Ontario that they will have a meaningful say in casino locations—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member for Oxford, come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak:—before they are pushed into communities?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There were a lot of things in that question, and there was an interaction between the opposition parties that I'm not sure about.

But here's our position: We have never said that we were going to force or impose a casino on a municipality. We have never said that. We have said the exact opposite. We have said that it is up to municipalities to determine whether or not they want a casino. They have the authority and the power to do the consultation that they deem necessary, and then they will make the decision whether they want a casino or not—not the OLG, not the provincial government, not any individual member, not the Premier. The municipality will decide whether they want a casino or not.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order—second time. Do you want to make it three? I'm going to cut off the coffee in the galleries.

Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, it sounds like the PC members are supportive of the government's plan to privatize or else they wouldn't be trying to shout me down.

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I can assure you, members of the NDP caucus are not supportive of the plan to privatize.

Premier, tomorrow in this Legislature—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know how to do my job, I think. Keep it down.

Finish, please.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Tomorrow in this Legislature, we will debate the NDP motion to give Ontarians a real say before casinos are forced on communities, and to ensure that this government actually sits down—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak:—to talk with the horse racing industry without the threat of a looming March 31—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop. Stop the clock. The two members that I will now speak of are heckling so much and there's so much noise, they didn't even know I asked them to keep quiet, or they totally ignored me. So I'll make sure it's clear: The member from Lambton and the member from Stormont, come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Some 30,000 full-time jobs in rural Ontario are on the line, and this government is not even willing to admit that cancelling the SARP partner-

ship without a plan for the future was a mistake that will cost Ontarians dearly.

Will the Premier explain to Ontarians why the Liberal government is choosing to reward the Donald Trumps of the casino industry over jobs in rural Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've made our position on casinos very, very clear. Let me talk about the horse racing industry. We are being guided by the transition panel's report, which called the SARP program bad public policy. It called it unaccountable, un-transparent; it created a fractious industry that lost the focus on its customer.

I think the best evidence that we have got a plan and that we're moving on that plan is that we have nine transition agreements in place with racetracks. Woodbine, Mohawk, Western Fair, Grand River, Clinton, Hanover, Georgian Downs, Flamboro and Fort Erie: All of those racetracks have transition agreements in place.

We are moving towards a sustainable horse racing industry in this province. We are following the plan laid out by the transition panel, and that will mean we will have a transparent, sustainable horse racing industry in Ontario.

SENIORS' SAFETY

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Today, my question is for the hard-working minister responsible for seniors. Over the last six months, since I first had the privilege to represent the wonderful community of Vaughan, I've spent a lot of time in my riding visiting wonderful seniors' clubs like the Maple Pioneer, the Vellore seniors and the Sonoma seniors. Over and over again, I hear from the seniors of my community and from their families that the safety and security of our seniors is definitely a high priority. When our seniors develop dementia, it can make it challenging for their loved ones to ensure that they are safe and protected, especially when they decide to leave home without assistance.

1120

Speaker, through you to the minister: If a loved one with dementia does go missing, what resources are available to help families and caregivers that can help them make sure they are properly prepared?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I have to say thank you to the very effective and hard-working member from Vaughan for the question. It's not only an important question; it's an incredibly important topic as well. We have 180,000 seniors who suffer from one form of dementia or another. During their term of life, they will go missing once, perhaps more, and statistics show that 70% will repeat it time and time again.

Last week, the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, along with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, joined forces to launch the Finding Your Way wandering prevention program—the very first program in Canada—in a bold effort to support our loved ones with dementia.

The program recognizes Ontario's diversity, and it will be delivered in eight different languages. When a loved one goes missing, families—

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Minister, for that wonderful response and for all of the exceptional work that you're doing on behalf of seniors in my riding of Vaughan and across the wonderful province of Ontario.

I understand that according to the OPP, 75% of individuals who wander are located within less than three kilometres from where they were last seen. Most of them also have a history of wandering.

If a loved one goes missing—I'm asking the minister if he can tell me what we are doing concretely to ensure that our police officers know how to respond to such a call.

Hon. Mario Sergio: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you to the member from Vaughan for this great question. We have developed resources to train police officers to help families prevent loved ones from going missing. Our officers will also know how to deal with situations where our seniors have already been reported as missing.

That means that we will train front-line police officers to recognize and respond to cases involving seniors who have wandered. To do so, we have provided \$200,000 in annual funding to the Ontario Police College to develop, deliver and evaluate police training on wandering and dementia.

I'm also very proud that the outreach to communities will be conducted in English and in French across the province.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, as you will know, the Federation of Ontario Traditional Chinese Medicine Associations has retained a litigation team to seek an injunction against you and your ministry's transitional council. I've met with numerous traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, and they've all raised concerns with me regarding your ministry's and the traditional council's treatment of them. They've advised me that both you and the council have refused to listen to their concerns, that the process leading to the promulgation of these regulations is deeply flawed and will result in unfair and discriminatory requirement terms for practitioners.

Minister, why on earth has it taken a lawsuit to get your attention to this matter?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, quite to the contrary, the transitional council has been working—we passed the legislation in 2006 and appointed the transitional council. They have been working very, very hard to develop the foundation of the college of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

I think people in Ontario have the right to expect that they are receiving care from someone who is qualified, and that is the purpose of the college. They have met

with a wide range of practitioners. They've done very, very difficult work. But I think it's important that the safety of Ontarians is paramount.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: That's the way this ministry continues to operate, same old: Ignore legitimate issues until they blow up in your face. We've seen this time and time again: eHealth, Ornge—the list goes on.

Minister, lawyers, as you know, are gathering in court to deal with this matter as we speak. It should never have come to this. Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine have raised legitimate concerns about this whole process, including the constitutionality of the regulations, which will affect access to treatment by over one million patients in Ontario.

Minister, will you commit today to meeting with the federation to resolve these concerns?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will let the courts do their work, but what I can tell you is that since January 2011, the transitional council has worked closely with future membership to keep them engaged and to keep them informed about the forthcoming changes. They've provided regular updates on their website and through newsletter and by email. They've clearly communicated requirements and timelines in order to obtain a certificate of registration by April 1, 2013.

The council conducted a series of outreach sessions in February this year to educate practitioners on how to register with the college. The council ran a series of ads in daily newspapers like *Ming Pao* and *Sing Tao* to encourage potential members to submit their applications to college. They've offered requisite courses since November 2012 and have been accepting registration applications since February. To date, over 2,000 applicants have completed the courses.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Eighteen more people have lost their jobs in Windsor, and that's 18 fewer children's aid society caseworkers protecting children in Windsor-Essex and 18 fewer families who can depend on a paycheque to keep a roof over their heads. Windsor is already struggling with high unemployment; the last thing they need is their government to make things even worse. How can cutting jobs at the Windsor children's aid society be good for kids and good for that community?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you very much for the question. Given that it is the Windsor-Essex CAS, I certainly am concerned over the layoffs that are occurring at the local CAS. We have been in touch with that local CAS to discuss that issue as well.

Ultimately, our concern is to ensure the protection of our children and our youth through our CAS, and that is where it is. Staffing decisions are made by agencies based on their volume and based on their need. What I

can say is that we have been working with the CAS, with the Ontario Association of CASs, on a funding model to ensure sustainability in the system with each CAS across the province, not only the one in Windsor. We will continue to do that work with them—again, with our primary objective being our children.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Windsor's children's aid society workers do a job that is stressful and that is emotionally draining. They're already overworked and underfunded, and now they have to deal with demoralizing staffing cuts. Eighteen workers have just lost their jobs, and their colleagues are now shouldering even bigger caseloads. Is this how the government shows concern and makes sure that no child is left behind in Windsor?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Speaker, I'm going to echo the comments that she just made with respect to the work that is done in our communities on behalf of our children by the workers at the CAS. I worked in our community. I worked very closely with the CAS, with our families, so absolutely, they do a fine job, and I know exactly the work that they do down in our communities.

What I will say is that over the past number of years, this government has increased funding to the CASs throughout the province by 40%. It is funded at \$1.5 billion. The CAS in Windsor has also received increases of close to 30% over the years. So we are certainly working with our CASs. We are certain ensuring the sustainability of that system and ensuring the protection and safety of our children.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is to the Premier in her role as the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Minister, there are many groups in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan that are interested in, and excited about, the introduction of our local food bill. The Thunder Bay Food Action Network and the Thunder Bay Federation of Agriculture, as well as others, have been working towards highlighting and supporting the benefits of local food for some time now.

In Thunder Bay, food is often transported long distances, with obvious environmental impacts. More consumption of local food is better for our health and supportive of our local agricultural community and our economy.

Minister, can you tell this House what this bill will do, in addition to previous initiatives like the Greenbelt Fund, to support the efforts of the Thunder Bay Federation of Agriculture, the Food Action Network, and organizations like them right across Ontario?

1130

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for the question, and to his community for the work that is being done to promote local food.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The hard work.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's right, the hard work that's being done. That's right.

We want residents of Ontario to be able to access local food, to eat it at home, in restaurants, at work, in schools or wherever they are. We want to take ideas like what's going on in Thunder Bay–Atikokan and we want to be able to spread those across the province. We want to support those ideas and we want to support communities in that kind of innovation. So, if passed, the local food bill will do just that: It will support, it will promote and it will celebrate the good things that are grown in Ontario, the good projects that are going on around the province. Food production in Ontario is a significant industry that drives the economy and many good jobs—over 700,000 good jobs in the agri-food industry. It's an extremely important industry in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the Premier in her role as the Minister of Agriculture and Food for that answer. It's important for the people in Ontario and in Thunder Bay–Atikokan to know that our commitment to local food still remains very strong.

The last time this bill was introduced, the industry had feedback about how the legislation could be strengthened and were vocal about the changes that they wished to see in the bill. For example, there was concern around ensuring that consultation on the goals contained in the legislation was robust on the part of our government.

Speaker, through you to the minister: With this opportunity to reintroduce the local food bill, were any changes made?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely. What we did was we consulted with the industry, we consulted with producers and municipal partners, and their feedback helped to shape the changes in the bill—helped shape the changes in the bill and also some of the non-legislative changes that we proposed, some of those goals that aren't necessarily in the legislation but are part of the larger local food strategy.

I know my critic from the Progressive Conservatives supports the notion that we would consult with stakeholders on the kinds of targets that we would put in place, because I know he doesn't want our municipalities to be burdened with targets and objectives that they can't actually manage. We've worked with the stakeholders. We have a local food strategy in place.

We've stipulated that the ministry publish a summary of government local food initiatives at least every three years, so we've put the burden on the government and on the minister to produce that report and to make sure that we work with the sector across the province. The report will highlight the successes and the innovations across the broader public sector and within municipalities.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Minister, as you know, your colleague the Minister of the Environment has approved exorbitant fee hikes charged by the Ontario Tire Stewardship. Starting April 1, the fees are increasing from between 400% and 1000%, minimum. I would suggest that this is a careless and rushed decision, as it negatively impacts farmers and small business, drives sales out of Ontario and into Quebec and the United States, increases food costs, and ultimately results in more job losses and decreased tax revenues.

Minister, was this a unilateral decision by your fellow ministers of economic development, rural affairs, and transportation, or did the environment minister act alone? Please clarify if they actually supported it. Most importantly, how, as the self-acclaimed learning-on-the-job minister of ag and food, have you allowed this decision to be made knowing it will so severely and negatively impact the farming community, the community you are supposed to represent?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm going to take the first one, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of the Environment is going to speak to the details.

I want to address two things—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Nice, deep breath.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton is not helping.

Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to address two points, and then I know the Minister of the Environment is going to want to speak to the details.

The first one is the accusation that I'm a learning-on-the-job minister, a learning-on-the-job Premier. I'm never going to apologize for learning more about this province, ever.

When I met with the corn-fed beef folks yesterday and when I was at the chicken farmers' AGM this morning, they were thrilled that agriculture and food is getting the profile it's getting. That's the first point.

The second point is that this issue around the tire stewardship has been raised with me. I raised it with the Minister of the Environment and I know that he has some details that he would like to share with the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker. This time, my question is to the Premier. Premier, would you discuss this matter with the ag minister and seek an apology to the farm industry and small businesses?

These increases will cost our farmers in the agricultural industry tens of millions of dollars. A single large tractor is going up by \$300. Tires for a quad train spreader will increase by \$1,340. It saddens me to advise that an implement dealer in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has already lost one major sale and is having to absorb the increases on three other tractors at the cost of \$700 per tractor—unacceptable.

Premier, are you absolutely certain that your fee hikes are not harming the already struggling farm, contracting

and small business industries in Ontario, decreasing tax revenues and making Ontario businesses less competitive and causing job losses? May I suggest that your idea of performing the dual role of ag minister and Premier is not—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I know the member would be aware that Ontario Tire Stewardship, which was established under the legislation of the previous Conservative government, in fact is a business organization that makes business decisions at arm's length of government; so I know the member at the end of the question period will want to correct his record, and know that the government of Ontario gets none of this money. The government of Ontario does not impose these fees. It's done by private sector—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I understand that there are votes coming up.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Having said that, I have had a meeting with Ontario Tire Stewardship officials and have discussed this matter with them at the behest of the Minister of Agriculture, and they have agreed to go back and consult even more with the agricultural community to try to establish whether or not changes can be made and, if they can, how they can be as fair as possible to members of the farming community. I commend—

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

HEALTH PROFESSIONS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

As of Monday, traditional Chinese medicine will be regulated in Ontario. What should have been good news for the 2,000 practitioners who have thousands of hours of practice is turning into a nightmare. Did you know that as of today, not a single one of them has a licence to practise, but yet it's due on Monday? The website to register is unmanageable—mostly in English—and now they're being told that the Chinese document won't be available till September.

Does the minister think it's right that the traditional Chinese medicine practitioners are told that they need a licence as of Monday, but the Chinese material won't be available till September?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm happy to see there's such interest in this issue today, Speaker, and let me repeat what I said before: The transitional council is providing a flexible approach to registration for those applicants who have registered, but have not yet completed the requirements. They will be provided with a transitional certificate, they will be able to continue to practise, but they must first register with the college so

that the college knows that they are preparing to write those exams.

Speaker, this work is important. It is under way because we believe that it's important to protect Ontarians. It's important that when they receive acupuncture or services from a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, they get them from a qualified practitioner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Mr. Speaker, do you really think it's right that the Chinese material won't be available till September, yet you have to register as of Monday? We are on Wednesday, one day before the long weekend of Easter, and not one of them has a licence to practise, and they're supposed to have those licences on Monday.

This makes no sense. It should have been something good; it's turning into a nightmare. Traditional Chinese medicine has been around for 4,000 years, yet the government does not seem to be able to have Chinese material line up with the date where we start to regulate them. Minister, how does this make any sense?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this is very good news. In fact, it was the unanimous approval of the Legislature on a unanimous vote to form the college of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture. As I said earlier, over 2,000 applicants have completed their courses. This work is under way. People are registering. They're getting their provisional certificate. They will be able to continue business as usual as they complete their requirements to practise. This is a transitional process, and it's very good news for the people of this province.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPLY ACT, 2013

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2013

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013 / Projet de loi 33, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On March 26, Mr. Milloy moved second reading of Bill 33.

All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Fife, Catherine	Milloy, John
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Forster, Cindy	Murray, Glen R.
Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gélinas, France	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Gravelle, Michael	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Piruzza, Teresa
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoskins, Eric	Prue, Michael

Campbell, Sarah
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Craitor, Kim
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad

Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul

Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Schein, Jonah
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Campbell, Sarah
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Craitor, Kim
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad

Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul

Milloy, John
Mori, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Oraziotti, David
Piruzza, Teresa
Prue, Michael
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Schein, Jonah
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim

Jackson, Rod
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Leone, Rob
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 67; the nays are 36.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

Second reading agreed to.

SUPPLY ACT, 2013

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2013

Mr. Sousa moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 33, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013 / Projet de loi 33, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Sousa has moved third reading of Bill 33. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no; therefore, all those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh. I skipped a move.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I therefore say that the ayes have it.

Five members?

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute vote. Same vote? No.

All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim

Jackson, Rod
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Leone, Rob
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 67; the nays are 36.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and is entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for an address in reply to the speech from the throne. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

On February 20, 2013, Ms. Wong moved, seconded by Mr. McNeely, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

"To the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

"We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has addressed to us."

All those in favour of Ms. Wong's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Fife, Catherine	Milloy, John
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Forster, Cindy	Murray, Glen R.
Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gélinas, France	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Gravelle, Michael	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Piruzza, Teresa
Brotten, Laurel C.	Hoskins, Eric	Prue, Michael
Campbell, Sarah	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Cansfield, Donna H.	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Schein, Jonah
Chiarelli, Bob	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Coteau, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Crack, Grant	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Craitor, Kim	Marchese, Rosario	Takhar, Harinder S.
Damerla, Dipika	Matthews, Deborah	Taylor, Monique
Del Duca, Steven	Mauro, Bill	Vanthof, John
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Wong, Soo
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
DiNovo, Cheri	Meilleur, Madeleine	
Duguid, Brad	Miller, Paul	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Clark, Steve	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Dunlop, Garfield	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Fedeli, Victor	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Hardeman, Ernie	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Harris, Michael	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hillier, Randy	Milligan, Rob E.	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 67; the nays are 36.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is therefore resolved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

“To the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario:

“We, Her Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has addressed to us.”

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1200 to 1500.

WITHDRAWAL OF BILL 35

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: I seek unanimous consent to discharge the order for second reading and withdraw Bill 35, An Act to amend the Places to Grow Act, 2005 with

respect to the finality of certain municipal planning decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Klees seeks unanimous consent to withdraw. Do we agree? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have some nice visitors in the gallery with me today. It’s a family from Nickel Belt: Mr. Neil Haskett; his wife, Tabatha Haskett, who is the daughter of a good friend of mine; and their children Clarice, Aedan, Natalia and William. Please welcome them to Queen’s Park. They’re here to support my colleague from Hamilton.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Also, I’d better identify the member from Hamilton Mountain to introduce some guests.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would also like to welcome some guests. We have Kenneth Reid, Bobbie Gellner, Chris York, Pat Hudak, Kim Shook, Zane Sherwood and Angela Sherwood. Many folks, again, along with the Haskett family, are here to support the reading of my bill today. Thank you, and welcome once again to Queen’s Park.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS**HOSPITAL FUNDING**

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: In the 2011-12 fiscal year, 33,142 citizens visited the Trenton Memorial Hospital ER. That number is estimated to grow to 40,000 in 2013-14. I feel a personal and professional responsibility to ensure Trenton Memorial has the best services in place to provide my constituents the health care they deserve.

Trenton Memorial is literally a vital lifeline within the community. The current funding formula that this government has put in place bases hospital funding on services delivered, but does not take into consideration the demographics of the community that the hospital serves. Northumberland–Quinte West has one of the largest aging populations in the province. The complexity of seniors’ care isn’t properly reflected in hospital funding.

Recently, Quinte Health Care announced, under the directive of the South East LHIN, that \$10 million would be cut from this year’s operating budget. On Monday afternoon, I had the pleasure of meeting with the members of the Trenton Memorial Hospital Foundation, physicians and military personnel from CFB Trenton. Each attendee voiced their support for Trenton Memorial and voiced their concerns that the proposed service cuts and closure of the laboratory would place increased pressure on front-line workers and have negative implications on patient care, not only in Trenton, but also in Belleville.

I urge the Minister of Health to reconsider not only the size of the funding cuts but to take into consideration the vital importance the hospital’s lab plays in service delivery and patient care.

AUTISM

Miss Monique Taylor: Next Tuesday, April 2, is World Autism Awareness Day. The prevalence of autism spectrum disorder grows every year; the most recent statistics put the rate in Canada at one in 94. There are approximately 100,000 people in Ontario with ASD.

Autism is a lifelong disability, but proper treatment can make productive and fulfilling lives a reality, especially if it starts at an early age. Unfortunately, we have 1,700 people on the waiting list for IBI treatment, and the problems continue throughout their lives. Individuals and families face long wait-lists and unsupported transitions from Special Services at Home to Passport funding. We simply don't have enough services, and it's left to families to do the heavy lifting—a weight that would crush most of us—sleepless nights, constant round-the-clock care, and oftentimes suffering violent attacks from those they love and who, in turn, love them.

In reality, those families are left to subsidize our care system to the tune of billions of dollars every year, because they simply have no other choice.

In closing, I would like to congratulate Autism Ontario, which, this year, celebrates 40 years of providing advocacy and support to individuals and families living with autism spectrum disorder.

HOLI FESTIVAL

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Today I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature to recognize an important Hindu festival. It's called Holi, although not necessarily with the same meaning that the English word "holy" would have.

Many of you, I know, are quite familiar with a few Indian festivals. Perhaps you've heard of Diwali quite a bit or Vaisakhi. Holi is also a very important festival, especially if you live in India, because it marks spring. It does have some religious significance—it's essentially a social festival.

Imagine for a minute—it's a warmer country, of course—hundreds of thousands of children in the streets, in backyards playing with colour. That's what Holi is: Holi is the festival of colours. We celebrate the coming of spring in India by painting each other's faces with colour. Just try to imagine for a minute what that looks like. It's essentially about friends and family coming together, but more importantly it's about strangers coming together as well. Imagine for a minute neighbours who are shy and don't talk to each other, but on Holi they all come out together to play with colour.

An interesting part of Holi which I remember, as a child, is we also played with water. Of course, that would not be possible here because March is still too cold, but playing with water is a very, very attractive feature for the younger children.

So it's really a riot of colour—wet colour, dry colour—but essentially it's bringing back spring, bringing back colour to our lives.

LIFE OF PI

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real pleasure today to rise in the House to pay tribute to a distinguished actor in my riding of Durham—an actor who appeared in the Oscar-winning movie *Life of Pi*. Jonas, a Bengal tiger from Bowmanville Zoo, was amongst a number of animal performers chosen to perform the role of the tiger in the movie.

Members may be aware that *Life of Pi* is based on the fantasy novel by Canadian author Yann Martel. The movie was directed by Ang Lee and won Oscars for Best Picture, Cinematography, Original Score and Visual Effects.

Bowmanville's connection to this movie demonstrates the potential for co-operation between cultural industries in North America and Taiwan, where most of the scenes from *Life of Pi* were actually shot.

Recently, on March 25, it was my distinct pleasure to meet with Winston Chen, director general, and Justin Lee, director, of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office. I'd like to thank them for their visit and for inviting me to a special screening of the movie *Life of Pi*.

Bowmanville Zoo director Michael Hackenberger and his wife and staff report that Jonas, the tiger who appeared in *Life of Pi*, has, sadly, passed away since the movie was filmed. His talent lives on in a motion picture that was made possible through the collaboration of cultural industries around the world, under the leadership of the film industry of Taiwan itself.

I am proud of Bowmanville's connection to the film and the innovation it takes to make art happen. Movie fans will remember *Life of Pi*, and friends of the Bowmanville Zoo will fondly remember the life of Jonas.

It's my pleasure to present this statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I was going to ask the member to get me a paw print for an autograph, but it won't be possible now.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. John Vanthof: The deadline is rapidly approaching to launch an appeal for the MPAC valuation of your property. Homeowners have tools to self-assess their properties, but industrial sites are much harder to compare and rate. Large, successful appeals in industrial properties can play havoc in single-industry towns.

This is happening all over the province, and the latest victim is the township of James. The mill in Elk Lake appealed their MPAC assessment, as is their right. The council decided to fight this appeal. They had faith in the original assessment and in the repeated assurances that MPAC would stand by it.

One of the tools that MPAC uses to rate industrial properties is the market adjustment factor. Back in January 2010, MPAC agreed to provide the rationale by which the MAF is calculated, but the study, folks, had disappeared.

1510

Last week at the arbitration hearing in Elk Lake, MPAC appeared to be backing down from its original

assessment. Then, in the final stages of the hearing, after more than three years, the missing study was found. Despite protests from Elk Lake, it was included as evidence. The municipality withdrew from the hearing and the arbitration review board ruled in the mill's favour, in effect bankrupting the municipality.

Had MPAC produced the study three years ago, when it was requested, Elk Lake could have made decisions based on the study and not on the fleeting assurances of MPAC officials.

I'm calling on the Premier to direct the ARB to put a hold on this decision and order MPAC to justify its actions.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Phil McNeely: Ontarians received good news about jobs in February with the employment report. Employment rose by 35,000 jobs in Ontario, and, better yet, this included almost 21,000 new jobs for our province's youth. In total, Ontario's job growth accounted for nearly 70% of Canada's total new jobs.

However, statistics for my hometown of Ottawa were not so rosy. Largely because of the federal public service cutbacks, our region shed 2,100 jobs last month. Even more specifically, in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans, the harm of these job losses is further compounded by the plan to move the offices of National Defence from the downtown to the west end of the city. Because of our proximity to downtown—20 minutes away by public transit—Orléans has been the home of Canadian Forces families. The numbers were so great, people commonly referred to Orléans as CFB Orléans.

These federal decisions to take away the access to jobs in my community will have lasting repercussions on multiple fronts. Locally and throughout the city, we can expect increased property taxes, skewed property values and a loss of cultural identity as people are forced to move from their communities for their work.

While Ontario continues to punch above its economic weight, our former colleague and now regional minister John Baird continues to make it difficult for Orléans residents to participate in our province's good fortune.

The federal government has a special responsibility to protect our national capital. I call on our federal counterparts to take a balanced look at Ottawa's development with sustainability in mind and with consideration for the social and economic impacts of their decisions.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to speak about an issue that will have an impact in my riding: the increase of tire stewardship fees for farmers. Agricultural tires have been put into the same category as hard off-road tires, even though agricultural tires take about half the time to process as these other types, and they are not replaced as often.

I have been told by an agricultural tire dealer in my riding that he will no longer be stocking new tires as a result of this fee. This means that if a farmer blows a tire in the middle of a field, they will not be able to get a quick replacement. This will obviously have a detrimental effect on the agricultural industry.

If farmers want to avoid this fee—and this is the sad reality—they could bring tires into Ontario from Quebec and not pay this fee. There, I understand that the Ontario Tire Stewardship has no enforcement mechanism to prevent this. So we're driving an underground economy here. For example, if you need two new tires for a combine, it will be almost \$1,000 cheaper to pick them up in Quebec.

The Premier and agriculture minister talks about how important the agri-food industry is and how much money they contribute to the economy. Proposing to increase the tire stewardship fee by 400% to 1,000% will drive sales out of Ontario and into Quebec and the United States. This undoubtedly will have a negative impact across the province.

DIALYSIS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm extremely pleased to share some great news in my riding of Niagara Falls, as a long-time advocate for a stand-alone satellite centre for dialysis. Even when individuals in my community thought that something like this could never happen, it has happened. As our population ages, kidney disease is becoming more and more prevalent. So by providing more than 17,000 treatments a year in this new stand-alone dialysis centre, it will help many by making dialysis more accessible and thereby improving each patient's quality of life.

Beginning on March 4, the 18,000-square-foot centre with 18 dialysis units was opened seven days a week, 6:30 to 8:30, with free parking on-site. On an annual basis, approximately 108 patients will be treated by 25 dedicated team members, plus staff who work between the different locations.

I want to thank the Ministry of Health and the Niagara Health System, who shared my vision of a stand-alone dialysis centre by providing over \$4 million in capital funding and a yearly operating cost of \$3 million a year. I have the pleasure of stopping in on many occasions, meeting with the patients while they are having their dialysis treatment and hearing the kind words they are saying and the benefits that they are receiving from this.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Lake Nipissing stakeholders are beside themselves after recent discussions with the Ministry of Natural Resources, who reduced the daily catch limits for walleye from four down to two.

Despite being presented with scientific evidence in support of a significant restocking effort, the minister has decided to maintain the status quo. Even though the stakeholders have stated that they view restocking as one

of the solutions, they have slammed the door on them, and their livelihoods in the process.

The municipality of Callander passed a resolution in January that asks the government to reconsider the daily catch limit decision and asks that “the Ministry of Natural Resources increase the support for, and provide additional resources dedicated towards, alternative actions to address the decline in the walleye population, including but not limited to additional fishing opportunities for other species, consistent enforcement of regulations and daily catch limits and community-based restocking programs.”

The Lake Nipissing stakeholders are ready to move forward with restocking initiatives they fund and perform completely on their own. We are asking the government, why are they standing in the way instead of working with our fishers on solutions going forward?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PRESERVING EXISTING COMMUNITIES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT À PRÉSERVER LES COLLECTIVITÉS EXISTANTES

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 41, An Act to amend the Places to Grow Act, 2005 with respect to the finality of certain municipal planning decisions / Projet de loi 41, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2005 sur les zones de croissance en ce qui concerne le caractère définitif de certaines décisions prises au niveau municipal en matière d'aménagement.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: By way of clarification, you'll know that I repealed a bill earlier today that was essentially the same bill. However, it was important for me to make some amendments to that bill to ensure that it was focused very specifically on established, stable residential communities and also to ensure that there was a provision in the bill that municipalities can demonstrate that they are meeting both the population targets and intensification targets of the Places to Grow Act.

OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT ACT (CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'OMBUDSMAN (SOCIÉTÉS D'AIDE À L'ENFANCE)

Miss Taylor moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to children's aid societies / Projet de loi 42, Loi

modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman en ce qui a trait aux sociétés d'aide à l'enfance.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been repeated calls from several quarters for Ontario to come into line with the rest of Canada and allow the Ombudsman to have oversight of child protection services. This bill amends the Ombudsman Act to allow the Ombudsman to investigate any decision or recommendation made or any act done or omitted in the course of the administration of the children's aid society.

MINING AMENDMENT ACT (RESOURCES PROCESSED IN ONTARIO), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MINES (RESSOURCES TRANSFORMÉES EN ONTARIO)

Mr. Mantha moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 43, An Act to amend the Mining Act to require resources to be processed in Ontario / Projet de loi 43, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mines afin d'exiger que les ressources soient transformées en Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bill amends the Mining Act, which currently provides that all ores and minerals raised or removed from lands, claims or mining rights that are patented, leased or otherwise disposed of must be treated and refined in Canada. The amendment of subsection 91(1) changes this by providing that all such ores or minerals must be treated or refined in Ontario.

Le projet de loi modifie la Loi sur les mines, laquelle prévoit actuellement que les minerais et minéraux qui sont tirés ou extraits d'un terrain, d'un claim ou d'un droit minier qui sont aliénés, notamment par lettres patentes ou par bail, soient traités et raffinés au Canada.

La modification apportée au paragraphe 91(1) prévoit que de tels minerais et minéraux doivent être traités et raffinés en Ontario.

Speaker, not only do we have large deposits in Ontario; we also have the facilities and the skills to process those minerals right here in Ontario. This is an opportunity that we cannot let go by and that can bring good jobs to Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll change it up a little bit by introducing just a generic comment again.

When introducing bills, it is the pleasure of this place to read the explanatory note, and if the note is long, that you condense it—no other speeches, because you'll have time to speak to that when you introduce the bill for second reading. I appreciate all members' co-operation in that.

I think I'll change it up for petitions as well: the member from Durham.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's certainly nice to be recognized once in a while.

"Whereas, under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08, public health inspectors are required to undertake risk assessments of small drinking water systems;

"Whereas many of these small drinking water systems are located in" rural "homes operating bed and breakfasts in rural Ontario;

"Whereas private homes that are the sites of bed and breakfasts already have potable drinking water used by the homeowners and their families every day;

"Whereas many of these bed and breakfasts have established the quality of their drinking water" for their families "through years of regular testing;

"Whereas these home-based businesses are facing high costs"—and regulation—"to comply with the new requirements of regulation 319/08;

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

"That the Ministry of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08"—this is important—"to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process;

"Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

It just makes sense. I'm pleased to sign and endorse this on behalf of my constituents and give it to Magalie.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "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"—up to—"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."

We've already delivered thousands, and here's another 700. I'm going to sign it because I believe in it, and I'm going to give it to Nadim to be delivered.

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Agincourt is historically recognized as north Scarborough's oldest and most well-established community; and

"Whereas the residents of the community of Scarborough—Agincourt share unique interests; and

"Whereas historically Agincourt's electoral voice has always been found in an electoral district north of Ontario Highway 401; and

"Whereas communities, such as Scarborough—Agincourt, with historical significance should be protected and not divided; and

"Whereas the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario has recently released proposals to redraw the federal riding map of Scarborough—Agincourt; and

"Whereas 'community of interest' is a mandated consideration of the federal Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act; and

"Whereas the original proposal from the commission included a unified Scarborough—Agincourt riding; and

"Whereas the commission's report would inexplicably divide the Scarborough—Agincourt community; and

"Whereas the residents of Scarborough—Agincourt should not be divided and the electoral riding should remain, in its entirety;

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

"To call upon the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario to recognize the historical and demographic context of the Scarborough—Agincourt community and to preserve riding boundaries that include a protected Scarborough—Agincourt community north of Ontario Highway 401."

I support this petition and I will give it to Stone the page.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here 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;

“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 placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is 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.”

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by a great many of my friends and neighbours, and I affix my signature to it and thank you very much for the time to present it.

LONG-TERM CARE

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

“Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term-care homes; and

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“Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don’t complain because they fear repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

“Whereas Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care home system;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman’s mandate to include Ontario’s long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors.”

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

CHILDREN’S PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there has been a dramatic increase in the use of psychiatric medication on children especially children in care or provincial custody; and

“Whereas it’s an established scientific fact that psychiatric drugs cause shrinkage and related problems to with the development of the still-developing brain; and

“Whereas it is our responsibility as a society to protect and care for our children;

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

“To create a policy statement discouraging the use of psychiatric drugs on children and send it to all Ontario clinics and mental health facilities working with children;

“To actively monitor the rate of use of psychiatric drugs on children to ensure that it is going down;

“To amend the professional misconduct regulation under the Medicine Act so that prescribing medication to children where the use of such medication has not been specifically approved by Health Canada for their age group and purpose constitutes professional misconduct, also to alter OHIP practices such that such use is not covered.”

I affix my signature in full support.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I agree with this petition. I affix my name to it and I'll send it to the desk with Stone.

PROVINCIAL PARKS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm catching up on my older petitions pre-prorogation.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the announced closure of nine provincial parks in northern Ontario will have a negative impact on local tourism and businesses; and

“Whereas these closures were announced without first consulting with local municipalities, residents or stakeholders; and

“Whereas no alternatives for keeping the parks open were explored;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to consult with interested municipalities to determine if the management of the parks can be outsourced to them as a means of keeping them open, while eliminating the financial obligation to the province.”

I agree with this petition and sign my name and give it to Magalie.

CONDOMINIUM CORPORATION

Mr. Grant Crack: It's a pleasure for me to introduce this petition on behalf of my colleague the honourable minister responsible for seniors, the MPP for York West.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the residents of York Condominium Corporation 375, request the direct action of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in reviewing the records and practices of this condominium corporation;

“Whereas the condominium corporation has failed to uphold and act upon the conditions and bylaws outlined under the constitution of the condominium;

“Whereas the condominium corporation has failed to hold an annual general meeting in the last three years to address the concerns of the homeowners;

“Whereas the condominium corporation has failed to uphold both the aesthetics and the maintenance of the property;

“Whereas the company Blue Star, hired by York Condominium Corporation 375 to maintain the property has failed to carry out its responsibilities and address the requests made by residents;

“Whereas the York Condominium Corporation 375 has allowed selected units to fall behind in maintenance fees without enforcing the penalties outlined in the constitution of the condominium;

“Whereas the members of the condominium board have failed to enforce the bylaws of the condominium corporation when addressing the concerns of residents, holding legitimate board elections and reporting financials and other information to the homeowners;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, request through this petition that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario take the

necessary steps to investigate the actions of the York Condominium Corporation 375. Furthermore, we request that an immediate review of the Condominium Act be conducted by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in order to strengthen the condominium bylaws by imposing severe and stringent penalties on members of the board, management companies, accountants and other responsible individuals that fail to aid, abide by and uphold the bylaws of the corporation, and fail to act in the best interests of all condominium owners.”

I support this petition on behalf of my colleague and will affix my signature and give it to page Ellen.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: A petition “Re: Dr. Kevin Smith's Niagara Health System report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care proposed changes to the hospital services in south Niagara.

“Whereas the residents of south Niagara will not have equal, fair, safe and timely access to in-patient gynecological, obstetrical and pediatric services due to distance; and

“Whereas excessive travel times and lack of public transportation for residents in south Niagara will put patient safety at risk; and

“Whereas if implemented, Dr. Smith's recommendations and the proposed location of a new south Niagara hospital in Niagara Falls is approved, a two-tier health system in Niagara will be created, where north Niagara will be overserviced and south Niagara will be underserviced in relation to the safe and timely access to health and hospital care; and

“Whereas if hospital services including in-patient gynecological and mental health, and all obstetrical and pediatric services from the Welland hospital site and the Greater Niagara hospital site will be relocated to the new north Niagara St. Catharines site in 2013, it will undermine the continued viability of these two sites as full-service hospital sites;

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

“We request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to maintain existing services at the Welland hospital site and the Niagara Falls hospital site and that no services are to be moved until this new south Niagara hospital is open and request that any approval for a new Niagara south hospital include a site that is centrally located in Welland.”

I support this petition and will affix my signature and send it with Fae to the Clerk.

OPPOSITION DAY

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of

Ontario calls upon the Wynne government to direct FSCO to gradually reduce average, industry-wide, private passenger auto insurance premiums by 15%.

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Before we move on, I'll just remind guests that they cannot clap or cheer or anything. Only the members in the House can do that.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timmins—James Bay, please.

Mr. Singh has moved opposition day number 2.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify: This is a demand, a request to reduce auto insurance rates across Ontario by 15%. This is something we're calling on the government to do within 12 months. This is a demand that is both reasonable and something that is deserved.

If we look at the situation in Ontario, in 2010 changes to the statutory benefits that we receive as consumers resulted in a significant cost reduction for the auto insurance industry. In fact, this has resulted in a \$2-billion saving for the auto insurance industry annually. To date, that results in over \$4 billion of savings, but in the same time period, we've seen auto insurance premiums go up by 5%. That's simply unacceptable. So what we're asking the government to do today—what we're asking the House to do today—is to accept our motion to see FSCO mandate a 15% reduction within the next 12 months. That is what we require. That is what we need.

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When doing this, we ask the government to keep in mind the fact that this government made significant changes to the auto insurance regime which benefited the insurance industry but did not benefit drivers in Ontario. There is no tie-in. The proposition was that by reducing the costs incurred by the insurance industry, this would result in lower premiums. But we haven't seen those lower premiums. In fact, if you look at the facts before us, the combined loss ratio for the industry, which is a commonly used method of assessing the industry profits for the insurance companies, these show—and this is using their own facts and figures—that the industry is making some of the highest profits over a decade. These are some of the highest profits, historically, that we are seeing now in Ontario.

At the same time, the Auditor General made it very clear in his report in 2011 that the 12% return-on-equity rule that governs the industry is something that needs to be called into question, that is not in keeping with the times. It was set at a time when interest rates were completely different, were much higher, when a bond would get you a much higher return than it can give you today. That is something that needs to be addressed. The Auditor General required and requested that the government look into that; the government indicated that they would and that that report would be released at the beginning of 2013. We still have not seen that report that would

address this issue of return on equity. We need to see that report, because that will help us unlock the problem, to address this issue and to reduce auto insurance rates.

Mr. Speaker, we're looking at a time when people are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. There are significant struggles people are facing in their household budgets. People are having to make do with less. They have less and less disposable income, and one of the hardest-hitting costs in their lives is auto insurance. The reality is that many people do not have access to affordable, efficient—or any—public transit. As a result, those community members must rely on their vehicle to get to work, to take their family members to a hospital if there is any need for that, to pick up their children from school. It's not a luxury; it's a necessity for many Ontarians. Recognizing that it's a necessity, we need to recognize that while auto insurance is compulsory in this province, making it affordable should also be compulsory. That is something we need to see. If we require our citizens and the people of Ontario to have auto insurance, we should also ensure that that auto insurance is affordable. We have a mechanism before us. We see that there are significant profits in the insurance industry, we see that there are significant cost reductions; now let's see some significant premium reductions for people in Ontario.

Whenever this issue is broached, whenever we talk about auto insurance rates, the immediate response that people have—it's a knee-jerk reaction: "Oh, it's because of fraud. We need to address fraud." Let's make our position very clear. Of course we, the NDP, are supportive of measures that would reduce fraud. That is something that everyone supports. But—there is a strong "but" here—there are two major issues here. One, any implementation of the fraud task force—any implementation that we do to reduce fraud should be tied to some premium reductions. We know that if we do tackle some additional fraud, that should be tied to some guarantees in reducing premiums. And we're saying very, very clearly that the industry has enjoyed some of the highest profits in the history of Ontario, some of the most significant historic reductions in their costs, and these reductions go much further than fraud would have by itself. I want to repeat that: If the Liberal government had done all it could to tackle fraud, it would not have resulted in the significant savings that the industry is enjoying right now. By reducing the benefits that consumers receive, they saved the industry far more than fraud could ever have done alone. So with those significant savings, we're saying that there are savings in the system right now that should be transferred on to consumers. That is our simple request: that those significant cost reductions should flow to consumers, because that was the initial intention.

In 2010, as many of the members who are in this House know, when the Minister of Finance at that time indicated that there were going to be some changes to the insurance regime, the proposal, the rationale for that was, "If we bring down costs, we'll bring down premiums."

Well, they certainly didn't bring down the costs—the costs have come down, but our premiums have gone up instead of going down.

This is a time for action. We want to see this in the budget, we want to see the government take some action on this, and we want to see this done within a reasonable amount of time.

We've said from the beginning that our demand is a 15% reduction within 12 months. Let that be clear: That's on the record. We said it time and time again. I want there to be no misunderstanding about that. That is a request where we want to see results for people in Ontario, we want to see results in a meaningful way, and we want to see those results as soon as possible, as soon as practical, and we've asked for 12 months.

This request is not a request that's going to impact the government's budget. It's a zero-cost request. It's a cost of fairness; it's a request for affordability. It's a request to put people first, for a change.

We've seen changes in the industry that have put insurance companies first. We've seen changes that have reduced their costs. We've seen changes that have increased their profits. But we haven't seen changes in this industry that have benefited consumers. We haven't seen changes in the insurance industry that have benefited drivers in Ontario.

That's what we need to see. We need to see some significant changes, some real changes, some real action that actually benefits drivers for once, instead of the insurance companies.

We can all agree that times are tough, and we can do our part here today to make it clear to the people of Ontario that we believe in making life more affordable, that we believe in addressing these household costs; that we are determined to do something to make their lives a little bit better, to make their household costs a little bit more affordable. That's what we're asking the government to acknowledge today.

I hope everyone in this House votes in support of this motion. This motion is asking for something that is very reasonable. It's very measured, it's very much deserved and it's very much required. I ask you all to support this motion today. Thank you to all my colleagues.

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

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Let me state from the onset that I will be supporting the particular motion, and you may ask yourselves why. I'd like to state why: Because I believe the motion is in the spirit of work this government has been focused on since being elected in 2003—unlike the previous two governments, the two parties across from us.

The mover of the motion is focused on the success and the benefits that are being realized from the good work that this government has done from 2003, in 2010, in 2011 and in 2012. I have to say that the motion is very short-term and very short-sighted in that, yes, we all want to provide lower rates to the consumer, but I think we have to look at it as a holistic industry and make sure that

the changes we make are not very short-sighted, but it should be the centrepiece, as we go forward, for stability in this particular industry.

I just want to repeat what the Premier said this morning: "I think I've been very clear that we want to take action on this issue. More than a year ago, I had a round table in my own riding where we talked about the cost of auto insurance. Through the leadership campaign, particularly in Mississauga and Brampton, I heard concerns about the cost of auto insurance. We are going to take action, and that's why the Minister of Finance is working with the industry.

"I've been very clear that the costs of fraud that are in the system need to be taken out, and implementing the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force is very important to me. So I am very willing to take action, and those conversations are happening in the run-up to the budget between the finance minister and the industry."

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She goes on to say, "Mr. Speaker, I think I said what we are doing. We are determined to take action. We are looking for the ways to do that."

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ladies and gentlemen, there seem to be at least four or five sidebars, and it's especially noisy on the government side when their member is speaking. I'd ask for a little more quiet. If you want to talk and have little debates, take it outside. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: She goes on to say, "I think one of the important ways that we need to do that is to implement the recommendations of the anti-fraud task force. I think there are hundreds of millions of dollars that can come out of the system. What we need to do is make sure that we can tie those reductions to a premium reduction for drivers, Mr. Speaker.

"So the principle underlying the question from the leader of the opposition and the principle underlying the opposition day motion is a principle we can agree with: that the reductions in auto insurance need to be put in place. That's why the Minister of Finance is working with the industry to find the ways of doing that."

Mr. Speaker, I just want to repeat that we truly believe that savings found in the industry because we could remove fraud need to be passed on to policyholders.

My colleague from Mississauga–Brampton South will be speaking later, and she will remind this House of her private member's bill on insurance rates that she introduced in the last Parliament, clearly pointing out that the Liberal government and its members have been very concerned about this issue and acting upon it.

Speaker, we do not deny that this is an issue, which is why our government has consistently stated there is money to be found in the system. The government is moving on implementing its anti-fraud task force report. The task force recommendation is a very important step that we have to take. We are prepared to work with the

third party on this overall strategy, not just an arbitrary 15% reduction in premiums.

The Ontario Liberal government has taken strong action on auto insurance rates since we took power in 2003. I just want to go back and cover some of the steps so you understand that we have been doing this. We took action through Bill 5, right in this House, introduced in 2003, which froze auto insurance rates immediately. I believe that freeze remained in place for several years.

We introduced a package of 41 reforms in September 2010 that are stabilizing rates, and we continue to pursue ways of cracking down on fraud. Policyholders can now choose the coverage that best meets their needs while keeping costs as low as possible.

The government of Ontario also passed regulations that took effect September 1, 2010, providing consumers with more choice and flexibility to purchase coverage that best meets their protection needs and their budget.

We also created the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force in 2011. It was to focus on prevention, detection, investigation and enforcement, as well as consumer education.

Mr. Speaker, the results to date clearly show that the government actions have been working and rates have been coming down. In fact, rates in Ontario have been the lowest in the last nine years. This government is hell-bent on protecting the consumer against fraud and finding ways to reduce rates. Instead of pitting one group of people against another, we are addressing the pressures of premiums head-on by looking at the costs of those areas that are affecting the rates. We truly believe that fraud in the system is hundreds of millions of dollars, and if removed, we can definitely find a solution to the problem.

If our government was to stay focused on dealing with the fraud situation in our system on a go-forward basis, we could see insurance rates stabilize for many, many years ahead of today's request from the third party. That request today is very short-sighted and does not have anything about sustainability and stability into the future, and I believe our government is doing the right thing. I would urge our government, and I'll urge every member of this Legislature, to stay with the government, stay focused and stay on top of this particular situation so we can protect the consumer as we go forward. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion. First of all, we all agree in this House that auto insurance rates are too high in this province. That's an indisputable fact. In light of this fact, the NDP have put forward this motion asking for a 15% decrease in auto insurance rates. Where they lose me is, how do they plan to achieve this target? Perhaps the most glaring thing about their rate reduction plan is that it doesn't exist.

In my everyday life I see there are a lot of things that I would like a 15% price decrease on, whether it be at the

gas pump or the grocery store, or getting a Tim Hortons coffee. However, I know that wishing prices were lower doesn't accomplish anything. There needs to be a plan of action. Today, as I look at this motion, I notice that the NDP has no plan. There's nothing more than a bumper sticker policy that lacks any real substance. The PC Party doesn't support such cheap tactics. We advocate for substantial policy that actually achieves results for Ontarians.

So if the NDP have not introduced an actual policy, what have they done? They've simply identified a symptom, a symptom of which we're all aware.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The captain of the tricksters is over there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): First and last warning to the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Continue.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: As a pharmacist, I can tell you that if you just treat the symptom you will not get better; you need to address the root cause of the illness. Ontario's high auto insurance premiums are a symptom of a number of root problems. These problems include excessive red tape that kills competition, fraud valued between \$750 million and \$1.5 billion, and a crippling mediation backlog that delays treatment to accident victims and creates undue certainty in the market.

Our debate today should be focused on these problems because they are the root cause of Ontario's high premiums. Yet the NDP seem content to continue to express their wishes for lower premiums without providing any real solution. We in the PC caucus have the medicine to treat the ills plaguing auto insurance. I'm going to use my time here today to outline four key areas that we as a Legislature should be focused on if we're going to actually deliver lower rates for Ontarians.

What we need to do is: (1) eliminate auto insurance fraud; (2) eliminate excessive red tape and encourage a more competitive, innovative market; (3) fix the dispute resolution process; and (4) increase the accountability of insurers.

We've heard a lot about fraud in the past and I'm not going to spend too much time on it because we all know it's a major cost to the system that we need to reduce. I will reiterate the PC Party's commitment to emulate other jurisdictions that have been successful in fighting fraud and establish a special unit of the crown attorneys. Fraud bureaus in other jurisdictions like New Jersey and the United Kingdom have been successful in targeting, investigating and prosecuting fraudsters. This is an important tool to help reduce fraud, bring down costs and deliver savings to consumers.

The government's own appointed anti-fraud taskforce issued a report outlining further measures to reduce the level of fraud in the system. Many of these recommendations are effective and nonpartisan. They address predatory behaviour in the towing industry, phony health care clinics and increased collaboration amongst law enforcement agencies.

We also need substantive whistleblower protection. Those brave enough to come forward to report suspected

fraud must be assured that they will be protected. This will help break a culture of silence and help law enforcement officials pursue cases against those who defraud honest drivers.

These are real solutions that I'm hoping the government will go ahead and implement. But you'll have to forgive me if I'm a little apprehensive on the prospects of them actually implementing them. This Liberal government has a library of unused reports gathering dust in their offices.

Regarding red tape and bureaucracy, we need to understand how detrimental they are to Ontarians. We must recognize that if we want to achieve savings in auto insurance the problem of red tape must be addressed. To better understand this problem, let me tell you a story of how businesses operate in the free market.

Let's say that we have a manufacturer that manufactures widgets. Every day, this manufacturer produces hundreds of widgets. It has a number of costs that go into this process: labour, raw materials, rent and energy. This company sells their widgets in an open market. It competes with other manufacturers that are trying to sell the same to consumers. Based on its analysis of demand trends and costs, the manufacturer will decide on a price to sell its product. The consumers in this example benefit from this process because all manufacturers do the same. The firms try to undercut each other in price in an effort to attract more customers. This results in lower price.

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What is the one thing that you notice about this process? The government is not directing it. Everybody can acknowledge that this system benefits the consumer by not having strict government intervention. No one would support the government telling the manufacturer how they should price their product; that is not the government's role.

Unfortunately, the government plays a large role in the determination of auto insurance rates. We have in Ontario what's called a prior-approval rate-setting process. What that means is that before an auto insurance company can set its prices, the regulator combs over every assumption made by the company. Based on the government's own analysis, they judge if the insurer's assumptions are reasonable. They can demand changes that prolong the approval process to, in some cases, over a year.

Are we to accept that the government somehow knows better the market conditions of an industry, better than the actual companies in the industry? If a company assesses market conditions correctly, it should thrive, whereas one that does not will lag. That is how the market works and compels companies to continually improve. But the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, with the prior approval process, eliminates these natural competitive forces. FSCO tries to regulate prices so that they will be fair and reasonable. However, by all accounts, they fail in this endeavour. This couldn't be more clear than by the fact that Ontario has increased their rates more than 16% since 2007, far more than any

other Canadian jurisdiction. FSCO's role should not be to direct premium levels, because it stunts competition, and, above all, they're just not good at it.

The Fraser Institute did a study where they looked at each provincial and state jurisdiction in the United States and Canada. As in Canada, auto insurance is regulated at the state level. They assessed each jurisdiction on a number of metrics, including affordability, regulatory severity, consumer choice and overall market quality. The results were clear. Ontario is ranked the sixth most regulated jurisdiction of all North America. The Fraser Institute noted that this was a major contributing factor to Ontario also being ranked 53rd in terms of pricing fairness and affordability.

So I looked at which jurisdictions performed well. Illinois caught my eye because it's similar to Ontario in terms of population, income per capita and density. Forty years ago, Illinois boldly established a completely free market for auto insurers; that is, companies could set rates without undue government intrusion or approval. People were afraid that this would lead to abuse and high rates, much like we're hearing from the sidelines. The opposite occurred. More companies entered the market. They compete for customers, giving drivers more choice, and today average premiums in Illinois are consistently below the national average, which is a lot more than Ontario can say. New Brunswick would be a Canadian example of a jurisdiction with a streamlined rate process, and their rates declined 4% since 2007.

So it's true that insurers' costs in Ontario have come down in the insurance industry over the past year. While the NDP have stated that costs have come down 50%, official audited data from the federal financial services regulator indicates that overall costs have only come down 3% to 4%. But that's beside the point. We all agree that premiums need to come down.

However, with red tape creating a long lag time in the rate-setting process, it becomes clear why we haven't seen swifter decreases. Bottom line: If you want premiums to fall, free up the market and allow for more dynamic pricing. Allow insurers to respond to lower costs by immediately implementing lower prices. Allow them to try to undercut their competitors.

To achieve this, the PC Party is proposing a file-and-use system for rate approvals. Under file-and-use, insurers submit their rates without having to obtain approval on every aspect. This expedites the process and allows prices to better reflect market conditions.

We must acknowledge that FSCO's role is not to try to predict market conditions and dictate pricing metrics to insurance companies. This is counterproductive activity that fails to deliver savings to Ontario's drivers. We need a streamlined rate approval system that allows insurers to set their own prices in response to market conditions. FSCO's role should be realigned away from active participant to strict oversight body. It's time to become the referee and not the coach.

Enhancing the competitiveness of the market also has the advantage of making the market more competitive.

With a 15% reduction, efficiency is lost and there's no room to distinguish good drivers from bad drivers. What the NDP are telling us is that even if a driver has been convicted of drunk driving, they should get a 15% reduction in their rates. This isn't fair, and we don't want to blindly encourage those who make our roads less safe. We in the PC caucus believe that our good drivers should be rewarded.

A competitive and efficient market identifies unsafe drivers. Premium levels reflect someone's risk level. Good drivers are rewarded. Any time a government interferes with this natural process, good drivers invariably subsidize the premiums of bad drivers.

At this point, I'd like to quote a victim advocacy group that presented to the finance committee last week. The testimony stated, "The NDP thinks that they're helping people by demanding a reduction in premiums, but they totally ignore the accident victims in the process."

The PC Party recognizes that for auto insurance to be any good, people who sustain an injury must have ready access to the benefits for which they have paid. To that end, the PC Party is committed to reforming Ontario's dispute resolution process. Sometimes an accident victim will end up in a dispute with their insurer over their level of benefits. Disputes are natural in any system. What is fundamental is that these disputes be resolved in a timely manner. Unfortunately, with 17,000 cases currently in backlog through the government-run dispute resolution system, claimants wait far too long to obtain the benefits they need.

Why is this? Part of the problem has to do with the fact that government has a monopoly on dispute resolution. If claimants disagree with their insurer's decision on their claim, they, by law, have to go through mediation and try to settle their claim before pursuing arbitration or the courts. Claimants must go through a FSCO-appointed mediator to do this.

Why should we restrict qualified mediators from mediating these cases? Mediation does not involve a ruling of any sort. It's a meeting where both parties come together and try to work out a settlement in order to avoid arbitration or the courts. Why do we make people wait, on average, for 414 days to obtain this service? It's time we allow for private mediators to provide people with a choice. If we allow people the ability to bypass the line at FSCO and go to a qualified private mediator, it will enable them to complete mediation sooner and ensure they resolve the dispute in a timely manner.

And when it comes to resolving disputes and obtaining medical treatment, the sooner it happens, the more likely the person will fully heal. This reduces the need for further costs in the future to the auto insurance system and our health care system.

We have to appreciate that such a backlog creates uncertainty for both the victim and the insurers. Until an insurer gets a ruling on a dispute, it doesn't know how much a certain claim will cost. The delay of this information decreases the incentive to lower rates. In any business, if you don't know what your costs are going to

be a year from now, why would you lower your price and risk incurring a loss? Expediting the dispute resolution process will ensure vital cost information is readily available. Timely information will ensure the market operates more efficiently and be better for Ontario drivers.

Finally, we need to ensure the accountability of insurers. Some very stringent consumer protection laws exist in Ontario. When it comes to pricing auto insurance, for instance, insurers cannot use credit scoring. This is an agreed-upon rule that we mandate all insurers follow, and that's fair.

When an insurer submits a rate filing, we need to ensure that the top executives are accountable. To that end, we would mandate CEOs personally approve all rate changes, and filings. This is no different than our accountability regulations that require CEOs of publicly traded companies to sign off on all financial statements and annual reports. This would make the highest executives at the insurance companies personally responsible for their company's actions. It would subject them to severe administrative and monetary penalties, should they circumvent any rules. FSCO, in its new, realigned role as a strict oversight body, would be responsible for penalizing these transgressors. This level of personal accountability will provide an incentive to companies to ensure the highest quality of internal controls and procedures.

It is the job of the government to set the rules, enforce the rules and ensure that we have an attractive market that encourages competition. This is the appropriate role for government. However, we have a regulator whose mandate is far too extensive, and in the end, Ontario drivers lose.

That is a four-point action plan to reduce auto insurance premiums for all drivers in Ontario. Unlike the motion we have before us today, if we eliminate auto insurance fraud, eliminate excessive red tape and encourage a more competitive, innovative market, fix the dispute resolution process, and increase the accountability of insurers, the drivers in Ontario will see a fairer and more affordable auto insurance system.

Before I wrap up, I'd like to point out one inconsistency in the NDP's rhetoric that I think is worth noting. On February 4, the leader of the third party said, regarding the timeline of the proposal, "It's not one that Ontarians should be waiting another two or three years to achieve.... It's a target that has to be met within a year."

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The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton has a petition that indicates this reduction must be achieved by the end of 2013. Those seem like definite timelines, yet the motion put forward today uses more nebulous terminology and infers that the implementation of a reduction should be gradual. Yet when they come up and speak again, they're back to the year timeline. We're not sure what they're proposing. There's no plan behind their action, and there's no definite timeline.

I think the voters deserve to know what all of this means. Were the NDP so eager to put forward a headline-

grabbing, bumper sticker policy that they actually didn't think it through? Are we now seeing them trying to back out of a commitment they know they can't possibly follow through on?

We in the PC caucus believe that the Ontario people deserve our respect. They don't deserve empty promises or policy on the fly. They deserve a well-thought-out plan that addresses the real problems. Ontarians want real action, not promises.

That's what I've laid out here today. The PC Party stands behind real action and bold policy, not vote-grabbing window dressing.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I think I should start my comments by thanking the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for laying on the table the Insurance Bureau of Canada and the insurance industry's perspective on this issue. He did a very good job of that. He did a very good job.

Speaker, the bottom line is that the insurance industry has been given a great deal of opportunity by the Liberal government to increase their ability to make profits in Ontario, without giving any thought whatsoever to the fact that they have an obligation to provide a product that is affordable for the people of this province who are required by law to purchase that product in our province.

What New Democrats are saying is, life is already too difficult for folks. They cannot make ends meet. What we would want to see in Ontario is an action and a movement toward much more affordable living for people. Part of that affordable living includes insurance rates that are currently the highest in this country and need to come down to be much more reasonable.

We are now seeing, in Ontario, people who are choosing to drive their cars without any insurance, simply because they can't afford it. It's not like they have a choice in Ontario; they have to buy this product.

It's the obligation, therefore, of the government—because it's our policy that people have to be insured in order to drive—to make sure that the product that we require them to purchase is not only affordable but meets their needs. The government has not taken this obligation seriously, and New Democrats are determined to actually see the people of this province get some relief on their auto insurance rates.

There are a couple of pieces to this puzzle that were described inappropriately by the former speaker. I was interested to hear what the government's first speaker had to say about this because what I'm hearing now is a little bit of dancing from the government side. The Premier came out, guns ablazing, this morning; by this afternoon, it's apparent the Liberals are not interested in getting these rates down in a reasonable period of time for the people of this province.

Why do I say that? Because they refuse to acknowledge that they have already made changes in 2010 that have given the auto insurance industry a huge bonus. They are getting \$2 billion annually in savings. They

have reduced their payouts by \$2 billion annually. They've had a 50% reduction in their statutory benefit payout.

What New Democrats are saying is, fair is fair. We all know the auto insurance rates are too high in this province. We all know that we have the lowest accident rates and yet the highest auto insurance rates. Fair is fair here. If the industry is given a bonus by the government, then what they need to do is pass some of those savings on to the people of Ontario.

The government and the Premier—Premier Wynne—like to talk about the future, not the recent past, not the bonus that they've already given the insurance industry, but they just want to talk about rooting out fraud. Well, look, I think you heard from the member from the Conservative caucus. You've heard from the government. You've heard from New Democrats. We all—all of us—want to see fraud reduced. We want to see the anti-fraud task force recommendations implemented. But that is not the sum of the savings that need to be passed on to Ontarians. What needs to be passed on to Ontarians is the bonus that the insurance companies already got, plus the next round of savings that they're going to get when it comes to the anti-fraud initiatives.

How do you make that happen? Well, again, the government is talking like they're somehow going to have to figure it out: "It's difficult; it's not easy." We have something called the Financial Services Commission of Ontario; that body is the one to which insurance companies have to apply to get a rate increase. Guess what? That is also the body that can mandate the insurance companies to pass on the savings they already received, as well as the ones they will soon be getting with anti-fraud measures in place, by mandating that reduction of 15%. It is not rocket science; it is actually a plan, and it's one that is on the side of the people in this province who are good drivers.

I say "good drivers" to address, of course, some silliness that was mentioned with the previous speaker. Thinking that we would actually promote the idea that bad drivers and drunk drivers need to have their insurance rates cut—give me a break, Mr. Speaker. That is so unreasonable, it doesn't even deserve the respect of being repeated in this House, never mind said in the first place. We have been clear from day one that we want to see rates reduced for good drivers in this province. We want to see rates reduced for people who are good drivers and who have a good driving record. If people have a bad driving record, then their rates will reflect that, regardless of whether the rates in the industry are overall high or whether the rates in the industry are overall low. We know the rates are overall high; for bad drivers it's higher. What we want is overall lower rates, and for bad drivers, they're going to have to fare for themselves.

At the end of the day, it is very clear that New Democrats have been fighting for this for some time. The Liberals are pretending, I think, maybe to be onside; we'll see. The vote today is something that's important, but the most important thing—the proof that will show

whether Liberals are on the side of everyday families, of drivers in this province, of women and men who have to get into a car every day—we will see whether they're on their side when the budget comes out, because that's where the rubber will hit the road, no pun intended.

I've put it to the Premier: We're happy to see a little bit of lip service to our motion today. We're happy to see a sense that they, in principle, may support what New Democrats want to actually achieve, but we're not talking about principles or ideas; we're talking about real action and we're talking about real results, and we want to see that real action and we want to see that real result written out in the letter of the law when a budget is presented in this province within the next several weeks. That's what New Democrats are asking of this government. That's what the people of this province deserve; they deserve no less. They deserve to see their rates reduced over the next year to take into consideration what's already happened to bonus the industry as well as what's about to happen in the next couple of months to help the industry with its fraud problems.

I think it's pretty simple. I think it's a pretty realistic plan, and it's certainly a plan that the people of this province are long past due for. I'm going to end my comments by saying that I look forward not only to the support of the Liberals in principle on this motion, but I look forward to seeing a budget that allows us to know that they meant it, because frankly, not only with the auto insurance industry issue in terms of the 15% reduction, but also in terms of a five-day home care guarantee, also in terms of making sure that young people are given an opportunity to get a job, also in terms of making sure that the people on ODSP and social assistance that are earning money get to keep \$200 dollars of their earnings without a clawback, also ensuring that corporate tax loopholes are closed in this province and ensuring overall that there's a balanced approach to balancing our books—those are the things New Democrats are looking for in the budget, and if we don't see them, we won't be supporting that budget.

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's a real pleasure for me to stand up here in the House and to speak to this specific motion introduced by the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I want to begin, actually, by saying, I guess in a way, kudos to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton for the hard work that he has put in over the last number of weeks and months regarding this particular issue.

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I know that it's an issue that's near and dear to the hearts of many Ontarians, particularly those living in and around the greater Toronto area. Certainly, over the course of my by-election campaign back in August and September in the riding of Vaughan there was a great deal of discussion on the campaign trail. When I had a chance to speak with voters in my community about some of the issues that they were concerned about, some of the stuff that they felt was important for them and for

their families, auto insurance rates did come up from time to time. I know that since my election back on September 6, these conversations have continued at my local office in Vaughan and they continue in my community, in some of the town hall meetings that I've had over the last three or four months. There are individuals who come forward and do have concerns, not so much just about increases they see—but, I guess, a little bit of a lack of clarity or understanding about why they're seeing some of the increases that they're seeing, so I think it's really important that we are having this discussion here in the House today.

I think it's important that the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has brought this issue to the floor with a motion today. I think it's really important as well for us to recognize that over the last number of weeks both the Premier and the Minister of Finance have spoken out repeatedly on this issue and have said that it's important for them and important for all of us here on this side of the House to work with both of the opposition parties, to work with members like the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, to engage in the kind of discussion and dialogue to make sure that we, working with them, working with people back in our communities, but also working with the industry itself, can make sure we put forward realistic, balanced, reasonable proposals that help provide some of that clarity that people in my community say they want around the issue of auto insurance, that help those individuals whose perception is that they're being unfairly treated so that they can feel that they're being treated in a more balanced and fair way.

For example, as I said a second ago, Premier Wynne has said that we are determined to work and we are happy to work with members on all sides of this House regarding this issue, but we also do want to work with industry. I know that there have been discussions. I'm sure that some of the speakers who came before me have talked about the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force. I don't think that we can underscore what kind of role the issue of fraud plays with respect to auto insurance prices. I think we have to be cognizant of the fact that there's an issue there. I think we also have to recognize that our government, over the last number of months and since September 2010, has actually moved in the direction of doing our best to crack down on some of the fraud that we're talking about. For example, in December 2010, Speaker, our government introduced a package of 41 reforms that are actually helping to stabilize the rates and are cracking down on the fraud that I talked about, fraud that the task force has also talked about. For example, some of the reforms that we introduced back in September 2010 mean that more dollars are able to go to accident victims rather than assessment and transaction costs. They mean that drivers will be able to choose the coverage that best needs their needs while keeping their costs as low as possible. They're reforms that will help make the system more affordable, especially for the nine million Ontario drivers who are never in a position to make a claim. We also introduced, as I said, in 2011 that

particular anti-fraud task force, which has focused on prevention, detection, investigation and enforcement, as well as consumer education.

There is a lot of work and a lot of detailed analysis that needs to go into this. But I think it's important to recognize at this point in time that there is recognition on this side of the House that our government does need to work with all of the interested parties to make sure that we can be in a position to deliver the kind of positive results for the people of our respective communities that they demand of us and that they deserve here in this House.

Just the other day—just yesterday, in fact, I think it was—when I had the chance to speak to another piece of legislation, I talked about the importance of making sure that when we are here and doing the people's business we are doing our very best to make sure that we can deliver—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There's quite a lot of noise coming down from the third party area. There's about nine conversations going on. I'm having trouble hearing the speaker. He's at that end, too. So I would like you to take it outside if you want discussions, especially the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that.

It is a really important issue, as I was saying a second ago. I think it's also important that, as I mentioned when I was speaking to another piece of legislation just the other day, the people in my community expect us to be in this House and expect us to try and provide them with the kind of positive measurable results, and that's what our government is determined to do, on this file. I know it's what Minister Sousa and Premier Wynne are determined to do as well, working with all of us and, as I said earlier, working with some of the members opposite.

I did come across a quote, which I believe was printed in some media today, where a member from the Progressive Conservative caucus talked about this being bumper sticker politics—“just bumper sticker politics”—nothing more than that. I think that actually is a little bit of an unfair characterization around the meaningful discussion and work that's taking place in this House with members from our caucus, members from the third party and I sincerely hope members from the official opposition, to come together, to work together, to take a look at the recommendations that have come out of the task force, to talk to industry, to talk to the other stakeholders and certainly to talk to the affected drivers, whether we're talking about the GTA or other parts of Ontario, to try and construct and build the kind of consensus we need to make sure that we're not simply putting a band-aid over a problem.

People definitely do feel, as they are preparing their household budgets, that they have concerns around the cost of auto insurance. That's an undeniable fact. But we want to make sure that we provide reasonable, mean-

ingful solutions so that we're not back in this place again in a number of weeks or months or even in a couple of years, saying that we haven't actually provided the kind of relief or the solutions that they're looking for.

The people of my community of Vaughan, and I'm certain the people in communities like Thornhill and others, are determined to make sure that their representatives are here in this House, putting our best foot forward to make sure that we provide them with that kind of reasonable solution, that kind of long-lasting and enduring solution. But, Speaker, that can only really happen in the most effective way possible if we're all working on these problems together and we're not taking the easy way out by characterizing an important discussion like that which we have in this motion today as simply “bumper sticker politics.”

The official opposition, I think, is better than that. One of the members opposite called this discussion “bumper sticker politics.” I don't believe that's an accurate or fair characterization. That's why we on this side of the House, in the government caucus—again, under the leadership of Kathleen Wynne, the Premier, and Minister Sousa—are so determined to work with those who are willing partners, like the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and the members of the third party, on this kind of challenge so that we can provide a solution to the people of our respective communities and make sure that we move this debate forward, that we actually get the achievable results that they're looking for in the best way possible.

Speaker, that's why I'm really happy to stand here in my place today to speak on this particular motion and to encourage the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and all members in this House to continue to work together to find the kind of resolution and the kind of solutions that people in all of our communities demand of us.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have a few things to say on the subject of this resolution, because I do believe that the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has taken with a great degree of passion the concept of addressing a problem for the province of Ontario and for all of those of us who drive cars and have to buy automobile insurance.

I think at that point we have to part company. My auto insurance rates have been just as ridiculous, if not more so, than many. I, at a given point, was paying \$300 or \$400 a month, and it has been as high as \$600 a month. Part of that was due to the four tickets I had simultaneously, but when they all fell off my record, I was still at \$300 a month, and I had to go insurance shopping in the province of Ontario and finally found one that was reasonable. To display the array of rates or to shine some light on it here in debate, I'm now paying \$140 a month on the same car. As the saying goes, go figure.

The point, however, is not whether or not there's passion on the part of my friend from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. The question is how we're going to deal with it.

His resolution says, “In the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Wynne government to direct FSCO to gradually reduce average, industry-wide, private passenger auto insurance premiums by 15%.” That’s all it says.

So the first question I had when I read that is, Why 15%? Why not 2% or 7% or 22% or who the heck knows what? What is the rationale for 15%? I’m going to get to that in a minute. But I do want to quote from a news report that crossed my desk today. I believe that I’m quoting from CP24. It goes like this: “Members of Ontario’s Liberal government will vote for an NDP motion calling for a 15% cut in auto insurance premiums, but don’t bank on big savings just yet.

“The motion, which is not binding on the government, calls on the Liberals to mandate a gradual, industry-wide reduction of 15% in auto insurance rates....

“The Liberals have maintained the best way to reduce insurance premiums is to combat fraud, the same position taken by the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

“The move by the Liberals to vote for the motion shows the minority government is willing to meet demands the NDP has made to support the upcoming budget and avoid triggering a provincial election.”

1630

Now we have isolated what we’re looking at here and why we’re looking at it. We have to understand, specifically for people who are looking in on us today, that this is not a binding motion. Regardless of who votes for this motion, it doesn’t have to have any teeth in it, ultimately.

Anyway, the concept of putting a motion like this forward and calling for 15%—a particularly arbitrary figure—makes about as much sense as milking a bull. This 15% is an arbitrary number that the NDP has drawn out of a hat. I tried to guess as to why 15%. I think it’s because the NDP—or, as we here like to call them, the socialist arm of the Liberal Party of Ontario—picked on 15% because they think that’s what the profit margins are. They don’t like the idea of profit. That’s the nearest I can come.

In a serious vein, I have to say that what we’re looking for here is a multi-pronged solution to a serious and complex problem that besets all Ontarians who drive automobiles and/or pay for automobile insurance.

To the point made by the leader of the third party, the concept of having 400,000 people in the province of Ontario driving around without insurance is not new. It has been like that for at least 10 years that I’m well aware of, inside and out of my political life. In fact, there are somewhere in the same vicinity of that number of people driving around without licences in the province of Ontario—another entirely different problem.

Being against this isn’t even partisan; it’s just common sense. Even the industry is against political pandering and picking a number out of a hat and saying, “That’s what we want, and, by the way, it’s a bargaining chip for a budget”—says it all.

The spokesperson for the Insurance Bureau of Canada is Pete Karageorgos. He said, “I don’t think she,”

referring to the leader of the third party, “has thought it through.” IBC issued a statement that called it a “band-aid solution that may score political points, but for the long term, all stakeholders need to continue to push for needed reforms and fight fraud.”

We were, as a party, willing participants last summer in a task force under the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs that isolated fraud as the biggest problem in the insurance industry that causes this rate problem. There is no question that auto insurance rates in Ontario are high, but premiums in the province of Ontario, I might say, have increased by 65% in the last 10 years. What’s significant about the last 10 years? It has been under the tutelage of the government of the Liberal Party. I don’t know anyone in this province who has had salary increases to sustain that kind of an increase—65%.

Instead of a drop in the ocean, the Ontario PC Party wants to target the root cause of the issue, and that is, I think all parties agree, auto insurance fraud. It costs the system \$1.6 billion annually. If we had \$1.6 billion back, I would suggest to you that insurance rates would drop, and more than just marginally.

The McGuinty-Wynne Liberals have been promising a reduction for almost 10 years. They promised a 10% reduction within 90 days of winning the election in 2003, and you folks who came in here in 2003 know that very well. Instead, there was an 11% increase that year. That’s what you can expect from the Liberal Party. If the Liberal government really wanted to reduce auto insurance rates, they would have done it already. As a matter of fact, there’s a commercial on the radio for a weight-loss guy named Harvey Brooker, whom I happen to know. His slogan is, “If you could have done it yourself, you would have done it already.” You made that promise.

The numbers that the NDP are giving are not even an accurate reflection of reality. When the NDP did their math—if you can call it math—the IBC said that the NDP did not consider expenses that insurance companies have, just their claim payouts. The NDP actually doesn’t have a lot of track record when it comes to arithmetic.

At a time when Ontario needs to create jobs, this ill-conceived attempt at policy would result in layoffs in an industry that employs 77,000 Ontarians. Governments should not be dictating how the private sector is going to be run. We’re on record on a number of files on this. The proposal is coming from the same party that put forward a private member’s bill last year that would have seen convicted drunk drivers paying less for automobile insurance. Frankly, the last place that we should be taking direction on this is from the NDP. These are the folks who essentially are having rings installed in their noses that are being pulled by the Liberal Party right now.

The 15% across the board also means that bad drivers will pay less. Is that really what you want? Is that what you want, for bad drivers to pay less? The anti-fraud task force was created in 2011 to produce regulatory change, but it hasn’t gone far enough, and the findings have yet to

be touched. There's been a lot of talk about the good work that it did, but we haven't seen any action, and that work was done about eight months ago. Right now, as my colleague has said, there are 17,000 claims backlogged in dispute resolution, and it takes an average of 414 days to complete a mediation case.

In addition to looking at ways of eradicating fraud in the system, the Ontario PC Party wants to increase accountability, reform the dispute resolution process so people don't have to wait a year and a half, and reduce bureaucracy to create competition, which means lower premiums for all Ontarians.

I can tell you something: I have had the insurance people in my office. There are precious few American companies that are up here in Ontario selling insurance, and the reason is, in their words, "It's a dog's breakfast for automobile insurance." Have you ever heard of a field of discipline or a field of endeavour where Americans, the world's greatest marketers—arguably—would not participate because they feel that the playing field is so ridiculously out of kilter they don't want to be there?

Ontario cannot afford populist band-aid solutions, especially from a party that really can't count.

So if you believe that this 15% cut is good policy, I've got some swampland in Florida. Come and see me after this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope to bring some clarity to the debate instead of a whole bunch of clichés. Let's start with what has happened.

In the year 2010, this Legislature dramatically reduced benefits that were paid by insurance companies. It was part of the package. In 2010, this Legislature and this government were warned by consumers, by lawyers, by doctors, by those who had been injured in catastrophic accidents, exactly what was going to happen if the benefits were cut, and in fact the government didn't listen to those people; they listened to the insurance industry. As a result, the insurance companies won, and the 65,000 people who are injured in accidents every year in this province lost. It was neither discreet nor was it focused. The government did this to save the insurance industry the costs. It was not consumer-focused, and it was not focused on the injured of Ontario and the pain and suffering that they have gone through.

We have heard in the finance committee in the last couple of days—a number of people have come forward to talk about what happened in 2010 and are seeking some form of redress. I am particularly thankful to Laurie Davis, who is here in the audience today, from the Ontario Rehab Alliance, for putting together a pretty good paper—exactly what happens to consumers who find themselves injured as a result of automobile accidents in the province of Ontario.

First and foremost, the minor injury guideline states that only \$3,500 can be given to an accident victim. This is the lowest in all of Canada. Not even Prince Edward

Island confines it to \$3,500, but we do that here in Ontario.

The next thing: Case law is allowed to be used against people who are injured in the province of Ontario as a result of what the Liberals call the reform of 2010. Now, today, in Ontario, if you suffer from leukemia or Parkinson's disease or a whole range of other things, the insurance company is allowed to say, "That's a pre-existing condition. Maybe you shouldn't have been in the car in the first place." That is totally wrong.

1640

We know that serious injuries in the province of Ontario used to be covered up to \$100,000. That's why you pay liability insurance. That has been reduced to \$50,000.

We need to know what is being bought here today.

As a result of all this—it was done without any consumer education whatsoever, so the insurance companies today, when they send out the form and people willingly sign it and send it back—only 1.4% of all people even question what is contained within the body of the insurance policy. The reality is that today we, as consumers, are buying an inferior product for more money. That's the reality. I want to say it again: We are buying an inferior product for more money, and the consumer ultimately is the loser.

Now, all those people who don't have an accident this year—about 99% of all drivers won't have an accident; they won't have an injury; they won't suffer. But they're suffering in the pocketbook. They bought the inferior product at an increased cost.

For my Conservative friends, in this country we pride ourselves on not being Americans. We pride ourselves that it's not a dog-eat-dog world like they are trying to produce. We pride ourselves that governments have an obligation, and do protect their citizens, and protect them in the case of monopolies. We pride ourselves that we have institutions like the CRTC that take on the telephone companies and television and Big Media. We pride ourselves that hydro is regulated so that consumers don't get gouged. We pride ourselves that we have things in place to help the poor in terms of their housing and the escalating costs. We do that because it's right and because these are necessities of life.

The insurance industry—they're there. They make money; they're supposed to make money. But, you know, each and every year throughout this entire recession, from 2007 until today, they have made a 9.5% profit. Now, think about that. How many manufacturers are making a 9.5% profit? Even the banks in Canada don't make a 9.5% profit. There's hardly a single industry, a single person, that does commerce in this country that makes that kind of profit. And we allow them to make up to 12%, due to outdated regulations.

The time has come to change all this. The time has come to put the consumer first. The time has come to put the accident victims—make sure they are protected. The time has come to pass the motion put forward by my colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton. The time has

come for all members of this House to think about their constituents and not think about an industry that is totally bloated and is continuing to provide poor service for too much money.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to speak on the motion put forward by the third party.

We all want lower insurance rates; there is no question about it. I also share the concern about high insurance rates expressed by the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton in this motion. Until this morning, they were talking about reducing the rates gradually. Now they are setting the timeline.

The Financial Services Commission doesn't have a magic bullet to reduce rates. We must look at the root cause of why rates are higher in certain areas. The member from Thornhill, the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London and the member from Vaughan confirmed that the root cause is fraud. I also strongly believe that the root cause is fraud.

That is why I introduced my private member's bill on June 1, 2011, so that by eliminating fraud, we could reduce premium rates. The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton was not even elected to the House at that time.

Last year, in the month of March 2012, I reintroduced my private member's bill. It was debated in the House, and it passed the second reading, whereas on April 26, 2012, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, in this House, asserted, and I quote from Hansard, "What I'm saying is that fraud is not the majority cause of the increase in our insurance rates." I disagree with the member. I strongly believe that fraud is the most dreadful beast that must be tackled first and foremost.

High auto insurance rates have been a concern for our government for quite some time. That is why we brought reforms in 2010; those reforms are working and the rates have gone down by 0.26%. That is why we created the anti-fraud task force, and I'm pleased to share with this House that the anti-fraud task force has embraced some recommendations of my private member's bill, and the major component they reconfirmed: The root cause is fraud.

Hon. Mario Sergio: That was a good bill.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Yes, thank you.

The record of the respective governments tells the whole story. We have kept auto insurance rates below the inflation rate. When the PCs were in power, the rates went up 43%, and when the NDP were in power, the rates went up 27%.

I would like to ask the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, or any other longer-serving member in the NDP caucus—they promised to make it a public asset—why they were unable to deliver.

Interjection: They never did.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: They never did. Instead of that, in 1993, they passed legislation and the rates went up.

I strongly urge the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and the third party to not waste more of their time and devote their attention to the real cause: how to tackle fraud. Let's work together to tackle fraud, to combat fraud. That is the way to go.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It's great to stand here today and debate this opposition motion by the third party.

In my riding, I can tell you that insurance companies are small businesses. As a matter of fact, I know many of the owners of these businesses personally. In many cases, they're smaller family businesses. We are talking about eastern Ontario, where the driving records are very, very safe and the number of claims are not very high.

McDougall Insurance, for instance, has been in business for over 60 years in downtown Belleville and right throughout the Quinte region. Since 1946, as a matter of fact, they've been in business and they employ more than 140 people. So they are a small business in our area. Whitley Insurance has been in business for 60-plus years as well. They're an active community partner, mostly in the Quinte West area over in my colleague Rob Milligan's riding. Mackay Insurance has also been serving Belleville since 1974. So these are small businesses that are entrenched in our community.

Sometimes our friends in the third party, in the NDP, like to portray the insurance companies as these big, massive giants and these faceless corporations that exist. But I can tell you that in Prince Edward–Hastings I know them as community people. They're passionate volunteers in our community. Many of them are huge supporters of the Belleville Bulls hockey team and our minor hockey programs, and they sponsor all kinds of local things in our communities.

I think sometimes in this Legislature, when we're spilling out this rhetoric—

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: —spewing out the rhetoric; thank you very much—we get carried away and we forget who's really impacted by some of the things we're talking about here today. So I just want you to keep that in mind as you're listening to the debate here this afternoon. These are small business people, and as the small business critic for the Progressive Conservative Party, it's our duty to stand up for them as well, because they're employing people in our community.

1650

As the small business critic for the PC Party, and because of the shocking lack of detail in this motion and what it does to threaten businesses in our communities, I feel it's important for me to stand up and say a few words. I know that in parts of Ontario, auto insurance premiums are very high; there's no question about that. Insurance premiums are extremely high in Peel region. Having sat down and talked with the business owners in my area since becoming the MPP for Prince Edward–Hastings riding, I have an understanding of exactly how much lower auto insurance premiums are in my riding

than they are in the rest of the province. But there's a reason for that. It's because the claims are much smaller and there aren't nearly as many of them.

What this motion doesn't do is provide any specifics for how we're actually doing to solve this problem. This is a populist agenda on behalf of the third party. They think if they get out there and say, "We're going to reduce auto insurance rates by 15%"—where they've pulled the number from, we're not exactly sure. But we have seen a bit of a climb-down from where the third party was just a few weeks ago, and I think we're now seeing that we do have a bit of a coalition going on here in the Legislature.

The thing is that they're now talking about gradual decreases. Before, it was hard and fast: "We have to reduce the cost of insurance by 15%, or else we're not going to support this scandal-plagued government any longer." Then yesterday in question period we heard, "Well, if they do it gradually over the next hundred years or so, maybe we'll support them." I think what we're seeing is a third party that really has no principle. They're throwing this out there trying to win support. We have no idea what they mean by "gradual"—we really don't. We haven't seen any details on the rest of this policy as well. We have no idea where that 15% number came from. We have no idea—from them, anyway—how the reduction is actually going to be accomplished and get drivers in the province a break that they deserve.

It's less a motion that we're debating here than it is wishful thinking on behalf of the third party. My colleagues in the House have already heard in some detail the PC plan proposed by the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London to lower auto insurance rates in Ontario. He has been doing yeoman work on this since he was given this file by our leader, Tim Hudak, working in collaboration with our finance critic, Peter Shurman, as well.

But as the PC critic for small business and red tape, I'd like to touch on a specific area, and that is the reduction of red tape in the insurance sector. Every time I stand here, no matter what the issue is—whether it's agriculture or whether it's energy or whether it's real estate, like we were debating last Thursday here in the Legislature—everything is bound up in red tape in this province, and the government really doesn't have a plan to reduce the red tape that is strangling our businesses, including the insurance sector.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that small business owners spend between eight and 10 hours a week with red tape and regulation—filling out paperwork and complying with this and that and the other thing. It has also been shown that red tape and regulation is costing this province about a billion dollars a year in economic activity. That's a billion dollars a year in economic activity that could be going to pay for our health care, that could be going to education, that could be going to pay for our social programs, that could be going to pay for transit to relieve the gridlock here in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

Few sectors of the economy are as heavily regulated as the insurance sector is. In few other sectors would the government specifically be able to dictate what can be factored into the cost of a product, or even what that product can be sold for. When we're talking about small businesses, like we are in my riding, any increase in red tape increases the cost of a product. It doesn't matter if you're selling guitars or you're selling auto parts or you're selling auto insurance, red tape is a factor in strangling business.

Small business owners exist on incredibly small profit margins. Every dollar that goes back into business usually goes to supporting their families. We should be talking about how we can create more successful small businesses in the province. It's something we don't talk about nearly enough, because small businesses are employing 90% of the people here in Ontario.

Reducing red tape, for many of these smaller firms, is going to help bring costs down. Is it the only answer? No, but it's part of a much more comprehensive plan.

You heard our member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, who spoke about our plan for how we were going to reduce the costs of auto insurance in the province. It was a fairly comprehensive plan, and I'm sure he only scratched the surface on what needs to be done. This isn't a simple fix; it's not going to be done quickly. For some reason, the Liberal government understood that a couple of days ago, but now, suddenly, they realize that maybe they want to stay in power for a little bit longer. They're going to cuddle up to the third party and agree to give them what they need so we can allow this scandal-plagued government to continue to live here in Ontario for that much longer.

It's too easy to stand up, point at a target and say, "That's to blame for everything that's wrong with auto insurance." I think that's what we're seeing here. We're talking about a very complicated financial service, and there's no one quick fix for it; for the third party to stand up and pretend there is lacks credibility. For the government to support that kind of thinking shows exactly how eager this Premier is to keep from going down in history as one of Ontario's shortest-lived Premiers and shortest-lived governments, and I think that's what we're seeing right here in the House today.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As a long-serving member of this Legislature, I've been looking forward to giving this speech since 1993, I must say.

First of all, let's say what this really is. This is an ability for this Legislature to try to give drivers in this province a break. They have seen their auto insurance rates go up over the last number of years, at the same time that largesse and gifts from the Liberal government have allowed those insurance companies to increase their profits, which is okay, but the promise was, at the time when the Minister of Finance said he would give them all these tools in order to be able to increase their profits,

that those profits would be shared by way of rate decreases to the drivers of this province. By and large, that hasn't happened, so we're here and we're calling on the government and this House to, within 12 months, give us a 15% decrease in automobile insurance.

I just want to say upfront that I support my colleague's motion wholeheartedly, but I've only got five minutes, so I want to take this time to say a couple of things.

First of all, I was just rather interested, listening to some of the comments from the Conservative caucus. The Conservatives were accusing New Democrats of having a shocking lack of detail as to what we're doing, this from the party that can only vote "no." The only thing they know is to say the word "no." They don't have any detail on anything. The only word they have is "no," N-O. And they're trying to tell me that we have a lack of detail? I understand one thing from Tories, and that's the word "no," because the only thing I have heard from Conservatives and Tim Hudak since getting here, since the last election, is the word "no." My God, what culot these people have.

Then I hear wonderful speeches from the front bench of the Tory caucus. The Tories say this is like trying to milk a bull. Only Conservatives would be silly enough to milk a bull. I've got to tell you, it is not a warm and fuzzy feeling. You've got to go to the cow to get the milk, not the bull.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you for that wonderful outburst.

I'll remind the member from Oxford that we don't cross-talk; we go through moi. I thank you for all that excitement from the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Whoa, whoa, whoa.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You're not done?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You sat down.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timmins–James Bay sat down before I got up, so I thought he was done. Well, here's how it goes: Keep an eye on me, what I'm doing.

Continue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Not a problem. Thank you very much for that, Mr. Speaker.

Again I say to my colleagues in the Conservative Party: Beware of milking bulls. You may get in a lot of trouble.

I then say to my friends on the Liberal side of the House the following: The one thing that I've learned from watching Liberals over these last nine years is it's all about the political self-interest of the Liberal Party. They are so interested in making sure that they're able to survive as Liberals and do what's good for their friends that they're not very good at doing what's right for the people of this province.

1700

What is this debate all about? They have given a large share of ability to the insurance companies to increase their profits, and rightfully so. Nobody is opposed to a company making money, least of all me or the New Democrats. But we believe there is a social responsibility in passing on some of those profits back to the shareholder, which in this case happens to be the people who buy their product.

Let's review what the Liberals have done over the last number of years. The first thing they did was they gave a billion dollars to their consultant friends on the eHealth scandal. They thought it was perfectly okay to give an opportunity to their friends within the consultant field to bill eHealth exorbitant amounts of money to the point where the first debacle we had was a billion dollars on eHealth. Then they said, "Oh, no, don't worry. We'll never do that again. We got caught. We know we cost people a billion dollars. We can't give people the savings on their auto insurance, but we'll never do it again."

Then what do they do? Along comes Ornge; they create Ornge. They end up taking apart a perfectly good air ambulance system in this province and they create another scandal that cost how much? Another billion dollars. So \$2 billion now for Liberals to help their friends.

Then they go back and they say to the auto insurance companies, "We're going to do things to reduce your liability to drivers when they are in an accident and we're going to let you become more profitable." They give almost \$2 billion to the insurance companies.

Then you get to the gas plants—my God. To save one seat, they did \$600 million; a total of \$1.3 billion given out to save some seats. Why? Because it was in the Liberal political self-interest. That's another \$1.3 billion. And where are we at? Not one saving on to the people of this province.

And, yes, we as New Democrats stand in this House proud and we say we will do what's right for the people of this province, because, my friends, when you come to this place, it's not about Liberal political self-interest. It's about the interests of the people of this province, and we think it's wrong to waste billions of dollars on eHealth, billions of dollars on Ornge, billions of dollars on gas plants—about to give \$1.3 billion to large corporations on tax cuts they don't need. And you can't give 15% to the drivers of this province? I say to you, shame.

Andrea Horwath and the New Democrats will stand proud with the people of this province and always remember we are sent here by the people of this province to do what is right. And, yes, we believe 15% is fair and it has to happen now, within the next 12 months. I urge this government to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Wow. Speaker, I have to say it's very hard to follow—

Interjections.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Yes, it's very, very hard to follow. But I have been enjoying the—

Interjection.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I can't afford that again, no.

I have been enjoying the presentations by every member of the House, especially the last one. He's always meaningful and entertaining, I have to say, Speaker. And if we look at records—I may touch on that, because I think no one can avoid the—of the time, if you will, Speaker, as we deal with this particular issue here.

But let me say at the outset that I will support the bill, and I will support it for a number of reasons—not necessarily that it's perfect, because it isn't. If I may, Speaker, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton may want to look at the title itself and may want to make some adjustment in his final remarks and maybe explain exactly what he intends to do with the bill. But first he says 15%; then he says “gradually reduce average.” Well, are we reducing by 15% or are we reducing average? I hope that he will explain that.

Then he says “industry-wide”: Does it mean including vans, trucks, trailers, whatever you have? And then “private passenger auto.” I think we have to explain very well.

One of the reasons that I support it is because it sounds good and it is good. People, especially in my area, working-class people, when they hear 15%, say, “Wow. That's excellent.” But you know what, Speaker? It has a good intention—that is fine—and I'll be happy if instead of 15% it will be 14%, it will be 13%, it will be 10%, it will be 9%, it will be 7%. I'll be happy with a 1%, 2%, 3%, 4% or 5% reduction.

Interjection: We won't. We want 15%.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Well, if you think you're going to get 15%, I'll be happy with 15%.

Then again, by looking at the record—you know, there is one particular thing in this House: We can say anything we want because we are protected by the wonderful laws that we enjoy in the House here. But we have Hansard that records—

Interjection: It's privilege.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Yes, it's the privilege, if you will—we have the Hansard that records every whisper that we say in this House here. Everything is recorded. We can go back to what the NDP did, what the Conservatives did, what the Liberals did. The record is there. We cannot run away from that, even though sometimes we say in the House things that are not so true. But they will go because we are working in this particular place here.

So I will support the bill for those reasons, and if we can't obtain 15%, I'll be happy with anything we are going to get on behalf of our people. The member from Thornhill says, “Why stop at 15%? Well, let's go for 25%, 20%.” It's not a question of that. It's not a simple solution. We have to be very realistic, and I have to say in defence of the Liberals—because it's easy to point fingers, and I don't like to point fingers. It's easy to accuse the government, accuse the Liberals. I have to say that since 2003, I believe, to 2012, the increase has been

lower than the rate of inflation. I think it was around 14% if my memory serves me well. The rate of inflation was 18.1%

I don't have to tell you, Speaker. They know the record, because they are Conservative or they are NDP members here. They know how much the insurance rates went up when they were in power—and certainly cannot compare to our own record.

The fact is that there is a huge problem out there associated with the industry, and it's everybody's responsibility to make sure that we're trying to curtail that. So it's not the fault of one government or the other. They did some things, but in the long run, it has been created, it has been out there, and not very much has been done, not as much as should have been done, but it's about time that we have some serious conversations with the auto industry, with all the stakeholders, within the House here, and we must put an end to the fraud, to the \$1-billion-a-year fraud that goes on in this particular province here. Because, at the end, do you know who is paying the price? You, me and all our people; we are, Speaker. I think it's in the interest—I forgot my colleague here gave me a time when it's my time. I have to leave some 10, 12 minutes, so I think I'm almost done.

I think we have to be very realistic of what we are asking, because those insurance companies are providing insurance for our people here. When we intend to do something good and reasonable, we have to make sure that it is good and reasonable and it can be attained on behalf of the people of Ontario. If we can't, if we don't, then it means we are just playing games, and we don't want to play games. No one wants to play games. If the bill is proposed and it intends to bring some relief to our people, then we should make sure that indeed we bring it to completion and bring some relief to our people.

So what is the problem really, then? The fraud—the fraud is tremendous. Indeed, in the package that we introduced in 2010, with that, maybe we didn't go deep enough, maybe we didn't go far enough. But the rates that particular year—in 2012, let's say, they only went up by 0.26%, not even 1%, not even half a per cent. But was that enough, what we did with respect to the anti-fraud task force? No, maybe not. Maybe we should look at the real cost and look at prevention, detection, investigation, enforcement and education, as well, that are the problem out there.

That is the problem. When we build an industry that is really growing out of fraud or crime, then there is something wrong, because out of that, our people are being affected. This is where we should be concentrating our efforts.

1710

So I laud the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton for pushing very forcefully. I have to say that before the member introduced his motion, I was asking my fellow members in the NDP to co-sponsor my motion—the same motion. They, of course, said, “No, we're going to have our own.” Good for them. We are here today. I'm very pleased that we are here to discuss and debate the

motion. Let's see what may come out of this that ultimately our people are going to benefit from.

I know that Minister Jeffrey wants to address the motion herself. I want to make sure she has enough time to address the issue, but I would hope that as we move along we can bring some improvements to the motion. I commend the member and I wish him well. If it's not 15%, I want to see this gradually. I don't want to wait to get back curly hair before I see that 15%.

Interjection: You're okay.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I'm okay the way I am? Terrific.

Anyway, I thank you for your time and my compliments again to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm pleased to speak to the motion today. It's obviously something that affects every driver in Ontario. Auto insurance premiums, especially in the GTA or Peel, are extremely high. I hear a lot from my constituents in the region of Waterloo and Kitchener–Conestoga, whether they're picking up kids, driving to their job, travelling to and from school, that's it's costing more and more money each day.

In fact, under this government, Ontario has far exceeded other Canadian provinces in terms of those premiums, and they've taken a spike of roughly 16% since 2007 because of a lot of the structural problems or regulatory decisions made by this Liberal government.

In my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, I had a constituent who was in not too long ago, who owns a small business. She rarely needs to drive during the day unless she's going about her business in terms of picking up groceries or her children etc. She told me how insurance rates are continuing to climb, even though she is driving less than she did five years ago and has a clean driving record. On top of being a small business owner and dealing with numerous certifications and regulations that she has to deal with in her small business, she's finding it hard to keep up. So, clearly, something needs to be done.

However, a mandated reduction in insurance rates is simply not sustainable. This motion, raised by the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, has some good intentions, but as we have said today, it's nothing but cheap, cynical populist pandering—so it is. In fact, I have heard time and time again from members of the NDP—not MPPs but members of the NDP—that at one time they actually believed in something. Now they're simply trying to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

As we heard, the member from Timmins–James Bay brought up this scandal-plagued government in his remarks and talked about power plants and Ornge and eHealth. But I want to remind him that they are complicit in the McGuinty–Wynne government's failures and scandals now. Don't forget that.

Again, back to the motion we're talking about today, in terms of it being really just cynical populist pandering. This approach was taken in New Jersey back in 1998. The government there mandated that insurance com-

panies reduce their premiums 15%. While those residents had relief for two years, rates spiked 26% from 2000 to 2003.

The number one thing I hear when I talk with folks is the fraud problem, which unfortunately isn't much addressed in this motion. I had an instance where a driver was making a left-hand turn. There were two cars in front and the driver waved the car on and moved into the oncoming lane. Then the driver ran up and smashed the other car, because that car was in the lane—I mean, insurance fraud. These guys are making a business out of it. In fact, just last month, Toronto police arrested 37 people for making false claims about whiplash. These organized groups of people have been staging accidents like I just mentioned, making false claims and receiving up to \$50,000 in return.

I want to thank my colleague from Middlesex–London for outlining our plan to address these specific structural concerns. We talked about reducing the excess bureaucracy to encourage competition that would allow for innovation and would serve customers better. We talked about addressing fraud here in Ontario by creating a special unit of the crown attorney's office to investigate and prosecute. We would reform the dispute resolution process, allowing private mediators and certified independent assessors to mediate disputes. This would get rid of the backlog of claims in the system. Jeff also talked about how we would increase accountability, making the CEOs personally responsible and subject to penalties.

I want to commend him for those thoughtful structural changes that truly are needed to address this problem, instead of this cheap and cynical populist pandering that we've seen from the third party. They've now resorted to cheap tricks for political stunts, and that's nothing more than what you've got here.

Thank you, Speaker, for the debate. I know my colleague from Durham will finish up the rest of the time for our caucus.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to speak for a couple of minutes and to bring a northwestern Ontario perspective to this debate.

This motion responds to some serious concerns that are being raised by northerners, who rely on their vehicles to get to and from work, to travel to medical appointments, to pick up groceries, and other essential activities. Northerners don't have the option of jumping on a bus or travelling by subway to perform these tasks. We have to rely on our vehicles, and in many cases, it's not even a matter of travelling down the road. In many cases, it's actually a matter of travelling 50, 100 or 200 kilometres or even more, which makes the use of our vehicles essential in our daily lives.

As a result, the cost of auto insurance is one of the complaints that I hear the most about in Kenora–Rainy River. I represent dozens and dozens of communities, municipalities and First Nations, and I've heard the complaints from one end of the riding to the other.

Just a few days ago, I received an email from a father in Kenora. He writes, “My daughter, who is 20, just received her insurance policy renewal. It has gone up over 25% from last year. My broker advises that all insurance policies for individuals under 25 have increased. This increase was approved by the provincial government. Can you advise if this is true and what can be done about it?”

That’s a very straightforward question: What can be done about it? That’s what we’re here to discuss today. It’s something that we’re hearing, again, all across the north. Just last week, I talked about a young driver in Thunder Bay who is paying \$4,000 annually for his premiums, despite having a clean driving record. It’s very clear that we have to do something. We have to act.

What we have is a service—auto insurance—which governments mandate is necessary to be able to drive, but nothing is being done to ensure that the rates that we’re paying are fair. The last action that was taken on auto insurance, in 2010, was when the province dramatically reduced accident benefits. At the time, the government stated that this action may result in lower prices for the consumer, but what we instead saw was that the rates continued to climb.

What we also saw was the auto insurance industry profits rise too; they climbed. In 2010, profits for the industry were right around \$1 billion. The next year, after these changes took effect, insurance profits soared to \$3.4 billion. The current system has obviously made the industry profitable. Now it’s time to pass some of those benefits on to the consumer—and consumers are fed up.

We, as legislators and those who mandate that people must pay for this service, have an obligation to ensure that there is a balance between the consumer’s ability to access this mandatory service at a fair and reasonable cost and the company’s ability to cover its costs. The balance has tipped significantly to one side, and we’re saying that we need to have a level playing field.

In this House, we have spent a considerable amount of time discussing what we can do to create employment opportunities for young people, but what we neglected to consider is the fact that in many parts of the province, such as in the northwest, young people need access to a vehicle just to get to work, because they don’t have the luxury of public transportation as an option. That means that they need access to a vehicle and, along with that, they need to have access to affordable insurance rates.

1720

Most young people entering the workforce are lucky if they can find a job that pays \$25,000 in my area of the province, but let’s just say that they luck out and they find a job that pays \$40,000. If they’re paying \$4,000 annually for auto insurance, as is the young man in Thunder Bay who I mentioned last week, that’s 10% of their income that’s gone. That’s 10% that’s gone before tax, before car payments, before groceries, before rent, before gas, before hydro. It’s gone, and there’s no reason for it. And it’s not just youth. It’s families, it’s seniors, it’s even businesses that rely on vehicles to carry out

their essential day-to-day activities. So whether it’s getting groceries, going to the doctor or going to work, people all across the northwest are looking to this House, to members on all sides of this House, to take some concrete action on the issue.

By supporting this motion today, we can take the first step towards delivering this much-needed reduction, and I encourage all members on all sides of the House to do that.

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

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I’m pleased to stand in the House today to speak to the opposition day motion brought forward by my colleague the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Let me begin by stating that I’m pleased that the member opposite has brought forward a reworked version of his private member’s bill. I think we can all agree there are challenges when it comes to insurance in this province, and we need to work together to find workable solutions.

Like the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton—we both represent a community that has some of the highest car insurance rates in the province. People in our community are like people in communities across the province. They use their car to get to work. They use their car to get their kids to school. They use their car to get to medical appointments and to visit their elderly parents or grandparents. For many in my community, having a car is not a luxury. It is a necessity closely tied to their livelihood.

Since car insurance is mandatory, families who want their children to drive must find the funds to allow them to drive to those locations. As a mother of three sons, I know a little bit about how expensive car insurance can be, and I know what the smell of a burning clutch is like with three sons. I know first-hand the impact of high auto insurance rates, and I know that it’s hard on hard-working families. It’s a very high cost that you need to find a way to address. That’s why I welcome the debate on how to address these challenges.

I want to also acknowledge today the work of my colleague from Mississauga–Brampton South, who—I think it was a year ago in this House—proposed a bill aimed at addressing insurance rate premiums through fraud prevention. One of the explanations insurance companies use when they are asked about the reason for high insurance rates is fraud. I think it was about a year ago that I held a town hall with residents of my community from a variety of sectors, and we brought in people from the insurance sector. We talked about all the reasons for fraud. It was a very lively meeting; we got lots of advice. I think that it helped inform many conversations I had, and certainly I heard about it in the last election. I think on almost every street, at every door or every second door I knocked at, people were talking about the high cost of insurance and what we were doing to address it. Like the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, it’s something our community shares as a whole.

The insurance industry estimates fraud to be nearly a billion-dollar business in Ontario and raising insurance rates for all drivers. Fraud can take different forms. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada and FSCO, forms of fraud include higher-than-necessary claims in minor accidents when there's no actual damage to the vehicle. There are also those unnecessary medical services that are claimed, and in some instances claims are made for treatment that is never actually rendered. There are even instances of staged accidents, concocted solely to make an illegitimate claim.

Clearly, based on the debate that we've heard this afternoon, there's a realization from at least two out of the three parties in this House that we need to explore options around insurance premiums in Ontario.

I'm proud to be part of a government that has already taken strong action on auto insurance rates. Back in September 2010, we introduced a package of 41 reforms that began to stabilize the rates, bring them down, and we attempted to crack down on fraud. These reforms mean that more dollars go to accident victims rather than assessment and transaction costs. These changes make the system more affordable, especially for those nine million Ontario drivers who never make a claim.

But that's not all we did. We created the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force back in 2011. The task force has been focusing on prevention, detection, investigation and enforcement, as well as consumer education. According to the anti-fraud task force, fraudulent activity—in particular, premeditated and organized fraud—has been on the increase, especially in the GTA.

We've also established a health claims for auto insurance database. This database will help us to detect potentially fraudulent activity, as well as new rules to ensure that consumers are actually receiving the treatments invoiced by health care clinics and other providers.

We know now that our plan is working. Since 2003, rates have risen at a slower pace than inflation. At the same time, Ontario has the most generous basic medical and rehabilitation benefits in Canada. That matters when you have an accident, knowing that you have a good system that will take care of you should you be injured.

While I'm proud of our record to date on car insurance, I am mindful that more can and should be done.

That brings us to today's motion. Premier Wynne has stated from the very beginning of her leadership that we will work to find common ground with the opposition. We will find ways that we can put our differences aside and focus on what's best for Ontarians. Private members' business, I've always believed, and certainly opposition day motions, are extremely valuable tools. They help us debate and raise public awareness regarding issues that affect all our citizens and our residents. I believe in those two tools. I believe that they provide all members of the Legislature an opportunity to bring forward suggestions on how to improve what we do, as well as government business. It isn't always used for that purpose, but in this instance, for this motion, I think it's a helpful method to have this important conversation about auto insurance.

As Premier Wynne has stated, we want to work with the third party on this issue, but we also need to work with the industry. I strongly believe we need to get everyone working together—all stakeholders involved. From the insurance industry, to government, to the police, to the municipal governments, to health care providers: All of us need to come together to fight fraud, to help Ontario drivers through lower insurance premiums. We want to increase road safety by reducing the number of staged accidents. That's why we need to implement the recommendations of the Auto Insurance Anti-Fraud Task Force: to make sure that wherever there is fraud in the system, we get rid of it, that we shine a light on that fraud, because it affects all of us.

Once we can successfully eliminate fraud, these savings can be passed on to premium holders. That will have an impact on insurance rates, especially in suburban areas like Brampton, where rates are higher because, according to the industry, instances of fraud are higher.

During the last election, in 2011, this was an issue, as I said, that I heard a great deal about at the door. People in my riding pay some of the highest premiums in the province. They don't think that's fair, and I agree with them; I don't think it's fair either. That's why I'm going to be supporting the motion today, and that's why we need to find better ways to lower those premiums for honest, hard-working individuals in communities like mine.

Let me be clear: Rates should be lower for individuals with a good driving record. That was one of the main problems with my colleague's previous attempt at this issue. In fact, I think the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton addressed that. He was trying to find solutions. We weren't able to arrive at it. I think certainly that bill raised awareness. It added some context and some colour to this issue that weren't being addressed. I think this is a much better motion. The private member's bill he brought forward on this topic last March was debated at length, certainly in the newspapers and on the media side. It wasn't exactly the right solution, and I think it had some unintended consequences that were pointed out by some very well-respected industry experts—Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Ontario police association. But his attempt was good. It was an attempt to find a solution.

As we know, that original bill did not pass, but I'm encouraged that he went back to the drawing board. He's trying to find positive solutions, and he used those interceding months to have a conversation with people in the industry and to draft a more balanced motion that's here for our consideration today.

1730

I'm pleased to be part of this important debate today. I want that conversation to continue. I want it to continue with the industry; I want it to continue with municipal government, with health care providers and with all of the stakeholders who have any tie to how we can reduce premiums for our drivers across Ontario. As a result of the implementation of the recommendations of the anti-

fraud task force, we've seen some great results. I'm heartened by them, but I acknowledge there's more work to be done. We want to work with the third party and the caucus. We know that the cost of auto insurance can be a huge deterrent; we know that it's a burden for a lot of Ontarians and it's a worry for them. Those pocketbook issues matter. There are no easy solutions; I know that, and that's why we need everybody working together to find a workable solution.

I support the motion because we need to work with all of those industry executives, anybody in the insurance industry, and local municipalities. We need to work with police services and forces to make sure that auto insurance is affordable and is available to everybody across the province. So I'm happy to support the motion, and I thank the member for the opposition day motion and the discussion.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I just want to recognize the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton and his initiative on this particular file. With respect to the genuineness is where it comes into question.

More importantly, to put things in perspective, here and now we have a coalition of the NDPs and the Liberals. If you think the rates are high, the last 10 years are by a government that said—the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing just claimed they've somehow recovered the system. They had 41 recommendations.

In fact, if you look at it carefully, they've pretty well destroyed the system. They have reduced SABS, which is the statutory accident benefits, which increases the amount of tort, which is the legal, in-the-court process. They did have a fraud task force report, but they've done nothing; they've come up with a few ideas of trying to document where it happens.

Putting it in perspective, I think it's true—as they've said, first of all, auto insurance is a mandatory product. That is a fact: You can't do anything. As she was suggesting, you could drive to the doctor and home—in my riding of Durham, you have to drive pretty well everywhere. We don't have as much transit as the urban areas like Brampton, or, for that matter, the city of Toronto. It's a mandatory product, so, in fact, you could say it's a tax. Because it's a mandatory product, the government has a role to keep it affordable, and as such, we're here because it's not affordable and we've had 10 years. And when the NDP were in, they completely blew up the thing; they had a no-fault system which they eventually cancelled.

I could put this to you: Yes, there's money in fraud. We agree with that. But if you really want to know what the strategy is to deal with this—and they said they wanted to work with all stakeholders—I would say this: The solution was outlined today by the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London, Mr. Yurek. What he said was, in fact, the case. As the member from Conestoga said, it wasn't cheap, cynical, populist pandering. Quite honestly, with all deference and respect to the member and to

the people here listening to the debate, auto insurance has been an issue for many years. It's not as simple as cutting it by 15%. If you cut it, there will be no insurance—nobody will write the insurance. The industry tells you all the time, if you look at facilities in Ontario as one example, you have to have insurance, basically, to have a job.

I can't for one moment believe that the NDP and the Liberals have formed a coalition to defraud the people of Ontario on a product that's mandatory, and they already have the tools—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the member withdraw the fact that he's saying that the NDP and the Liberals are defrauding the people of Ontario.

Mr. John O'Toole: With all due respect, I withdraw that.

They have ignored the requirements of keeping a product cheap and affordable, and that's the whole responsibility of the government in regulation. What they've done is unconscionable. They have not dealt with the issue of defining catastrophic injury. They have taken no firm action on dealing with fraud. They have made the product more expensive. In fact, the NDP—I'm surprised they're working together—recognized that they gave the insurance companies a big boost in income, as far as they're concerned; that's the NDP's argument, and the Liberals now are agreeing with them. So we have it very clear, there is a coalition. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's my conclusion that Ontario is now made up of a two-party system: the Liberals and the left-sided Liberals, and Tim Hudak, the government that could actually bring sensibility back to Ontario.

I would say insurance will not be solved by this resolution or in the budget. It's an attempt to keep the keys to the office of government, nothing more than that. I go back to the member from Kitchener-Conestoga, where he said that it's cheap, cynical, populist pandering. That is the lowest form. Once upon a time, the NDP had values and traditions that they stuck to.

I'm appealing to all of the people to realize what's being done to them.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's been an interesting debate, and it's a pleasure to actually stand up in support of this motion. There's been some talk about the value of a motion. Do you know what motions do? They bring issues to this place, where we can discuss them, where we can debate them, where we can raise awareness of them. The people of this province are well aware that auto insurance rates are too high.

To hear the PCs talk about populist pandering—they're quite mistaken, in fact. What we have done is we've actually gone out and listened to the people of this province. We've listened to how hard it is to make ends meet. It is popular, though. Do you know why it's popular? Because families need it; drivers need it. They recognize that auto insurance rates keep going up, the

profit margins of insurance agencies and organizations keep going up, and it is not fair. So actually, what we're trying to do in this House is get results for Ontarians.

I understand that the PCs don't understand that you have to come to this place and get results for people. As we've heard from the member from Timmins–James Bay, all that we've heard from that side of the House is no—no to the throne speech, no to the budget that you haven't even seen. Yet here we are over here, bringing the real voices of Ontarians to this place; absolutely.

You know what's also very interesting? What's really interesting is that we all agree.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, no, no, we all agree that auto insurance rates are too high. We agree on that. The PCs have no plan. The Liberals have a plan that's not working. This motion will accelerate the conversation that we need to have about insurance rates. This motion will get action, which people in this province deserve—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oxford might want to return to his seat if he wants to make outbursts, and the member from Lanark might want to cut it back a bit.

Continue. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

What's really amazing is that a lot of the terms that the PCs have used—"bumper sticker politics"—if the auto insurance rates continue to rise in this province, people won't be able to afford bumpers; there's no way. Auto insurance rates are hurting businesses. They're hurting families. All that we want for drivers is a fair deal.

As I mentioned, the importance of a motion is that it brings it to this House, to this conversation. When you go out in the community—and if you were truly listening to the needs of Ontarians, just as the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton—thousands of people came out. They are outraged. You have an enraged populace that is so tired of being used and abused. They want a party to stand up for them, they want the people in this House to work for them and they want results. That is what we are doing in this party.

You have to think back a little bit. When the Liberals introduced the statutory changes, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan said at the time—this was back in 2010, with \$2 billion in profits for the insurance agencies—"I believe that is something that will be very good for consumers." But it hasn't been. The savings have not been passed on to the citizens, not just the consumers, but the citizens of this province. They've been waiting and they're getting impatient. What can happen here in this minority government setting, the potential and the power of a minority government, is that we can actually move; we can get results. We can get real results for the people of this province.

1740

It's a very simple motion; it's very workable. In finance committee, where I sit with Mr. Prue, we are going

to be making sure that, if this motion does pass in this House, your words are translated into action—because when you follow the money, you follow the real priorities of any government. We are going to be watching very carefully in the finance committee. And you know what? This will be a strong signal that real action may actually happen throughout that process.

It's very simple, though. It's within your power as a government to direct the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, FSCO, to bring the average Ontario auto insurance premiums down by 15% by the end—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, the Speaker is at his limit. There is going to be removal soon. We've got 17 conversations going on. I can't even hear the member at the back. Last warning to everyone: Quiet.

Continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So let's just talk a little bit about numbers, because everyone is throwing out a lot of numbers here. Let's think of the benefits that this motion could have. In 2011, the first full year after the benefit cutbacks, the overall annual rate change for premiums approved by FSCO was an increase of 4.83%. This compares with increases of 6.18% in 2010 and 8.77% in 2009. Those rates keep going up. So you can't say that you're making progress. You can't say that a plan is working when it isn't, because the numbers tell the real story.

I also want to remind this House that the NDP actually initiated an all-party legislative committee to look at all aspects of the auto insurance system and to come up with creative solutions to bring premiums down for all Ontario drivers regardless of where they live. But just as the committee began to develop its final recommendations, the government pulled the plug on the committee by proroguing this Legislature, and the committee had to wait. Once again, we are playing catch-up for prorogation. We need to get real results. This motion will signal to the people of this province that we are serious about the rising costs of family—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I guess you didn't take me seriously. I'm telling you, the next outburst, the person is gone—the next one, and there's a crucial vote coming up. Last warning.

Continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a final note, I just want to say to the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton, his determination, his commitment to getting real results—the values of this motion are in line with us as a party, and it is time for this House to actually address auto insurance rates in a real and tangible way.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to very sincerely congratulate the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton and the New Democratic Party for bringing this forward. I

think this is a very positive idea and deserving of the support of all parties in this House.

I just want to say briefly, when Premier Wynne was elected leader of our party, I think there was a very clear commitment from all of us that we wanted to do business in this House in a different way. For us, it was a change in approach and an enhancement of direction, that we should be less partisan, that we should focus more on collaboration and we should create more opportunities in this House for individual MPPs, regardless of their party, to bring forward good ideas and see them brought forward in law.

I think we've had 20 or 30 years of too much partisanship in this House, and you will see a very strong turnout from my colleagues on the government side in support of this bill. This is more than simply a statement of support of the bill; it's meant to be—and I've said this on several occasions in the last three weeks—yet another message to our friends in the opposition that we have a huge amount of regard and respect for you and that we want to work for you, not just to pass this motion today, but to see this brought forward as legislation so that it can actually be added upon.

I hear these conversations about populist pandering. I mean, really. If there are 107 Ontarians who have no right to talk about populist pandering, it's the 107 of us. We can all be accused of populist pandering. I've heard the NDP talk about Windsor and London like there are no other parts of the province, and they are very free about calling us politically opportunistic. I won't even start with the official opposition and populist pandering, because I think they've almost made it an art form. If we just had a little humility—that we're all politicians and we all want to get re-elected, but we also all came here with a higher calling, which is trying to make a difference.

I believe that my friend from Mississauga–Brampton South has worked very hard, as has the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton. They're neighbours. They also know that fraud is a problem in their community, and they also know that rates are too high.

I think this is a really great day. I am not going to take any shots at anyone today. There isn't a party in power here that hasn't had a scandal or two. There isn't a party in power here that hasn't had a few major screw-ups in their time, and we could all spend our time—or, Mr. Speaker, we could do that.

I would ask, because I think the third party has been working to try and be collaborative: Could we stop playing the games of not voting for a supply bill like it's a kindergarten class and saying, "We're not going to vote for a budget that we haven't seen"? If they're really serious about collaboration—because I've heard members opposite say they want to collaborate—there's a huge opportunity here to do it.

We have gone through some very exciting conversations in this House, and they are resulting in real action. You'll see in the budget—a budget that has the fingerprints of many members in this House, not just members

on this side of the government. Maybe it's because it's the first time that our party realized that if women are going to lead, sometimes men have to follow. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, I've run against New Democrats and I've run against Conservatives. I never, ever, want to run against Liberal women again. They are the toughest opposition I have ever had.

To my friend from Durham, I want to say: I cut taxes by 11% when I was mayor. I cut the debt in half of my city government. There's lots of stuff we can work on together. God bless. Take care.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join my colleagues on the NDP side of the House to add some reason to this debate and to infuse, I guess, that what people are demanding from us as elected officials are some measures of affordability coming out of this building, some inkling that we understand the pressures that are faced, particularly in regions that are heavily concentrated with drivers.

I stand in this House hearing another narrative from the Conservatives attacking drivers. We presented a case last year that would have frozen the price of gas at the pump to save drivers some money. The Conservatives voted against it.

I am pleased to see here today that, finally, some rationale and some reason is being used on the government side to understand that this issue around insurance is one that needs to be addressed today. I've heard the issue around small business. We understand the nature of small business. This is going to help small businesses in a way that I think is a tangible effort on the part of this government and on the part of this Legislature.

I commend my colleague, my friend from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, for having the courage, despite all the challenges and negativity lobbed against him, to continue to pursue this issue and to fight to get results for the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Singh has moved opposition day number 2. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, take your seats, please. Thank you.

Mr. Singh moves opposition day number 2. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Fife, Catherine	Miller, Paul
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milloy, John
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Forster, Cindy	Moridi, Reza

Bisson, Gilles	Gerretsen, John	Murray, Glen R.
Bradley, James J.	Gélinas, France	Naqvi, Yasir
Broten, Laurel C.	Gravelle, Michael	Natyshak, Taras
Campbell, Sarah	Horwath, Andrea	Oraziotti, David
Chan, Michael	Hoskins, Eric	Piruzza, Teresa
Chiarelli, Bob	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Colle, Mike	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Craitor, Kim	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Dei Duca, Steven	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Delaney, Bob	Marchese, Rosario	Vanthof, John
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Dickson, Joe	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
DiNovo, Cheri	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Leone, Rob	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLaren, Jack	Pettapiece, Randy
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonell, Jim	Shurman, Peter
Fedeli, Victor	McKenna, Jane	Smith, Todd
Hardeman, Ernie	McNaughton, Monte	Thompson, Lisa M.
Harris, Michael	Miller, Norm	Walker, Bill
Hillier, Randy	Milligan, Rob E.	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 60; the nays are 33.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Timmins–James Bay yesterday had given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm just going to watch the exodus here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Timmins–James Bay has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

You will know that in this House I asked the Minister of Northern Development and Mines a question yesterday, and it was a very simple one. During the last

leadership campaign, we had a number of leadership candidates who went around northern Ontario trying to garner votes from the people of the north and said that they were prepared to revisit the question of the privatization of the ONTC. In fact, a number of those candidates went as far as saying there should be a pause on the privatization of the ONTC.

We know that's what was said during the leadership campaign, but what's clear is that northerners have been saying to this government since last year that we think privatization is the wrong way to go. We don't see, for example, the government moving to privatize GO Transit. That would be a wrong-headed idea. If you tried to privatize GO Transit, I would argue that would be the wrong thing to do. But this government, for whatever reason—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm just wondering when that conversation is going to end.

I was just saying, if you take a look at what northerners have been saying from the beginning, they have been saying that it's important that we not only have a discussion between northerners and this government about how we can make the ONTC work, but we also said that what's important is that the government give some time for that process to work.

Nobody in northern Ontario expects that we'll be able to find a solution to the issues at ONTC in a couple of seconds. We understand there are challenges. You're trying to run a rail system across a vast geography of northeastern Ontario with a very small population; thus it's going to cost money to be able to run it. For over a hundred years, governments in this province have understood that there's a role for the provincial government, because it was an agency set up by the crown to fund this particular organization by providing a means of subsidy. Now the government says, "Oh, subsidization is bad. We're wasting a lot of money spending money on the ONTC." Well, you don't see anybody in northern Ontario saying we should stop giving a subsidy to GO Transit. We give \$500 million a year to GO Transit, and people in northern Ontario say rightfully so. We don't argue for minutes when we see money being transferred to other organizations and other transit organizations across this province in order to support cities like Toronto, Hamilton, Oshawa, Ottawa and others. We say rightfully so. The only thing that we want the government to do is to treat us as the same class of citizens, as everybody else in this province is treated. We're asking for the government to treat northern Ontario no different than anybody else.

So we say we agree with the former Premier and we agree with the former minister of the treasury to look at, are there better ways of running the ONTC? The truth is, governments over the past number of years have not allowed the ONTC to run the way that it should in order to lessen its reliance on the subsidy and at the same time provide a better service. So we said, let the north rise to

that challenge. Let's put together a group of people—not just mayors but mayors, people that work on the rail, that take the passenger rail service, or used to take it, people that are shippers, people that are part of the ONTC family of services—and put those people on a committee to say, how can we run this organization in a way that we can increase the revenue? And give us the proper amount of time to do that.

What New Democrats have called for—John Vanthof, my good colleague from south of me, Timiskaming—Cochrane, and Andrea Horwath and other New Democrats—is to put this entire process on pause and give us an opportunity as northerners to look at what can be done to get the ONTC running the way that it should. We thought for a little while that there was a chance that that was going to happen. I had conversations with the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, along with Mr. Vanthof and Mr. Mantha; we had conversations with the Minister of Infrastructure; and there seemed to be a bit of a willingness to push the pause button. We were expecting at one point that the government might actually announce that they would do what we had asked them to do. And we would have stood in this House and we would have said, “Job well done.” Because all the north wants is an opportunity to be part of the process to be able to find the solutions. We don't want to be told by Queen's Park, we don't want to be told by this provincial government what's best for us. We want to be able to have the destiny in our own hands to come up with some of the solutions.

So I say to the government again, and I say to the minister across the way, we're asking for two things. We're asking that a proper committee be set up in order to study this issue of how we can make the ONTC a better organization as a public entity, and to do so we're asking you to press the pause button. Only by pressing the pause button will we have the time to be able to do what needs to be done. I think most people in northeastern Ontario would be pretty happy if you did so. So I ask the government again, will you press the pause button and stop the privatization in its tracks?

1810

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The Minister of Northern Development and Mines has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much. I appreciate the support beside me—the Attorney General's here with me—and my colleagues from the New Democratic Party caucus. Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

I do understand what an important issue this is for everyone in northeastern Ontario. I was up in North Bay on Monday—as you know, we formed our ministerial advisory committee—and I certainly saw the signs, I talked to the people and I recognize how important this is. May I say, we do indeed understand how important the ONTC is, obviously, as a transportation and telecommunications business and agency in northeastern

Ontario. We are committed to making sure we indeed put in place or keep in place a sustainable ONTC and a sustainable transportation system.

The reality is—and my good friend from Timmins—James Bay referenced it in part of his remarks leading up to this—that indeed with the ONTC we have seen an agency, over the last 10 years, that has received increasing dollars going into it from a government point of view—increasing almost every year going up from 2003—but also one where the revenues have not kept pace with that and obviously the business lines have not been as successful as we think they could be.

One of the interesting parts of the discussion that we had on Monday with the ministerial advisory group that I put in place—and I think it's a really good one. May I say that it was Premier Wynne who asked me, as minister, to do this, to truly find a way to listen to northerners. I will not speak very much about the past in the sense that the decisions that were made were tough decisions, but moving forward I believe we can find a way to make the right decisions for how can we see that the ONTC, in the form it takes potentially, obviously with private sector partners, can be one that can be a better system.

The fact is that, ultimately, there's no question we need to make sure that the business lines that are in place, and the services that are provided, need to be maintained. We need a transportation strategy in northeastern Ontario—in fact, all across northern Ontario—that makes sense for northerners, that speaks to the economic viability, the economic opportunities that are there in the north.

So the committee that's being set up—perhaps if I have enough time, I'll mention the members: President Al Spacek from FONOM, Mayor Al McDonald from North Bay, Tom Laughren from Timmins, Nina Wallace from Englehart—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Great people.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: They're all great people—and representatives from industry. Obviously the shippers and First Nations representatives: Chief Isadore Day from Serpent River First Nation, France Picotte from Métis Nation of Ontario.

We're asking them to absolutely give us the kind of advice to make sure that the criteria are put in place that meet the standard that people in northeastern Ontario would expect, and certainly our government expects, in terms of making sure that if we do privatize—and as you would know, all of you across the way here, it's not necessarily in opposition to privatization; it's making sure we protect the service and protect the jobs.

It is interesting that even in terms of the Ontario telecommunication proposal that went out, we released the RFP a couple of days ago and a very significant part of the criteria was their plans for sustainable employment, their service continuity and their investment in northern Ontario, up to about 60%—you take those two pieces.

What we're saying to the group that we are asking to help advise us is, one of the key elements will be, "You will be helping provide us with the criteria by which we will set the standard for what future proposals will go out there for an RFP, potentially, for privatization. In other words, these are the standards which we need to meet. We need to make sure that these services are provided."

Listen, I can't believe that I'm running out of time and I'm sure you felt the same way when you were speaking. There are so many other aspects of this. I say this with the greatest sincerity: We are very genuine about the fact that this ministerial advisory committee is one that's going to be providing the kind of advice that will be very,

very useful in making sure that indeed what comes next will actually provide the services in northeastern Ontario. People expect those standards. We're going to commit to that. We're going to work hard on that. Certainly I look forward to working with my colleagues on any advice you give me. I appreciate the advice you gave me today. Thanks so very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. Therefore, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1815.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

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Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
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Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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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
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McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
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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
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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement

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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
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O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
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Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
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Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
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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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Ted Chudleigh, Cheri DiNovo
Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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