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des débats
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Tuesday 16 April 2013

Mardi 16 avril 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 16 April 2013

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.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LE CODE DE LA ROUTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 10, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of permit denials and out-of-province service and evidence in certain proceedings and to make a consequential amendment to the Provincial Offences Act / Projet de loi 34, Loi visant à modifier le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les refus relatifs aux certificats d'immatriculation et la signification et les preuves extraprovinciales dans certaines instances, et à apporter une modification corrélative à la Loi sur les infractions provinciales.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I look forward to the next 59 minutes and 58 seconds to discuss this riveting bill before us. With your permission, I will on occasion drift somewhat, but not far, because I realize that we're committed to speaking to the issue at hand.

I'm concerned that we're opening the business of this House today in the wake of yet another special report by the Auditor General that confirms what opposition parties have been saying for a number of months now, and that is that the decision by the Liberal Party of Ontario to cancel the Mississauga gas-fired power plant to save the seat of the now Minister of Finance in the 2011 election cost the taxpayers of this province at least \$351 million. Assuming that these costs can be offset by an estimated \$76 million, the auditor confirmed that the cost to the taxpayers will be at least \$275 million.

Speaker, here's what the Auditor General said in his press release yesterday: "In 2005, the government contracted with the builder, Greenfield South Power Corp., for a 280-MW natural-gas-fired"—

Hon. John Milloy: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I think we all recognize the fact that, particularly during an hour-long speech, members may do a bit of

a tour of the horizon, but he has begun his speech on the Highway Traffic Act speaking about the Auditor General's report. I believe the standing orders would say he should be speaking to the Highway Traffic Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I will listen carefully. I know that the member has already mentioned the breadth of his discussion, and I'm listening carefully.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, you will recognize the segue that I will take, and there is a reason, because the context within which the Minister of Transportation is bringing his bill forward, which is all about collecting unpaid fines from, as the minister referred to them in his speech, lawbreakers in this province—it's important that we have a good sense of what the fiscal framework is of this province.

With your permission, I'd like to just finish what I was reading—again, I hope uninterrupted this time by the government House leader.

I quote from the Auditor General: "In 2005, the government contracted with the builder, Greenfield South Power Corp., for a 280-MW natural-gas-fired electricity generating plant in Mississauga. After various and extensive delays, construction of the Mississauga plant began in June 2011. Shortly before the October 6, 2011, general election, the Liberal Party announced it was cancelling the already started construction of the plant. Shortly after the election, the re-elected minority government directed the OPA to negotiate the cancellation with Greenfield."

Speaker, we have before us a bill that the Minister of Transportation brought forward, and rightfully so. I'll say at the outset that the PC caucus will be supporting passage of this bill. We believe wholeheartedly that those who break the law and are convicted and are issued fines should pay those fines. Whether those convicted are residents of this province or whether they're visitors to this province, we also believe that the mechanism should be there to ensure that those fines are paid, especially given the fact that most of those fines that are captured in this bill are owed to municipalities across this province. When we know that at this point in time there are close to \$1 billion of unpaid fines that are owed to those municipalities, it just simply makes good sense that we in this Legislature would accommodate an effective collection of those unpaid fines.

So the principle, we agree with. We will, however, make some recommendations. I'm going to have, over the course of this debate, some questions for the Minister of Transportation, because I believe that, new to his portfolio, there may well be some issues within his ministry

of which he is not yet aware, and those of us who have had some experience in this House would like to appeal to the minister to take whatever time he needs to thoroughly investigate what I'm about to bring to his attention.

All of these changes that the minister has referred to in terms of collection of fines, in terms of working with the court system to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place—the minister referred to the fact that, through regulation, he will be making retroactive the capacity of collecting on these fines; I believe he said seven years is how far back he will go. So we have circumstances where individuals who failed to pay their fine would be getting a notice in the mail, I'm assuming.

The question we have here is a very important one. This is the first question I have for the minister: Is the minister aware of the problems that he has within his ministry, within the ability of the minister to assure us that the information they have in their files is accurate, is up to date, and that the addresses they have for those individuals who may well be caught and be identified as not having paid fines—that that information is in fact accurate?

I'm going to give the minister some examples of why I have a concern. I'm going to ask the minister to bear with me on this, because I always find that there is nothing quite as effective as examples that are very practical.

0910

The first one that I want to draw to the minister's attention—and by the way, I want to just make a point with the minister. There is an individual in your ministry who deserves a great deal of credit. Her name is Elena Tersigni. This is someone within the ministry who I got to know when I was the minister there and who I believe is one of the most conscientious civil servants in the government of Ontario. She will go out of her way to accommodate requests. Minister, I'm going to ask you to do this: Do a review of her branch, do a review of her area of responsibility—and my advice would be that you have a third party do that review, with a view to determining what the resources are in that branch of your ministry to do the job that needs to be done. I'm convinced that while there are hard-working individuals within that branch, they are far from supported with the appropriate resources to get the job done. That's why many of us in this place—and I would be surprised if the minister himself has not had this kind of feedback from his constituents, in terms of the delays that our constituents experience. Those delays translate into significant hardships in the lives of constituents, in the lives of Ontarians, right across this province.

I'll start off with the first example. In this particular case—I'm going to read from a letter that my constituent sent me: "I left for Myrtle Beach (by car) on February 19 returning on March 5, 2011. Upon my return I opened the mail to find a letter from the ministry suspending my driver's licence on February 22 for an unpaid traffic fine which I discovered was dated some nine and a half years previously. I can recall the specific incident and the spe-

cific payment as these don't happen that often with me. The court office stated that without proof of payment there was nothing they would do about negating the issue. I note that a copy of the ticket is stamped 'Licence suspension—January 4, 2011.'

"I don't keep bank or other records for nine and a half years nor do I suspect do either yourself nor anyone else.

"The office claimed that they mailed me a 'heads-up' but (a) I suspect that they really didn't ... or (b) it would have been sent to an address that I vacated some many years ago and would have been undelivered. In any event they could have easily determined the proper address with a call to yourselves," that is, to the ministry.

I will not read the balance of the letter, but I will provide a copy of it to the minister. Here is the issue: an example, minister, of a letter that was sent to someone on an incident nine and a half years in the past. These letters are not being sent out by registered mail. I don't know what the minister has in mind, Speaker, in terms of notification to these individuals who have outstanding penalties or outstanding fines from up to seven years ago. As was noted by my constituent—I think I keep fairly good records. But if it comes to a matter of debating or challenging the Ministry of Transportation about whether I paid it or challenging the court as to whether I paid it, do I have a copy of that cheque? Maybe. Do I have a copy of a receipt? Maybe. But here's the point: This constituent received a letter—not a registered letter, so there was no guarantee that that individual would have received the suspension notification. He's on holiday; he's driving in Myrtle Beach. He got a notice not advising him that his licence would be suspended 30 days from now; his licence is suspended. Speaker, what are the implications of that?

Well, one implication is that had that individual had an accident, a collision that resulted in property damage, resulted in the loss of life, the first thing that would have happened is that his insurance would have been invalid because he's driving without a valid driver's licence. The implication to that individual in his personal life—his finances, his entire family—could have been catastrophic.

I've said this a number of times: I believe when we're dealing with something as important as someone's driver's licence, surely the ministry has a responsibility to ensure that if you're notifying someone that their licence has been suspended, we go the extra mile and we do that by registered mail. There has to be some way that we can confirm that that individual who is being advised of a suspension actually received that notice. So I would leave that with the minister and ask him to look into that, and I would appreciate a response from the minister on that request.

Speaker, I have another issue. This is one that causes considerable concern. I don't know about other members, but the number of complaints that I get—it's not really a complaint. It really is an appeal from constituents about how vision tests are handled by the Ministry of Transportation.

I'm going to take the time to read this letter into the record. The reason is because I think it will give the minister an opportunity to look very carefully at how these matters are handled. This is from my constituent Pat Morris. I'm using her name because I have authorization to do that. I'm going to quote from her April 20, 2012, letter. It goes as follows:

"Let me begin with that both Richard"—Richard being her husband—"and myself completely understand that driving is considered a privilege and not a right, and respect that.

"As part of the vision waiver, a letter is sent from the Ministry of Transportation every year advising Richard that his vision waiver report is due. This form letter states.....

"The report must include monocular Humphrey full field 12-point screening test with fixation losses not exceeding 20% or Goldman 60-degree perimetry charts using a 1114e test size object with monitored reliability, and an Esterman binocular functional test with false positive/negative errors not to exceed"—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me just for a moment. I'd just ask if you would take the conversation outside. It's difficult to hear the speaker. Thank you.

Please continue.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you. Speaker, I can't believe that my own colleagues aren't—I thought that my colleagues would be spellbound by my remarks this morning. Speaker, this is on their behalf and their constituents' behalf as well. I would ask that the next member who is so disrespectful—that you would ask them to leave. Just throw them right out of this place.

Interjection.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you.

I'll continue where I left off: "and an Esterman binocular functional test with false positive/negative errors not to exceed 20% or a Goldman binocular field test using 1114e test object with the test's reliability confirmed. This reports must be returned to this office by" a certain "date determined by the ministry or driver's licence will be suspended."

0920

Here's the rest of the story: "[O]n more than one occasion, I have attempted to contact the Ministry of Transportation, with no success." Speaker, these are seniors. They receive a letter that is very complex. They have legitimate questions. They want to comply. They try to contact the ministry, and they can't. "The most recent attempt was on April 17, 2012, at which time I was on hold for 57 minutes before hanging up. What the recording stated is, 'We are experiencing a high volume of calls; the estimated wait time is 30 minutes.'"

These are people who are dealing—they're not ordering a pizza here; they're dealing with important matters that affect their day-to-day life. If the ministry can't get this part of it right, my concern is that there's a lot of other concern that we have in terms of the Ministry of

Transportation being able to administer the bill that's before us. Thirty minutes—I ask the minister: Will you at least check into doing what Air Canada does? Not that I'm singing Air Canada's praises, because Lord knows they've got their own problems. But here's what they do get right: If there is a long time that people are being held on hold, what that system allows you to do is to key in your telephone number, and they will call you back, so you're assured that you can get on with whatever you're doing and at least someone is going to call you back. The frustration of people in this province with the Ministry of Transportation is that they do their utmost to comply and then we make it impossible. This is not something that is earth-shattering; it's not groundbreaking, Minister. These are systems that are in place, and I would ask the minister to please look into this.

I'm going to continue this, because the next part of what Ms. Morris shares with us is particularly concerning. "Another instance was when I submitted the required tests to the ministry well before the required date." They were trying to do their part. "You can imagine my husband's horror when he received a letter from the ministry advising that his licence was suspended. No reason provided. I remember this day very clearly, as it was on a Friday, and when I arrived home, Richard showed me the correspondence from the Ministry of Transportation. I called the number on the letter and, strangely enough, someone actually answered the phone. Shocking to me! Realizing that I could not talk to the ministry, I explained the reason behind the call, then put Richard on the phone, who questioned as to why his driver's licence was suspended. He was told at that time that the ministry had not received the requested paperwork.... I explained/confirmed to the ministry that in fact they did have the required paperwork as it had been sent" by "registered mail." You see? My constituents are a little more thorough than the ministry is; they sent their information in by registered mail. "The gentleman put us on hold and returned on the line within 15 minutes, confirming that in fact the ministry did have the paperwork, and further elaborated that no one had entered into the system that the vision waiver report had been received by the Ministry of Transportation. This gentleman then reviewed the test and reinstated Richard's licence immediately."

I say to the minister, we have a problem here. Once again, put yourself into the shoes of my constituent. Not only did they comply; they went the extra step, submitted the information in advance of the due date, sent it by registered mail, and he got a suspension letter in the mail. The minute you get that suspension letter—not a warning, not saying, by the way, "We're going to suspend your licence 10 days from now if you don't reply." No. It's a suspension notice. Your licence is suspended. That individual can't leave the house, can't take the car, whether it's to a doctor's office, whether it's to go shopping, whether it's to visit a spouse in the hospital, whatever the issue is. It's automatically suspended—unjustifiably so, I say to the minister.

There should be no room for error here. If we allow that there are going to be errors, then I say to the minister, at the very least, do what I'm recommending and ensure that these letters that go out are sent by registered mail. And is it not reasonable under these circumstances that we provide a period of time so that there can be some communication so that, whatever matter has not been complied with, the individual is given some time to do it?

I'm going to give the minister another example here. This is an email that I asked my staff to provide me as an example, and I'm going to read this. It's from my assistant in my constituency office, Jacqueline Flowers. She writes, "On January 2, 2013, a Newmarket resident called in to get assistance with her driver's licence reinstatement. It was reported in 2010 that she had a seizure and licence was suspended and reinstated shortly after sorting this out. In October 2012, she applied for a B licence and was told that it could not be granted until they get information supporting that she is okay." In other words, this goes back to the fact that this seizure was on one side of the file, but the fact that it had been resolved never got transferred to the other side of the file. "She said it was submitted. Now she's getting the run-around and she needs this for a job. Spoke to MTO and was advised that our constituent was already speaking to someone at MTO"—in other words, they acknowledged that there is dialogue going on—"and was advised that her file was sent to the medical review panel. A decision should be made within the next few days. Followed up on January 10 and her B licence was issued on January 7."

The issue here is that, once again, we have a problem with our transfer of information. Does the left hand know what the right hand is doing? Every time that we have this conflict, there's someone who's experiencing hardship. This licence was necessary for a job; it was delayed. And the consequences are not with the ministry. Look, they carry on. The consequences are with—whether it's a senior, whether it's a young person—whichever it is who needs that licence to get from point A to point B to get on with their life.

Speaker, I have a letter here from another constituent, Andrew Atkinson. I'm going to read this into the record. This is dated March 25, 2013:

"I recently received a letter from the Ministry of Transportation indicating that I must forfeit my driving licence immediately due to 'psychiatric condition.' This was shocking to me....While the identity of who reported me to MTO is protected, I suspect it was" Southlake hospital in Newmarket, where he had attended for an ER visit. He says, "They released me that night with no prescriptions or follow-up appointments.

"I did turn in my licence right away when I read the notice. It appears that being conscientious about this matter just means I lose my ability to drive that much earlier. It is not suspended for a particular number of days, so handing in sooner increases the total time without a licence." The constituent did the right thing. He got the notice of suspension; he handed in his licence.

0930

He goes on to say:

"Taking the bus to the city takes at least twice as long. As such, I could not respond to job offers I had applied to, not expecting to suddenly lose my licence.

"I am considering dropping out of university too. I'm a top-performing student in terms of grade point average."

The bottom line is this with regard to this letter, I say to the minister: We have a serious problem with our reporting mechanism—that medical doctors are required to report to the MTO. Look, we all fully support and we pass legislation here that requires an that if attending physician, or anyone attending to a patient in this province, suspects that there may be a problem with that person being able to properly drive, there has to be a report to the MTO. But here's the problem: Many times, that attending physician says not a word to the patient. The patient has no idea that this correspondence is now taking place between the attending physician and the MTO. There is no opportunity for that individual, for that driver, to take whatever steps may be necessary to alleviate the suspicion of that attending physician. Keep in mind, this is not a confirmation on the part of the attending physician; this is merely a suspicion, a sense, having has some reason to believe there may be a problem. So what was intended to be a warning or an alert or a caution now becomes a sentence for that individual. They get a notice of suspension, they can't drive, and they don't even know the reason.

Now the process begins, and that process is something else that I'm going to ask the minister to please look into. In fact, I really think that whether it's the Auditor General or whether it is the Ombudsman, I believe that we need a thorough review of how our medical review system in this province works, because now it is the onus of responsibility of the constituent, of the resident, to seek out all of the follow-up reports or the medical examinations or the specialist reports that are now required by the ministry.

The rest of the story is this: The minister should know that, first of all, it can take weeks, if not months, to get an appointment with that specialist. All that time the person can't drive, can't go to work, can't perform any of his or her normal duties. Once that medical report is with the ministry, the policy—this isn't even left to chance—they are immediately told that it will take between six to eight weeks to get a response from the ministry. How can that be?

The minister is new in his job. This is not the first time that this has been brought to the attention of a Minister of Transportation. I'm asking the minister to take a fresh look at this.

I can tell you that from previous research that I've done, the solution is very simple. You see, one of the reasons that it takes six to eight weeks is that when those reports come in they're put into a stack—and by the way, the medical officers who now review those reports, most of them are part-time. They get to them when they get to

them. I'm not saying that they're not working hard. I'm not saying that the staff in this department isn't working hard. In fact, I have to tell you, I compliment the staff who are there, because when we make those follow-up calls, they are very responsive. But we feel guilty for making those calls, because the last thing we want to do, as members, is to ask someone to go into a stack of files and pull someone out and have someone dealt with in any special way simply because the MPP calls. That's not right.

It's a matter of a lack of resources, I say to the minister. I believe that something as important as an individual's ability to drive is not something that we should be shortchanging. I realize we have to be looking for efficiencies in all aspects of government, but this is not one of those areas—yes, efficiencies, but not cut-backs; yes efficiencies, but make sure that we have the appropriate resources available to the staff who are charged with the responsibility of carrying out that work.

The other concern that I have about this vision testing is that apparently, with regard to one of those procedures, there are only seven locations in the entire province that have the particular technology, the equipment, that's required for one of those vision tests. I have to believe—I've been told by ophthalmologists that that is an outdated approach to these tests, that there is equipment available right across the province that can deliver the same results and the same tests that many ophthalmologists have in their own offices. So I ask, why are we limiting it to these seven locations? My constituent in Aurora has to drive to Barrie to have that test. I ask the minister, does that make sense? Are you telling me that we should be directing people to drive miles and miles to get a test that they can get in their own hometown? I'll look forward to hearing from the minister on this.

I'd like to shift the discussion, if I could, to another area of the ministry, and it's consistent with the discussion that we're having here. It again relates to the minister's responsibility to ensure efficiency within his ministry. I've mentioned this to him before. The only reason is that when I look at my correspondence that relates to the Ministry of Transportation, I have a number of constituents who have been contacting me about their frustration with the Presto card system. I raised this issue with the former minister. I have held press conferences here. I have had meetings with Mr. Prichard, the chair of Metrolinx, as well as the CEO. I've had meetings with representatives of the TTC on this issue. When the minister was first appointed, we had a meeting, and I appreciated very much the opportunity to exchange some thoughts. I pointed out to the minister my concern with what is happening on that file. With your permission, Speaker, I'll set the context.

We are fully supportive of a fully integrated transit system across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. It's essential, which is one of the reasons we're proposing that the responsibility for coordinating our transit system across the GTHA be uploaded, so that there can be not only a governance structure that fully coordinates and in-

tegrates that system, but also operational. As part of that fully integrated transit system, we need a fare card that is also fully integrated, so the concept initially was right. A number of years ago, Presto, which would become the branded name of this fare card system, was initiated really through the Ministry of Transportation. As time went on, the development of that card continued. Fast-forward to the TTC. The TTC decided two years ago that they wanted an electronic fare card system, but they wanted a fare card system that was current technology, an open-payment system.

0940

What is the difference between an open-payment system and a closed-loop system, which we have with Presto? Here's the difference: With Presto, you have to load up that card. Yes, you can tap it and yes, you can use it, but it continually has to be loaded up with value—fair enough. It cannot be used for any purpose other than the transit system. There are electronic fare card systems in use around the world today that are open payment. In other words, they'll accommodate the Presto card system but they will also accommodate a credit card, they will accommodate a bank card. So regardless of where we are, that system can be accommodated. Whether it's someone who lives in the area here, a local resident, or whether it's a visitor from elsewhere, you've got a credit card, you can use it.

The TTC, wanting that advanced technology, put out a request for proposal. They received initially, I believe, something in the range of eight responses. Ultimately, as the details and requirements were made clear, it ended up down to two proponents, and finally there was a selection of one supplier who could meet all of the requirements. That supplier was ACS Xerox, fully compliant with all of the requirements that the TTC had set out in its request for proposal.

The TTC decided to move ahead. They were well along, in terms of their analysis of that proposal, and ready to sign a contract when they received a call from Metrolinx. The call from Metrolinx said, "Put a stop on this. We are asking you—in fact, we're directing you—to put an end to that discussion. You shall use the Presto card." The TTC responded by saying this: "First of all, we've just gone through a public process, a transparent, open bidding process, and we have concluded, based on that process, that this proponent, this supplier, can best meet our needs. Second, based on our analysis," the TTC said, "the Presto card system would cost us \$300 million more in capital costs to implement." The proponent's proposal, ACS Xerox's, involved zero upfront money. They were absorbing the capital investment and would recover it over time.

There was \$300 million that the TTC said, "Wait a minute. We can't afford to pay \$300 million." Here was the response by Metrolinx—and I say to the minister, he was not the minister at the time—obviously with the full endorsement of the Ministry of Transportation, because Metrolinx could not have taken that decision unilaterally: "You will use Presto or we will withhold essential gas

tax revenue that you're relying on for a number of your infrastructure projects in the city of Toronto." That was the one threat. The second was the carrot: "We will pay," Metrolinx said. "We'll pay the \$300 million."

You can imagine the reaction of the TTC and those members who sit on the TTC and the council in the city of Toronto. This is bizarre. We're now being forced to take what they consider to be a less-than-adequate product. You're threatening us—essentially blackmailing us—by saying that, "If you don't, you don't get your gas tax revenues for infrastructure," and you're willing to bribe us with \$300 million.

Speaker, when I first heard about this, I did not believe it. It took a great deal of effort to do the research. It was all confirmed. I had meetings with councillors of the city of Toronto; I had meetings with commissioners of the TTC. All of them confirmed that information.

I took it to the then Minister of Transportation, Mr. Chiarelli. I shared with him my concerns about this. The response that I got was, unfortunately, predictable. I got the typical bureaucratic explanation about why all of this is justified.

In my discussions with the current minister, I said, "My advice to you is, unless you want yet one more scandal brewing in this place, get on top of this." I shared, I believe, with the minister that there is a very uncomfortable aspect to this story. One of those nuances of this story is the fact that some of the same individuals who were consultants on the eHealth file were also consultants on the Presto file.

I'm not here to indict anyone. I am asking the minister to be very diligent in terms of how he deals with this file. I don't relish the idea of having yet one more issue in this House where we're calling into question the competence, the integrity, the thoroughness of any minister of the crown. We've had enough of that. So I'm simply appealing to the minister. I'm saying to the minister, "Look at this. You have reason for concern."

We have reports—not just from the experience of Presto here in the GTA—that it's not performing. Ottawa is having serious concerns. In fact, Presto has had to make a financial offer to Ottawa because they've missed deadlines; they've missed delivery dates. They've made financial concessions to Ottawa, and they're still having problems with the technology.

I'm going to wrap my comments up on this aspect of the file, but for the benefit of the minister, I caution him on this. Presto continues to assure the minister that all is well and that they will be able to meet the targets that the TTC has set out in terms of their expectations of a fare card. But, Speaker, they don't have the technology. The best that they can do is commit to develop it.

I asked the minister to go back and look at the eHealth experience, where eHealth committed month after month after month that they would develop the technology that the government is asking for. Millions and millions of development dollars were poured into that black hole. Today, we still don't have it. Yet we have a provider of an electronic transit fare card that is ready to implement

that technology. We don't need further development dollars.

I ask a simple question of the minister: Why? Why are we trying to thread this needle? I would say—in fact, I've said it—if we had an election tomorrow, and if in the wisdom of the electorate we formed a majority government, the first thing I would recommend that we do, to whoever the Minister of Transportation is, is to put an end to this. Pause it. Call for a public proposal process. Let's allow Presto to be part of that submission. Let them make their proposal. Open it up to the market.

0950

It doesn't have to take a long time. I've heard the response of Presto and Metrolinx, saying this would delay implementation of a card. It would not. Let's take 90 days and get it right. Within 90 days, we would know whether or not there is a company that can deliver a technology that is leading-edge, that can do the job for the greater Toronto area and other parts of the province.

What is the risk of that? Why don't we do that and clear the air? There are so many unanswered questions about how this file is being handled, let alone the fact that Metrolinx is now building an entire bureaucracy to house the Presto facilities, I'm told; I'll ask the minister to look into this. What is the increase in the number of employees at Metrolinx related strictly to the Presto card, at a time when the minister is looking for ways to cut down the size of government?

The minister referred in his comments when he opened debate on the bill before us that this was part of the Drummond report. I commend the minister for taking up that aspect of the Drummond report, all in the interests of reducing the size of government, making government more efficient. Speaker, I ask you: What is efficient about creating a new bureaucracy within Metrolinx that doesn't need to be created?

I'm also going to ask the minister to look into this: In addition to the number of people who are actually on the payroll at Metrolinx related to Presto, how many consultants, who don't show up within the Metrolinx home, are being paid to provide development advice to the Presto file? I think the minister will agree with us that there's something very wrong there.

I'm going to make one other request of the minister, before I close off my remarks here, and that is to look into one other matter. The minister referred—again, I refer to his very eloquent speech when he opened debate on this bill, and he spoke about the reputation that Ontario has of having the safest roads in North America. I think all parties, all governments over the last number of years, take credit for that, because successively, whether it was the drinking and driving legislation, where we have some of the toughest in North America, or whether it's with regard to the graduated driving licensing system, which is, I think, one of the smartest moves that any government could ever have made—I credit the NDP, when they were the government, with bringing that and initiating that particular policy. So we celebrate the fact and we take a great deal of comfort in the fact that

we can point to our roads as being some of the safest in North America.

With that as a concern, I'm going to ask the minister to look into this: Not too long ago, GO Transit took delivery of a number of new buses. These are not intra-city buses; these are buses that take the 400 series of highways, okay? Now, we know that in any other bus transportation company uses the 400 series—that is, a highway transport system—those buses are required to have safety belts.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Safety belts.

Mr. Frank Klees: Yes, safety belts.

I would have thought that a bus order that GO Transit would put in for buses that travel our 400-series highways would at least have the same level of safety precautions as Greyhound or any other carrier is required to have. Guess what, Speaker? Those brand new buses don't have seat belts. I can't fathom why. Surely that's not an area that the minister would say, "We have to save some money here." I'm told that manufacturers of buses like that automatically would put seat belts into those vehicles. So what it comes down to is, there would probably have had to be a special direction to the manufacturer not to install the seat belts.

The minister is looking perplexed. I'm glad that he's looking perplexed, because if he wasn't, then I could only conclude that he would have been complicit with this. I now conclude he didn't know about it. I'm not sure which one is worse, but I am going to ask the minister to look into that. I really think that any passenger that gets onto a GO bus that travels our 400-series highways at 100, 110—and, Minister, I've been behind them when they're travelling 120. Not to have the precaution of seat belts in those buses, I think, is a lapse in judgment.

I know that my colleagues—those who were not listening to me earlier actually left the chamber, and I don't blame them, but they can get this on Hansard, and I can send them a video if they want the special effects.

Finally, I simply would say this to the minister: We will support this legislation, but we look forward to committee, where we will reassert our concerns with many of the administrative shortfalls in the Ministry of Transportation.

Here's a recommendation I would make to him: Before the minister agrees to implement this bill, that he take the steps to review those areas that I brought to his attention to ensure that they're fixed so that we don't have an unintended consequence of this bill that can cause considerable hardship to the people in this province.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for his lengthy but interesting speech on the G34 highway traffic law. Many of us in our constituency offices heard similar examples and stories every day from people in our community. Particularly the ones that I've heard about that have impact are around people losing their licences for suspensions for health issues, and

the length of time that it actually takes to get their licence back.

Although this amendment will assist municipalities and it has the support of AMO and the police service boards, I, too, look forward to getting it into committee to hopefully address the many other issues that I hear about each and every day in my community.

I think that the amendment needs to address some other ways for people to pay fines, because not everyone can perhaps come up with a \$1,000 fine or a \$500 fine at once. I know that there has been a discussion paper which suggested some recommendations for some different ways that people can pay fines. Perhaps you could have a discount if you paid your fine in a timely way, like they do with parking tickets in some communities. If you pay your fine within 10 days, you get 20% off the fine price.

So, although the bill is here before us, I think that there will be much more debate on the issue over the next couple of weeks, and we look forward to getting it to committee. It certainly is a supportable bill.

1000

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora for what I thought was a very solid and very constructive speech. I found it a little more engaging than some of his colleagues did, but we have a finer appreciation, you and I, maybe for this matter. I also want to acknowledge his significant contribution to Ontario having the safest roads in North America. When he was transportation minister, he was a very fine minister and left behind a very fine legacy. He has become a friend and provides me with great advice.

I just want to get through as much as I can in a minute and a half, Madam Speaker.

I am quite happy to undertake that kind of review and would be quite happy to work openly with you on it. I will pass on to Ms. Elena Tersigni the compliments of the opposition on her work. I think we appreciate the significant challenge and the need for accuracy.

The suggestion to use registered mail seems to me to be a very constructive one. I will look into the implications of that and will also get back to the member on what advice there is for the ministry to ensure that he is part of that conversation.

There are some very good ideas that the member put forward that I want to commend him on. Checking into keying in phone calls as Air Canada does, so you don't have to wait in line, seems to me to be a very constructive and very useful contribution to this discussion. The idea of warnings, giving people a chance to come into compliance rather than doing a suspension, also seems to me to be a very constructive suggestion that's worthy of work.

Some of these things are governance issues and policy review, and I'll look at that. I'll also sit down with Deputy Layton and review this with her. I know, as many people who have ever worked with her know, what a

remarkably dedicated public servant she is. I'm sure she's listening to us right now.

Physician reports and the review of medical records and a performance standard for turnaround times seems to me to be also a very useful review, and I'm quite happy to do that.

The matters of Presto and those things, I don't have time for, but we can continue that conversation at another time.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to join in the debate. I just have to speak to the member from Newmarket–Aurora on behalf of his colleagues in the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus who are here today. Although at some points we perhaps—and I know he's a Leaf fan and he and the member for Nepean–Carleton get into a bit of debate about the Leafs and the Senators. I'm certainly a Senators fan because of my close proximity to the city of Ottawa, but I think there were some members who were excited about the Leafs' win last night, and I'm sure you can appreciate that. So there were a couple of side conversations.

I do want to commend the member for—and I want to use the words that the minister said—his “solid and constructive” debate on Bill 34 this morning. I'm also very pleased that he mentioned Elena Tersigni from the ministry. She's someone I have worked with when I was a political staffer with my predecessor, now Senator Runciman—and also my constituency staff; I know we appreciate her efforts in dealing with our constituency issues. I'm very pleased that the member for Newmarket–Aurora mentioned her today.

I'd also like to speak as municipal affairs and housing critic for our party. Certainly most members are aware that municipalities have been looking for a way to deal with POA fines for a number of years. I know that members of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario are very pleased that the bill was tabled. I know I've had a number of my local councils express interest in the bill and wonder how it's going to be dealt with at committee.

I look forward to, at some future point, speaking on the bill myself and providing some other details of constituency issues that I think the minister needs to hear. Thank you for giving me the opportunity, Speaker.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to put in my comments on this bill, G34, the MTO bill for municipal fine collections. On the premise, the bill sounds like it's a good idea, because municipalities are facing similar challenges as provinces are facing, as well as budget reasons. But I think we have to always remember, when we're talking about—when times are challenging to find funds, when we implement changes that are going to hold the person in the middle in a situation that could actually cause them more damage because we are trying to get the money from them, that's where I think we need to take a

look. The suggestions that the member from Newmarket–Aurora made were quite good.

In my previous life as an insurance broker, one of the things we had to do was send a registered letter when your insurance was being cancelled, because you have to have insurance. But you also have to have a licence to drive. I never understood why the MTO was allowed not to do their due diligence when someone's licence was suspended and not properly legally notify them. Because many times there's that example where someone moves, and they don't get the information, and they're driving around very innocently thinking that everything is fine. They may have had the fine, as the member did, nine and a half years ago. Nine and a half years is a long time to remember if you've paid something or not, and often-times people have paid a fine and there's a mix-up. If they're not notified by a registered letter that their licence has been suspended, it becomes a situation that rolls out of control.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank the member from Welland, the Minister of Transportation and the members from Leeds–Grenville and London–Fanshawe for their comments.

Speaker, in this place, we do our best to pass legislation that will be in the public interest. From time to time, we get parts of it wrong. I think that what, hopefully, we have focused on in this bill is an opportunity to improve this bill when it gets to committee. But sometimes the improvement is not necessarily focused on the bill; it is on the supporting administration and implementation process around the bill, which is why I wanted to take this morning's opportunity to share some of those concerns with the minister, with a view to ensuring that, in the end, we actually achieve the objective that this bill sets forward.

With that in mind, I want to give a bit of a promo to my private member's bill, which will be debated on Thursday, entitled “preserving existing communities.” Again, it's an example where existing legislation has had and continues to have some unintended consequences, namely the Places to Grow Act that calls for intensification of communities. We all support ensuring that we minimize urban sprawl, but what has happened with that bill is that, unfortunately, a lot of existing communities have intensification forced on them that is undermining quality of life and land values. My private member's bill will ensure that in municipal decisions relating to that very narrow aspect of intensification of existing communities, the decision of the municipality will be final.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1009 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine, an insurance broker from New Hamburg and Elmira, of course, Mr. Steve Wagler from Josslin Insurance. Welcome to Queen's Park, and I'm sure we'll see you later on today.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome the 12,000-strong insurance brokers of Ontario here today for their Queen's Park awareness day, and also the president of the insurance brokers of Ontario, Debbie Thompson, who happens to be the sister of Steven Blackett, who is the minister of consumer affairs in the wonderful, beautiful country of Barbados. Welcome, Debbie.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to give a warm welcome to James Varley, who is here with his grade 10 civics class from Greenwood College School in Toronto. A special thank you to his father, Peter Varley, who works in our leader's office, for letting us all know.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: They're not in the House, but I want to welcome Equal Voice here at Queen's Park today and invite everyone to attend the reception.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It is indeed my pleasure to acknowledge the page from Etobicoke Centre, Madeline Smart-Reed. Her mom, Sarah Smart, is here, and her grandmother Mary Smart. They're both in the Speaker's gallery.

I also say a very special welcome to Silverthorn Collegiate, who are going to enjoy this morning's festivities in the House.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'd just like to introduce a local insurance broker from the great riding of Leeds—Grenville. Please join me in welcoming Brian Purcell from James Purcell Insurance Broker in Spencerville.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm looking forward to introducing the heart and soul of my constituency operation in Thunder Bay—Superior North, my executive assistant, Larry Joy. Larry, come on, get up.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce constituent Debbie Thompson, as well as Chelsea Smyth, Philomena Comerford and Arthur Lofsky. Many of us know Arthur.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to introduce Chris Streib, a physiotherapist and president of Talbot Trail Physiotherapy in St. Thomas, and his wife, Christine Zacharias. They're here to see how we do business.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce two special guests from the beautiful town of Niagara-on-the-Lake; they're with the 1812 bicentennial committee. They are Tony Chisholm and Jim Alexander. I know we're not allowed to show props in the House—I know that's a very strict rule—so I will not show this prop, which is the burning of Niagara-on-the-Lake that will take place on December 6—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sure the member from Niagara Falls would not want to have me not do my job by telling him it is a prop, and he will put it down.

With us today in the Speaker's gallery are the mother and father of page Rosalin Dubois from Brant: Suzanne Dubois and Greg Dubois—and brother Thomas, who says he can do a better job than his sister. Welcome, and we're glad you're here with us. I think I've initiated a family feud; I'm not sure.

BOSTON TRAGEDY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker, for acknowledging me. Yesterday we all witnessed a horrific tragedy in Boston at the Boston Marathon, and of course, our sympathies and our condolences go with the families of the victims. I seek, Speaker, unanimous consent from the members to observe a moment of silence for the victims and their families, in light of the tragedy yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Labour has sought unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence for the victims and the families and the first responders of the Boston tragedy.

Is there consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Please stand.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the Legislature, we offer our condolences, our heartfelt prayers and our love to those victims.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order for the third party.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I realize I should have done this earlier, but I missed that Monsieur de Laplante from Timmins is here, along with the insurance brokers from the city of Timmins.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I would also open by commenting on the cowardly acts of terrorism in Boston and that our caucus, as well, offers our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who were sadly affected.

Speaker, my question this morning is for the Premier. The Auditor General told us that the cost of the Missis-sauga gas plant is not the \$190 million that you talked about but, rather, a whopping \$275 million.

He also told us of the subtle change in language the Liberals used, from saying the "total cost" to now saying "cost to the taxpayer." That's because the OPA was instructed to add \$85 million on the hydro bills of rate-payers. There's the subtle difference.

Premier, you played with words to get around telling us the true cost of cancelling Mississauga. What's the difference between a taxpayer and a ratepayer, and will you apologize to the people of Ontario for misleading them?

Interjections.

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

The member will withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, on behalf of the people of Ontario, I want to send our thoughts and prayers to our friends in Boston, to the families of those killed and injured and to everyone affected by this shocking event.

Races like the Boston Marathon really are a demonstration of human endurance and a sense of community. I want the people of Boston to know that we're here for them, that we offer them our support in any way that we can.

I want to thank the auditor for his work and accept his findings. The auditor has provided Ontarians with a longer-term assessment than the original assessment by estimating costs and savings over 20 years.

Let's be clear: We listened to the residents of Oakville and Mississauga, and we relocated the gas plants. Do we agree that the plants shouldn't have been located there? Yes, we do. Do we agree that the plants should have been relocated sooner? Yes, we do. Do we take responsibility and are we going to move forward, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely—

Interjections.

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

Like all of us in this place, I am aware of the situation that is happening today with responses, and I'm going to ask you to contain yourself as much as possible, to get to your questions and to the answers. Let's try to keep it at a level at which we can all hear, and I will immediately be looking to people to quiet them down.

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Premier, what was even more revealing from the auditor was the fact that millions of dollars were needed for transmission, gas connection and other costs made necessary by moving to your new location. That's because, Premier, there's a right way to move these plants and an expensive way, and we learned from the auditor that you picked the most expensive way possible.

The auditor told us he will be using the same criteria in telling us how much your Oakville cancellation really cost. You're sticking to \$40 million, but the OPA shows that those same extra costs the auditor will look at using will bring this to \$991 million.

1040

Just like yesterday, Premier, we're going to get to the truth. Why don't you just tell us now the total cost of cancelling Oakville?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy is going to want to speak to some of the specifics, but I want to be clear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I didn't think that was such an outrageous comment; I know the Minister of Energy is going to want to speak to the specifics.

I want to talk about my responsibility and our responsibility to move forward on this. It is very clear to me—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I listened to what the Auditor General said yesterday. It's very clear to me that he has made calculations, and I am very glad that he has shed some light on this. That's exactly why we asked him to look at both of the situations.

It has been my priority to be open and transparent on this issue. I asked for the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation. We've expanded the scope of the committee, and I take responsibility for getting that information out.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, we learned two things over at the justice committee this morning from the sworn testimony of Shelly Jamieson, former cabinet secretary. First, she swore that cabinet knew of Project Vapour. You and a handful of cabinet ministers stood up and said, "You have all the documents," when this proves you knew we didn't. She also swore that cabinet knew of the extra costs for the Oakville cancellation, far above the \$40 million you claim. In fact, she called them "buckets of costs."

Premier, documents prove you were at the cabinet meetings when these extra costs were disclosed. Will you stand up now, put an end to this charade and tell all Ontarians how much Oakville cost?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, when the Auditor General was given the responsibility to look into the Mississauga issue, he worked on that file for over half a year. He worked co-operatively with the Ontario Power Authority and officials from his office. He stated—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville, come to order—and Prince Edward-Hastings.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: He stated very clearly yesterday that he had access to all documents. It was not a problem for him to gather the information.

The auditor's office is, again, looking into the Oakville situation. They have been doing that for some time;

they're going to be doing it over another period of months. There are difficult calculations; they're complex files. As in the case of Mississauga, we were not getting interim reports on what the auditor was finding, and in the case of Oakville, we're not going to be getting interim reports. So the speculation on the part of the critic is totally vacuous.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier.

The transition from McGuinty to Wynne has been seamless and is now complete. Premier, you've picked up exactly where your predecessor left off. You have made empty statements about being transparent and releasing all of the information with respect to the gas plant cancellations and relocations. These claims are nothing but attempts to distract from the fact that you only give the answers when you are legally compelled to do so.

The auditor stated clearly that you were aware for months that the cost to cancel the Mississauga gas plant was substantially higher than \$190 million. Why didn't you order your Minister of Energy to disclose that fact instead of continuing to insist that your false numbers were correct?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Since I came into this office, I have done everything in my power to make sure that the information that people were asking for was available. I asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville plant. I asked that we expand the justice committee's mandate so that it could ask a much broader range of questions. I have said I will appear before the committee. We are making sure that the questions that need to be answered are answered. The reality is, every member in this House—all parties—agreed that these gas plants should be relocated, and there was a cost associated with those relocations. That is unfortunate, but that is the reality, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. Oh, that got quiet.

Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the Premier, as well: Premier, your answers completely betray what we already know: that you have no intention of being straight with this Legislature or the people of Ontario. For months, you've been asked on a daily basis for the total cost of your politically motivated decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. You told the public that the cost was one amount when you knew it to be higher. They have a right to know how much of their money you're going to waste. In spite of the guarantees of your so-called new government, you chose not to disclose that figure. You've done everything you can to avoid being transparent. Taxpayer or ratepayer are one and the same, and they are entitled to the truth.

End this now. Release all of the costs related to the Oakville power plant cancellation and relocation. Do it now, Premier. The people of Ontario deserve nothing less.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is simply not true that I have avoided, or that our government has avoided, getting the information out. It's just not true, Mr. Speaker. I have done everything I can to get the experts who understand what the costs are.

As the Minister of Energy said, it has been a complex process. It has been a six-month process for the Auditor General to come up with the cost. I am neither an accountant nor an engineer. I am not an expert in these areas. I think what we need is the information that is developed by, that is compiled by, the experts, which is why I asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville plant. I want the information to be available.

The members opposite can rail as much as they want. The reality is, everyone in this Legislature believed that those gas plants should be relocated. We acted on that, and there was a cost associated with that.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, the people are the final arbiter. The auditor's report has shone a light on all of the holes in your story. Why are you here, Premier—to set an example, or to play politics and protect the interests of the Liberal Party?

We have 600,000 people out of work in this province, and you're wasting the time of this Legislature by refusing to come clean and disclose the information. Compliance with orders is not transparency and full disclosure; that's only doing what you are compelled to do.

Today, Premier, I ask you to do the right thing. Will you release the total cost of the cancellation of the Oakville power plant, or do we have to wait for another auditor's report confirming what he did on Mississauga yesterday? Will he have to confirm on Oakville at a later date that you have lied to the people of Ontario?

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to take this further. I said this yesterday, and I'm going to say it today to reinforce it: If there is an effort to use unparliamentary language, I am going to skip questions—and I mean "skip questions." So the rotation is there, the answer is there, but if it continues, using unparliamentary language that you know is not allowed, I will skip.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to address the issue of Oakville. On September 24, 2012, the Ontario Power Authority put the actual memorandum of understanding, the terms of the agreement, on their website. It indicated quite clearly in that document—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lambton–Kent, come to order.

1050

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: It indicated quite clearly that the sunk costs were \$40 million. It also indicated that there were a number of other matters that had to be addressed, including the issue of the lower power price and the impact that would have, and the cost of some of the equipment that was provided.

Mr. Speaker, there is an issue of accountability here. The issue of accountability is where we site our energy infrastructure. It is not appropriate. The Premier has indicated it could be much better. She expanded the terms of the committee to find ways and means to have a better way of siting the project.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to begin by joining with the Premier and the opposition—for New Democrats—in our condolences to the people of Boston as well as the people from around the world who were participating in the Boston Marathon, and their families and supporters. I think we were all shocked by the incidents yesterday, and we certainly do want to say that our thoughts and our prayers are with all of those folks as they struggle through what happened and the aftermath.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. On September 25, 2012, the now Premier was pretty decisive about the cost of the Mississauga gas plant. She said, “The cost of that relocation was \$190 million.” The auditor put forward a different, higher, figure yesterday.

Does the Premier stand by her claim?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’ve been very clear. I’m appreciative of the auditor for his work. He’s looked at a longer-term assessment of the cost. He’s estimated the cost and the savings over 20 years, and so the number is a different number. The whole purpose of the Auditor General looking at these costs was to make sure that it was understood exactly what the costs were. So I appreciate that he has done that work. I appreciate that he’s doing the work on the Oakville gas plant as I asked him to do.

But Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we all agree that the gas plants shouldn’t have been located where they were. We agree on that. We agree that the information should have been clear. I absolutely acknowledge that. I take responsibility for getting the information out and for fixing the process going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier and this government have made a series of claims. They insisted that the cost of cancelling the private power deal in Mississauga was \$180 million. Then, they insisted it was \$190 million. Now, they insist that the cost of the private power deal in Oakville was \$40 million. And they insist that consumers will be protected.

Does the Premier back any of these claims?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the leader of the third party knows, on February 7 I wrote to the Auditor General requesting that he examine the cost of the Oakville relocation. He agreed. He’s working with the OPA, and we look forward to his report.

But again, we listened to the people of Oakville. I wish that the community engagement, the process, had been better up front. I wish that the information had been more clearly released earlier. But the reality is that we all agreed that that gas plant should be relocated. We acted on that, and we know that there is a cost associated with that decision.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is about the sort of government that the Premier is running. This government signed private power deals. They defended those deals and insisted that they were absolutely necessary. Then when it looked like it would cost them political power, they cancelled the deals, and not only did they stick the public with the bills, they’ve gone out of their way to hide the details and the real costs.

How can the Premier stand in this House and act as if this is acceptable?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really need to take issue with the notion that we are not trying to be transparent on this. From day one when I came into this job, and through the leadership race, I was very clear that the information that was being asked for needed to be available. That’s why I took the actions that I did as soon as I was in this office. That’s why I said, “Let’s make sure there’s a committee in place that has the broadest mandate possible to ask the questions that need to be asked.” That’s why I asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation. That’s why I said I would appear before committee. We have attempted at every turn to provide the information that was being asked for.

The Auditor General is doing his work. I appreciate the work he did on the Mississauga plant. I look forward to the report. Do we want it to be different next time? Do we want the process to be better and the community engagement to be better? Absolutely we do, Mr. Speaker.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I guess day one is all a matter of perspective, Speaker. From day one, New Democrats were FOIing those private power contracts, and we couldn’t get the information from this government years ago.

My next question is for the Premier. What’s really shocking for people is, the Premier doesn’t seem to be showing any remorse or regret. Instead, it’s just full steam ahead with politics as usual. Yesterday, Ontarians learned that the people of this province are going to be paying \$275 million to cancel that Mississauga plant. That money could have been used to wipe out home care waiting lists or to put 25,000 young people to work.

Why can't the Premier admit that this was cynical politics at its worst and actually show some remorse for this waste of public money?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think I've said very clearly that I think the process should have been different. If the process had been different, then we wouldn't be in this situation where we're having to pay these costs.

The reality is that there were costs that were associated with making this decision. I said weeks ago—months ago, now—that this was a political decision, Mr. Speaker. It was a political decision that every party agreed with. Whoever formed government, whoever was in this role, if they were going to follow through on that commitment to cancel these plants, there was going to be a cost associated with that. What we don't know is what the parties opposite thought those costs were going to be.

We have taken action. We have made those relocations. There are costs associated with them, and I've been clear that we need every piece of information open and available to the people who are asking the questions, because that is the right thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I guess I was right, Speaker: politics as usual, personified in the response there. People in Ontario are hoping for a little more from their government than the same old evasions and the same old excuses. Yesterday they learned that they're going to be paying \$275 million to cancel that Mississauga plant. That's \$85 million more than the already astronomical \$190 million that the Premier insisted was the tally in this very House back in September 2012.

People are tired of being zapped by the Liberals in this province. Why can't the Premier simply say that this was the wrong thing to do and apologize on behalf of the Liberal Party and her government for this cynical waste of public money?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want the people of Ontario to know that I believe that the process should have been different. It should have been different, Mr. Speaker. We should have had a different process to locate the plants and we should have had more community engagement. There should have been a different process up front. I don't know how much clearer I can be on that, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I don't know how I can say that more clearly: that I believe the process should have been different. The reality is that all parties agreed that they're—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. I'm going to mention the member again, and the minister responsible for seniors will join him.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've lost my thread. How could that happen?

The reality is, we have been clear that the process should have been different. We need to have a different process going forward. The Auditor General has provided us with information that is very necessary. The committee will continue to do its work, and we look forward to its report on Oakville.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier lost her thread because she's weaving a tale; that's the problem.

This should be a pretty simple issue, Speaker. The money spent scrapping this power plant could have hired 4,700 nurses in this province. It could have eliminated the wait-list for home care over and over again. It could have provided some relief for households that are paying the highest electricity rates in the entire country. Instead, it was handed to US hedge funds and to private power companies. Instead of coming clean about this, the government spent a year scrambling to hide the facts from the people they stuck with the bill. When will the Premier give the people some indication that she actually knows that this was wrong?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the government listened to the residents of Mississauga by relocating the facility. The NDP and the Conservatives made the same election promise. When the three parties made this commitment in November 2011, none of the parties knew what the costs of relocation would be.

The Auditor General's report demonstrated how complex and difficult the negotiations and the calculations were. It took the auditor's office over half a year to do the report, which we received last week.

The issue really is, how do we locate, how do we site our energy infrastructure? As the Premier said, we have to do better. The committee has the mandate to do that. Why don't we work together to get better rules for siting our—

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

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, on September 24, 2011, according to the auditor, an Ontario Liberal Party news release announced, as an election campaign promise, that the Greenfield plant in Mississauga would not go forward. "The Liberal Party won the election on October 6, 2011." There's a reason that the Auditor General makes that point in his report—that it was the Ontario Liberal Party. The co-chair of the Ontario Liberal Party at the time was none other than Kathleen Wynne, the Premier.

The Premier may not be, as she indicated, an accountant, and she may not be an engineer, but she is the Premier. As the Premier, I would ask her this question: Why can the Premier not stand in her place and say to the people of Ontario, "We made a mistake"?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said that we take responsibility for making sure that all of the information that is being asked for is provided. I take full responsibility for that, Mr. Speaker.

I have also said that the process should have been different. I've been clear about that. It should have been different, and we need a different process going forward.

I have also said that this was a political decision. It was a political decision that would have been taken, ostensibly—by all accounts from the other parties—by the other parties had they been in government. It was a political decision that, in the implementation, had business costs associated with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, there's an important thread missing in the Premier's comments, and that is that it was the government of the day that decided to put the plant there in the first place. That was not a decision of the opposition. It was not a decision of the third party. That government made the mistake of putting it there to begin with. Therefore, they share all of the responsibility for the costs.

My question is this: Given that it was a Liberal Party decision to incur \$275 million of costs, will the Premier agree that it's the Liberal Party of Ontario that should pay that money?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let me remind—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If I have to wade through this and individually mention somebody—I want to give everybody an understanding: When I give you a warning, that's the last time I will speak to you, other than to name you.

Government House leader.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member from Leeds–Grenville: If it was a test, you won. You're warned.

Answer?

Hon. John Milloy: What's interesting is, today in front of the committee, the Liberal members called on all four of the candidates for both parties in this riding to come forward, and they couldn't make it. I'm very anxious to have them come forward—

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

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Premier: For nearly a year, the Liberal government claimed that the Mississauga gas plant cancellation cost about \$190 million. Yesterday, the Auditor General told us that it was \$275 million, a full \$85 million more than your government has been willing to admit. Today, Shelly Jamieson, former secretary of cabinet, told Ontarians that she knew there would be more than the sunk costs and that the Premier and ministers would know that.

Premier, why did the Liberal government say the cost was one thing when everyone knew it was far higher?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: The Auditor General has come forward with a report, and the Auditor General is coming forward with a report on the Oakville situation. But I think what's interesting about Shelly Jamieson's testimony this morning is that she confirmed that last week, when the opposition stood up with a document related to the negotiations going on and claimed that it had somehow been withheld by the government, that document was in fact outside the scope of any of the requests that were made by the committee.

We have been prepared for a long time to furnish all the documents to the committee, but that honourable member and other members of the opposition sat in their place and voted against it. I think it's time that we allow the committee to undertake its work, we allow the Auditor General to finish his work, and the committee to come forward with some profitable advice—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's very clear the government doesn't want to tell the truth on this issue—does not want to answer questions—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There was so much noise that I didn't hear, but there seemed to have been a concern about what was said, and if you did, I would expect—but I will let it go. Please ask your question.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you. Shelly Jamieson told the committee that the government was looking at options for cancelling the Mississauga plant before they'd begun—not destruction, construction; destruction came

later—before they received the 14% financing that Ontarians are now paying for.

Premier, the Liberal government planned the Mississauga gas plant. The Liberal government wanted to cancel it so it could save seats in an election. For nearly a year, the Liberal government hid the costs. Does the Premier think this is a good way to do business?

Hon. John Milloy: Here is what the NDP member for Mississauga had to say about the Mississauga plant—and I quote from InsideToronto.com, September 26: “We wouldn’t build it.”

Here’s what Torstar News Service had to say, September 16, 2011: “Etobicoke–Lakeshore NDP candidate Dionne Coley also pledged to fight the plant.”

The National Post, September 29, 2011: “[L]ocal NDP candidate Anju Sikka soon issued statements concurring with the new Liberal cancellation.”

The Liberal members of the committee invited both the Progressive Conservative and the New Democratic candidates for those ridings to come forward to the committee and talk about their calculations and the work they did when they promised that in the last election. None of them were available today, and I hope that that member will persuade his colleagues to come before the committee.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. My constituents in Oak Ridges–Markham rely on public transit to get to work and school, to reduce congestion on the roads and keep our air clean. In particular, GO trains are very important and popular for us in Oak Ridges–Markham, as there are five GO train stations in my riding, and we are served by three different lines. Last year, additional GO train service on weekends and holidays helped my constituents move along the Barrie line with more convenience and flexibility. I heard from many residents of King City and northern Richmond Hill that they really appreciated the implementation of additional GO services.

Minister, could you please update the House on what the plan is this year for GO Transit on the Barrie line?

1110

Hon. Glen R. Murray: As you know, our Premier has made transit and transportation, and taking on congestion issues and the infrastructure deficit in this province, a priority of this government, and I’m very proud to have the honour of being part of the team that’s delivering it.

This summer we are adding, to that end, four southbound and four northbound train trips on the Barrie GO line as well as increased GO bus service on weekends and holidays. This will begin on June 29 and will be running through to September 2.

I also want to acknowledge my friend from Oak Ridges–Markham for her incredible advocacy on this. And to Mayor Lehman in Barrie—Barrie is responding in the community by increasing their bus fleet and their

transit services by an amazing 30%, to match up with our GO service.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the minister for that update. I am glad to see that our government is making summer travel even more convenient.

GO Transit’s seasonal weekend schedules sound much improved. I know that people in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham will welcome transit investments on weekends that make public transit a better choice for many of them, reducing congestion on our roads and contributing to a better quality of life for Ontario families.

There is also a great deal of interest in introducing two-way, all-day service on all GO rail corridors for commuters in York region. I know it will require significant expansion of the supporting railway infrastructure. However, it is sorely needed.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please provide an update on the progress we’ve made in creating a more convenient and efficient public transit system in the GTHA?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member, and I will give some more details. I also just want to thank the member from York–Simcoe and the member from Barrie for joining me for the announcements on the Highway 400 and the GO service.

One of the good reasons we have GO service improvements to Barrie—and for all of our constituents—is because we are going to be putting, with the federal government and municipalities, \$109 million in repairs on Highway 400 and the interchanges, so to avoid the congestion, people will be able to use the GO service.

But we’re also doing things such as moving to complete two-way, all-day GO service on every line. That’s part of our strategy with the Big Move.

As many people drive to this, we’re adding 3,500 parking spaces right now to our parking spaces in those areas, in those communities, where automobiles are the choice of residents to get around.

We have integrated all 11 transit authorities right now under the Presto card, so you don’t have to fuss with multiple passes. This is an amazing investment in transit across the greater Golden Horseshoe, and we’re very proud to be moving forward.

I thank the member for her question.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question also is to the Premier. The auditor was quite clear yesterday that the real cost of the cancellation of the power plant was \$275 million, not the \$190 million you and your cabinet had continually suggested. The auditor only reduced that number because we don’t have to pay for the power from that cancelled plant now. Your government even paid the company of the power plant for the cost of its land and then you let them keep it.

You were briefed, as was cabinet, and I quote from Shelly Jamieson, who said there were known “buckets of costs” that exceeded \$190 million. Premier, given you

were briefed on these “buckets of costs” exceeding \$190 million, why did you tell this House on September 25 and every day thereafter the wrong number?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The Auditor General performed his work for a period of over half a year. When you read the report of the Auditor General, there are over 21 items that either had reductions or increases in costs. They were very technical in nature, and it took him that long period of time to review it.

We have said quite clearly that we accept the auditor’s report. We’ve also said in this House, and the Premier has said, that the root cause is that we need to do better in siting our energy facilities. That’s the core root accountability issue here.

We’ve put before the committee the responsibility to try to find better ways to site our energy infrastructure. I think we should have some common purpose in that committee to try to determine better ways to site our energy infrastructure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I’m going to go back to the Premier because she has some serious answers to give this assembly.

Shelly Jamieson’s testimony was damning. The auditor’s report was appalling. The only thing that has become very clear has been this: This government is rotten to the core, and it’s time for them to leave.

The Ontario PC caucus has said for quite some time that they should never have built that power plant in the first place. It has now cost taxpayers in this province \$275 million.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They’re forcing taxpayers to pay \$275 million so Charles Sousa could keep his seat.

Speaker, I have a question for the Premier: How can you put forward a credible budget in this assembly when the biggest beneficiary of that power plant will be the person collecting that \$275 million from the taxpayers in this province? You can’t do it. Step aside.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: To the opposition: The Mississauga and Oakville energy facilities were seat-gainer programs, because they promised quite clearly that they were going to relocate the sites. They did that because they hoped to win those seats. So it was a seat-gainer program for them. None of the parties who promised in November 2011 to relocate those facilities knew what the costs were going to be when those commitments were made. They were election commitments made by all parties; nobody had the cost at that time. The auditor’s report showed quite clearly that it was complex, detailed and technical. It took the auditor over half a year to calculate the costs. They should be the last ones to complain

about the calculation of the cost. They had no idea what it was going to cost.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. In the last few months, Windsor and Essex county residents have lost dozens of hospital beds, nurses and front-line care workers. They’ve seen long-promised new beds evaporate. Budget cuts are threatening the services available to infants at the NICU, and Windsor CCAC is facing significant cuts to address funding shortfalls. Yet as we found out yesterday, this government was happy to spend \$275 million securing threatened seats for their MPPs.

What does the Premier have to say to the people of Windsor and Essex county who have watched their health care be whittled to the bone while the Liberal government spends millions of dollars to save seats in an election?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Health is going to want to speak to the specific system issue, but I just want to be clear once again, because I think in this context it’s important to say once again that I wish, I believe, I would have desired that the process had been different. I wish that we had been able to have a better process up front so that a different decision could have been made so we wouldn’t have been at this place. But the reality is that we listened to the communities both in Oakville and in Mississauga. We made a decision which is a decision that all of the parties would have made. It was a political decision, as everyone in this House agreed. We made the decision, we moved forward, and there were costs associated with the relocation of the plants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Better process comes with better governance.

In recent times, the Windsor and Essex county region has struggled with a 9% unemployment rate, cuts to health care, cuts to seniors’ care and broken promises about the Grace hospital site—and a government willing to throw away the region’s gaming industry to benefit private casino operators from down south. Now we find out that Ontarians are on the hook for massive penalties being paid to American hedge funds for contracts signed by and cancelled by the Liberal government.

The hard times and job losses facing Windsor are no secret and they are no myth. When will this government stop throwing taxpayer dollars at American corporations and start protecting the services that we need most?

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is making allegations that simply are not true about our health care system in Windsor. Indeed, the facts speak for themselves. Since 2003, the budget of Windsor Regional Hospital has grown by \$100 million. That’s an 83% increase in funding to that hospital. We’ve seen results from that. What we’re seeing is lower wait times. We’ve

seen a reduction of 86 days for hip replacement, 46 days for outpatient CT scans, 56 days' less waiting for people needing cancer surgery.

1120

At the same time, Speaker, we are enhancing home care supports because that is fundamental to the transformation in our health care system. We're seeing more people getting care from family health teams, and 320 new long-term-care beds are being built.

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

SERVICES AUX IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est pour le ministre de la citoyenneté et de l'Immigration, l'honorable Michael Coteau.

My riding of Etobicoke North, Speaker, as you'll appreciate, is home to many newcomers who come from all over the world. Of course, when they come to ridings like Etobicoke North and across the GTA and beyond, integrating successfully into our communities benefits everyone.

In Ontario, of course, we have long valued diversity and its economic contributions. Our diverse population is a tremendous asset.

Now, Speaker, as you'll appreciate, with the economic times being hard, more than ever, newcomers are critical to our economic development and meeting our future labour market needs. Putting their skills to work will be key to our economic growth.

I ask the minister: What is our government doing to help newcomers settle in Ontario, and what are some of the ideas, instruments and investments that we are making in this domain?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for Etobicoke North for the question. I know he's a great champion for his community.

Our government is committed to supporting community agencies that provide valuable settlement services to newcomers. Across the province, we've expanded our support for newcomer settlement services. In total, Mr. Speaker, 98 community organizations across this province, including the north and rural communities, will receive funding for important language and job training, programs and community services.

Enhancing community settlement services is part of the province's immigration strategy and supports the Ontario government's efforts to build a strong economy and a fair society. Settlement agencies in Ontario help more than 80,000 newcomers each year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker, and through you to the minister: I'd also like to recognize the fact that he visited my riding, Etobicoke North, last week to announce \$14.9 million in funding in this whole particular area.

I think that people, especially in Etobicoke North, sense on the ground that our initiatives, directives and

programs are enhancing lives. As we heard from a newcomer during the announcement—my constituents tell me that the settlement services are making a difference. These services are helping newcomers contribute to their communities, go to school, develop new and marketable skill sets, and strengthen our workforce, which of course leads to more prosperous, successful and integrated lives.

Monsieur le Ministre, pouvez-vous donner à mes électeurs un savoir plus sur le travail du gouvernement pour les nouveaux arrivants dans ma communauté?

Hon. Michael Coteau: One of the main goals of our immigration strategy is to help newcomers and their families settle and achieve success. More newcomers come to Ontario than any other province in this country. That's why we've increased our efforts to support newcomers across this province. Since 2003, our government has increased settlement services funding by over 80%. The funding is needed now more than ever because of the federal cuts equalling \$85 million that have happened in settlement services over the last three years.

Our new government has made investments to support newcomers in ridings like Etobicoke North. These investments will support the great work of organizations like the Rexdale Women's Centre, the Dejinta Beesha, and the Community MicroSkills Development Centre. These organizations help more than 4,000 people each year.

I'm proud that our new government is supporting newcomers in the beautiful riding of Etobicoke North and across the province. When newcomers succeed, we all succeed.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier.

Premier, you stood in this House and repeatedly told us your version of the truth and the supposed cost of the Mississauga gas plant, saying it was \$190 million. Yesterday, the Auditor General, who is far more believable than you are, told us the real truth: that the costs were \$275 million, some 50% more.

I'm going to quote you, Premier, from Hansard on September 25, 2012: "We are relocating a gas plant from Oakville to eastern Ontario. The total cost of the relocation is \$40 million."

Premier, given your rather liberal interpretation of the truth when it came to the Mississauga statement, are you still standing by the \$40 million? You know the costs; you need not wait for the Auditor General to expose you once again. Tell the truth. Stand in your place—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: On September 24, 2012, the Ontario Power Authority posted on their website the actual memorandum of understanding. It's the contract between the proponent and the OPA and the provincial government. It states in the contract itself: \$40 million are the sunk costs. It states in the contract itself that there

are other calculations that are being made. Those calculations relate to reduce power site and to the provision of certain equipment.

Mr. Speaker, that document is the contract—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Pembroke.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Closing in.

Finish, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, they're trying to make a sow's ear out of a silk purse.

Interjection.

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

The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is warned.

Supplementary. The member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I redirect the question to the Premier. Premier, you have known and actually have the answers—you're in charge. The buck stops with you, as far as I'm concerned. You know all of the answers. All I'm asking today is a simple question: Is the cost of the Oakville plant still, in your opinion, \$40 million?

Stand in your place, Premier. I'd ask you to stand in your place and say what you said on September 25, 2012. Should we believe what you said then or should we believe what you're saying now?

You knew the real costs. The buck stops with you. I ask you once again, are you going to stick to your figure of the \$40 million? Was it true then? Is it still true now, that number?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The relocation costs of Oakville are contained in a contract that has been negotiated. That has been on the public record, on the Ontario Power Authority website, since September 24, 2012.

The people of Ontario want some unity of purpose coming out of this Legislature. The committee has the mandate to create the rules for better siting of our power infrastructure so that these things would not happen in the future. The people of Ontario are looking for this place to provide some leadership collectively in how we relocate or locate our power plants and our energy facilities. We expect the people of Ontario to be respected. We expect this Legislature, through that committee that has the mandate, to create some better rules.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety. Minister, the situation at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre escalated again last week. An improvised weapon has still not been found and we also saw a lockdown that resulted in a fire and two injuries.

When I asked last September, the minister said that the government had developed a 12-point plan to deal with

these exact issues, but reality speaks to worsening conditions.

When will the minister do her duty and develop a real plan to bring Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre up to standard?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you for this question. As you know, Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre is on my top priority in the Ministry of Correctional Services. The deputy and the assistant deputy are working very diligently to solve the problem there.

1130

Yes, I have presented a three-point plan to resolve the problem at Elgin-Middlesex. We have done one of them; 24-hour nursing is already in place, and I am very pleased about it.

There was an incident last week, and I can confirm that the search and the lockdown have been ended. I cannot talk about the investigation because there is an investigation going on, but I can say that we'll take every measure possible to redress the situation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Minister, just last week Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre was on lockdown after staff issued a refusal to search due to lack of safety equipment. I hope the minister understands that it's a question of safety for both the guards as well as the inmates. Two people were sent to the hospital because government mismanagement allowed the situation to escalate.

Will the minister act now to guarantee safety at the Elgin-Middlesex facility?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will differ in opinion with the member from the London area.

I visited the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. We've worked very closely with the administration, and my ministry will continue to address the situation. My questions are, why is this happening, why is there stuff that is coming into the detention centre? We have a lot of whys that the investigation will give us answers to.

BEEKEEPING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Premier in her capacity as Minister of Agriculture and Food. There has been recent concern among the Ontario Beekeepers' Association, including members in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, that the government is planning to repeal the Bees Act. It is this legislation that guides beekeepers and that gives bee inspectors the authority to inspect Ontario apiaries and enforce the regulations designed to keep our bee population healthy. Concerns have arisen within the beekeeping community that a posting on the regulatory registry may mean that the government is intending to do away with this legislation.

Premier, can you please provide the House with an update on this situation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for his question. This is a really important issue, and I want to thank the Ontario

Beekeepers' Association for their work in representing their members. I want to clarify the situation and set aside the concerns of the beekeepers. Proposed changes to the Bees Act were posted for comment in January and February. These changes would simply update the list of diseases and pests named in the Bees Act. It's a direct response to the industry's concerns, and it supports bee health and swift detection and timely response to emerging issues.

From an economic perspective, the changes will improve access to more markets for Ontario's beekeepers. This is something that there has been a lot of concern about. I heard about it early on. That's the situation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Issues related to a healthy bee population not only in Ontario but nationally and internationally have gained prominence in recent years. I've met with a number of individuals and groups in my riding concerned with this issue. It's also an issue of concern—of grave concern, I would say—to the agriculture community. I'm pleased by the response from the Premier. This legislation is important to beekeepers, especially during this period of uncertainty for the sector.

As I'm sure the Premier is aware, there have been reports of high mortality rates of bees across the globe, and many beekeepers in Ontario attribute the deaths to the planting of treated corn seed. Can the Premier please inform the House what is being done to help beekeepers who are losing their hives?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very aware of the high number of bee deaths in Ontario and, along with beekeepers, I'm really concerned about what this means for the agriculture sector as a whole, not to mention the ecosystem. The Pest Management Regulatory Agency, alongside with the Ministry of the Environment, is investigating the bee kills. The Pest Management Regulatory Agency has released a best-practices document developed in consultation with the industry, and it demonstrates ways of reducing potential risk to bees. Ministry staff will continue to work with the industry, with colleagues at the Ministry of the Environment and with the Pest Management Regulatory Agency this spring to monitor Ontario hive health.

The Ontario government recognizes the vitally important role that pollinators and beekeepers play in maintaining a healthy and productive agri-food sector. I know that the members opposite are equally concerned about this issue.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question today is for the Premier. Premier, the former Minister of Finance reported on July 16, 2012, that the true cost to cancel the Mississauga gas plant would come in at \$190 million. Well, we had to wait for the Auditor General to tell us the actual true cost, which is actually \$275 million—unacceptable. Since your math seems to be off these days, I'm going to break that down for you. What we are

talking about is seat-savers, and it's \$69 million per Liberal member whose seat was saved by the Mississauga gas plant cancellation, all on the backs of taxpayers.

Minister, now that we know the true cost of the four Liberal seats in Mississauga, why don't you just reveal the true cost of the Oakville cancellation?

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: When the three parties made election promises to relocate the energy facility in Mississauga, none of us knew what the costs would be. This government accepts the Auditor General's report.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Premier, the answers that you and your ministers have provided are pathetic. They are disingenuous and disrespectful to the people of Ontario. The AG's report clearly shows you squandered millions of taxpayer dollars to save Liberal seats in the last election—a billion dollars that could have built new hospitals, provided health care to seniors and kept schools open. I suggest you have known all along the cost implications of your decision to cancel the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants.

Premier, this is about integrity—the integrity of your government and your personal integrity. Will you show integrity now and show us the real facts and cancellation costs of the Oakville gas plant?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: When all three parties made election promises to relocate the gas plants, they did not know what the costs were. They knew that there would be costs. The Auditor General has spent—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, withdraw.

Mr. Bill Walker: Withdraw.

Interjection.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The Auditor General has spent over half a year working with the Ontario Power Authority to calculate the costs, having access to all the documents and all the information. The government has accepted the Auditor General's report.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the finance minister. Over a month ago, we raised concerns in the House regarding the dire situation that municipalities are facing due to MPAC and Assessment Review Board decisions. Several months ago, the Assessment Review Board ruled that the town of Espanola must pay \$4 million following a property reassessment of its Espanola

mill. Months ago, the Minister of Finance said they were aware of the situation and were looking into a solution.

Residents of Espanola live every day in fear that their taxes will increase substantially. Municipalities rely on MPAC assessments to collect local taxes. When the Assessment Review Board decision comes out of left field, the municipalities are left holding the bag.

The government has had much time to think about this issue. Will this government commit to finding actual solutions in a timely fashion before municipalities are forced to put the unfair tax burden on the backs of hard-working Ontarians?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It is indeed a concern that is shared by the people of Espanola and, frankly, by our government as well. That's why we've asked MPAC to do a review of the ARB decisions. It is under way, and we look forward to seeing their decision so that we can facilitate the needs of the community while at the same time maintaining competitiveness in our province. So I do appreciate your question. We are reviewing it, and we will get back to you shortly.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. John Milloy: I wish to correct my record from question period today. Today I said that the NDP member from Mississauga said we wouldn't build it. I meant, of course, the member from Toronto–Danforth.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, you can help me out on this. Are we allowed to give notice of dissatisfaction with a question?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No.

DEFERRED VOTES

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT (AIR AMBULANCES), 2013

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

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

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

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

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1145.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Will the members take their seats, please. Before the Sergeant-at-Arms comes, will the members take their seats, please.

Ms. Matthews has moved second reading of Bill 11. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

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

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

Nays

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 65; the nays are 32.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Minister of Health and Long-Term Care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'd ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

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

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BOSTON TRAGEDY

Mr. Todd Smith: In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul tells us that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” On days like today, it seems like hope is all we’re left with. We cannot, nor should we try to explain the evil that exists in our world. We’re left only to endure it, with the promise that we will come out a stronger, more hopeful, more determined people.

Yesterday, in the middle of a serene Boston afternoon that saw the Red Sox win a thrilling walk-off against Tampa Bay at Fenway Park—just moments later and a few miles away, tragedy hit one of the seminal sporting events in the American lexicon.

My friend Cassandra Bonn was one of 2,000 Canadians who were participating in the Boston Marathon. Moments earlier, she had crossed the finish line. As she celebrated a lifetime accomplishment with her husband, Kris, two explosions tore through downtown Boston. Thankfully, they weren’t injured and survived that terrible event.

This senseless act of violence did claim three lives, including that of an eight-year-old boy.

It’s in these moments that our society begins to believe in heroes again. As smoke and shrapnel rained down on Boston yesterday, first responders were joined by runners and spectators so committed to helping the victims that they ran toward the explosion. That’s how you identify the heroes: They’re the ones running into the explosion.

In the face of such brutality, we all suffer. In the wake of such violence, we must all endure, because we only defeat the darkness if we’re able to hand hope to the classmates of that eight-year-old boy.

Pray for Boston today.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Jonah Schein: Recently, I met with constituents of Davenport from the Dupont/Lansdowne area. They’re paying the price for a gaping loophole in our tenant protection laws. I want to thank them for taking the time to share their stories with me.

These are residents who are living in buildings that were not residential prior to 1991, and as such, they’re not covered by the rent increase guidelines in the Residential Tenancies Act. This means that they and hundreds of other residents in Davenport who are living in newer buildings and factory conversions are not protected by rent control laws. Residents are seeing their rents raised arbitrarily, and in some cases by arbitrarily large sums. Some landlords seem to be using this as a way to force out tenants who request simple maintenance repairs.

This loophole affects most deeply those living on the edge and those living in poverty in our community. Fixing this simple loophole in the law would help strengthen

protection for tenants and help keep housing a bit more affordable for thousands of Ontarians. This government should take immediate action to close this loophole and start taking further action to protect Ontarians from poverty.

I hope that this government will introduce a budget soon that will begin to address the needs of people living in poverty. We need to see investments made in our child care, in our social assistance and affordable housing programs, and we need this government to raise the minimum wage.

Speaker, the decisions made in this building determine whether the most vulnerable residents can survive and prosper in Ontario or if they will fall deeper into poverty, and we need to take this responsibility seriously.

ISRAELI INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Today we mark Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day. This is the national day of Israel, commemorating the Israeli declaration of independence in 1948. On this day, the Jewish leadership, led by future Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, declared Israel an independent state eight hours before the end of the British mandate for Palestine. Today is a day to commemorate the Jewish people’s realization of self-determination.

At noon today, we had an official flag-raising ceremony here at Queen’s Park, honouring Israel’s 65th independence day.

I might add that it is also an opportunity to support ongoing efforts at the international level to bring a just and lasting peace to this region of the world.

Over the past 65 years, the bonds between Ontario and Israel have become established and are strengthened through our shared values of freedom and human rights. Today is not only a day to celebrate Israeli independence, but it is also a day to celebrate the many successes Israel has enjoyed, including Israel’s strength, vibrancy and commitment to democracy.

In Israel today, families will celebrate with picnics and barbecues. Balconies and cars are decorated with Israeli flags. Here in Canada, many Jewish communities, organizations and activity groups hold celebratory events to commemorate the day.

Ontario’s Jewish community has made a tremendous contribution to our economic, social and cultural life. I call on all Ontarians to join me in wishing the nation of Israel peace and prosperity in the year ahead.

RONALD JOHN EDWARDS

Mrs. Jane McKenna: This past weekend, the people of Burlington gathered to offer their final respects to Ronald John Edwards, who passed away peacefully on April 2 at the age of 85 after a lifetime of community service.

Ron was the first executive director of the Burlington YMCA and was best known to the residents of my riding

as Mr. Y. He wore that nickname as a badge of honour, and it literally followed him everywhere, as it was also his custom licence plate.

In 2004, the Burlington Y was renamed the Ron Edwards Family YMCA, which is fitting since he lived the values that define the organization: caring, honesty, respect, responsibility and inclusiveness. He championed the Y as a place that all people could enjoy, regardless of financial means.

He was a community builder, and he was generous with his time and energy. Ron was an active Rotarian and recipient of the Paul Harris Fellow award, as well as a member of the Appleby United Church and the Burlington Curling Club.

On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I would like to extend condolences to his wife, Esther, his children, grandchildren, family, friends and loved ones on the passing of this wonderful, wonderful man.

EQUAL VOICE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to rise today because Equal Voice is in the House, and they're having a reception here. They're an amazing organization.

I want to tell you that Girls Government was here yesterday. This is an initiative that Equal Voice supports and members around the House have actually put into place in their ridings. Yesterday, we had some incredible young girls—13 years old—who came and met with two women in power, one of them being the Premier. They brought forward their issues, and they were able to speak directly to women in power.

But they walked past two floors where the walls were covered with portraits of men. That is simply the reality of the history of this and other places of power in our nation. We have to change that.

I'm very proud that in the New Democratic Party we have over 40% women in our caucus, both here and federally. We're excited about that, but that's just the beginning. We need to be over 50%. That is the goal, and that's the goal of Equal Voice.

To ensure that goal, we need to get that message out to our daughters, to our granddaughters, so that the world that they grow up in is a world where the portraits on the walls are equal numbers of men and women. That's what we aim for and that's what Equal Voice aims for in a world where women in Ontario still make only 72 cents for every dollar men make. We're going to change that with Equal Voice's help. Please come out and give them your support this afternoon.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I also rise today to speak in support of Equal Voice, which is going to be hosting a reception later on today. As we all know, our government is committed to encouraging more women to engage in the political system and to seek public office. Although great strides have been made in the advancement of

gender issues in the province, there is still a lot of work to be done in empowerment and advocacy.

Just last week, Ontario observed pay equity day, raising awareness about gender differences in salaries in our province. As part of our action on women's issues, the Ontario government has undertaken a series of programs and action plans pertaining to issues like domestic violence, sexual violence, aboriginal healing and wellness, poverty reduction and long-term affordable housing.

Additionally, this year 66 women and girls are being honoured with Leading Women, Building Communities and Leading Girls, Building Communities recognition certificates for their contributions to improving the lives of others in their communities. Through programs like these, the Ontario government is proud to celebrate and advocate for the women of this great province.

1510

Today, we take note of the fact that although women in Canada compose over 50% of the population, only 25% of the elected officials in our country are women. While that number has improved in recent years, there's always more to be done. Led by this province's first female Premier, Kathleen Wynne, with the support of Deputy Premier Deb Matthews, our government is proud of the fact that one third of cabinet is composed of women.

DON BUMSTEAD

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise today to pay respect to a long-time Meaford resident of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Don Bumstead passed away in his home on Sunday, March 17 at the age of 92.

As a true industry and community leader, Don was one of Meaford's most recognized residents. He was involved in the Meaford Rotary Club, serving as the president on multiple occasions. He was also instrumental in founding the Meaford Hospital Foundation, raising millions of dollars for the local hospital.

Don also served on township council and volunteered on boards and associations across the province. He was, in fact, featured on the cover of Time magazine for his business success—a pretty impressive feat for a farm boy from Meaford.

At a very young age, Don started custom threshing and later started a farm machinery business in Meaford, and after that moved on as founding owner and operator of the Meaford Ford dealership.

Don was always there to help anyone in need. He was a renowned fundraiser in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, receiving the prestigious Whipper "Billy" Watson award for his many years as the top pledge-earner at the Snowarama/Skiarama Easter Seals fundraiser, organized by his good friend the late Tom Norris. In November 2002, Don was awarded a Queen's Jubilee Medal for his outstanding contributions to his country.

Don was married to his wife, Edith, who passed away in May 2012, for 67 years. They had three children—David, Tom and Donna—and many grandchildren and

great-grandchildren. Family was always Don's top priority.

I would like the House to join me in paying respect to Don Bumstead for his great dedication, leadership, hard work and generosity towards his community of Meaford. We will miss you, Don, but you will never be forgotten.

FATHER SERRA SEPARATE SCHOOL

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I rise today to tell you a story about a little school called Father Serra. Every year, under the guidance of their principal, Joe Pannozzo, the school holds a dance-a-thon. For nine years, they've been holding this dance-a-thon in memory of a little boy named Ian Macdonald, who passed away from leukemia. They've raised up to \$112,000 over those nine years. They engage the entire school. They have a wonderful time.

The little girl who came—she's about four years old—she's a survivor, and she brought her piggy bank so that she could add her pennies to that \$112,000. It speaks to the kind of caring that goes on in our schools, the respect that our teachers teach the children on how to care for others, and that they're very much a part of the community that they live in.

They go quietly about this every year, they don't make a great big spiel about it, and yet they have an incredible impact on a lot of people in their community and on a lot of children who now are survivors because of their support and their input.

It's just a way to say thank you to the children, to the parents, to the volunteers, to the teacher administration of a little school tucked away in Etobicoke that is making an extraordinary difference for children with leukemia and lymphoma.

RALPH KLEIN

Mr. Ted Arnott: I rise this afternoon as our caucus critic to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to honour former Alberta Premier Ralph Klein.

As members will know, Ralph Klein passed away late last month. He was a true political icon in Alberta. He served as Premier of Alberta from 1992 to 2006 and led the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party to four consecutive majority governments.

Ralph Klein also had a strong working relationship with former Ontario Premier Mike Harris, and the two Premiers shared a common political philosophy.

In his own way, Ralph Klein had an unvarnished eloquence that was unique and that endeared him to Albertans and Canadians. He had the common touch. He was able to connect with ordinary Albertans and reach out to them in a way that few politicians can match.

Perhaps his greatest legacy to his province will be seen to be his unwavering commitment to fiscal responsibility. When he became Premier, he attacked Alberta's debt and deficit with a vigour and passion that were unrivaled across the country. He recognized that it was

important not only to eliminate the deficit but also pay down the debt, a vision that I have raised in this House many times. His efforts were rewarded when in 2005, under his leadership, Alberta became the only Canadian province to become entirely debt-free.

Ralph Klein achieved a stature such that, across the country, if you thought of Alberta, you immediately thought of Ralph Klein and you smiled. I know that all members would want to join me and extend our sincere condolences to Albertans and to the Klein family.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated April 16, 2013, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE DAY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE JOUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES PRIS EN CHARGE

Ms. Wong moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 53, An Act to proclaim Children and Youth in Care Day / Projet de loi 53, Loi proclamant le Jour des enfants et des jeunes pris en charge.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: By proclaiming May 14 in each year Children and Youth in Care Day, the province of Ontario recognizes the enormous contribution that current and former crown and society wards make to the province, as well as the strength, bravery and resilience shown by these children and youth in the face of adversity.

Mr. Speaker, Children and Youth in Care Day is an important opportunity to raise awareness about children and youth under the care of this province and to commit to supporting them and helping them reach their full potential.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. Jim Wilson: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Just to clarify the speaking order on the Local Food Act this afternoon. I seek unanimous consent that the official opposition lead speech by Mr. Hardeman on Bill 36, the Local Food Act, be stood down, and that the speaking rotation pass to the third party for their leadoff remarks at that time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Wilson is looking for unanimous consent to stand down the leadoff for the Progressive Conservatives and transfer that to the NDP. Do I hear a yes in agreement? Agreed? Agreed. Thank you.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm glad that I finally got this spot away from the member for Durham. I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

“Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions is the result of factors other than Drive Clean, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

“Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false ‘fails,’ which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

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

“That the Minister of the Environment take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Addison.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Michael Mantha: I rise today on behalf of constituents in Algoma–Manitoulin from Spring Bay, Gore

Bay, Providence Bay, Evansville, Mindemoya, and across Manitoulin Island.

1520

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas northern Ontario will suffer a huge loss of service as a result of government cuts to ServiceOntario counters;

“Whereas these cuts will have a negative impact on local businesses and local economies;

“Whereas northerners will now face challenges in accessing their birth certificates, health cards and licences;

“Whereas northern Ontario should not unfairly bear the brunt of decisions to slash operating budgets;

“Whereas, regardless of address, all Ontarians should be treated equally by their government;

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

“Review the decision to cut access to ServiceOntario for northerners, and provide northern Ontarians equal access to these services.”

I agree with this petition and will present it to page Jack to bring to the Clerks’ table.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas the NDP member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton has put forward a plan for auto insurance that would dramatically drive up rates for drivers throughout northern Ontario. According to one estimate, drivers in northwestern Ontario could expect to pay 38.8% more in insurance premiums if the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton’s proposal is adopted;

“Whereas Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada has said, ‘In essence, the bill would force responsible drivers to subsidize the insurance premiums of dangerous drivers’;

“Whereas the leader of the third party and the other NDP members of the Legislature have made it clear that they continue to support the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton’s proposal for auto insurance reform;

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

“To make it clear that the Legislature does not support the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton’s proposal to change auto insurance in Ontario.”

I support this petition, and I will give it to Kamryn for presentation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —have to tell you to stop heckling during petitions.

The member from Simcoe–Grey.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Everybody says everything they want in a petition.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not going to argue, and I'm sure you're not going to start the argument—I'll finish it.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

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

"Whereas we oppose the termination of the operating budget for Springwater Provincial Park in Springwater township on March 31, 2013;

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

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

I agree with this petition and I have signed it.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this. I'll sign my name to it and give it to page Callum.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that's entitled "Good Things Grow in Ontario.

"Whereas the agri-food industry is now, and has historically been, one of the primary economic drivers in Ontario; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario support local processors and producers in Ontario through purchasing and consuming locally grown and raised fruits, vegetables, meat and processed food products; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario farmers and Ontario food producers by leading by example; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario celebrates local Ontario producers and processors and promotes the good things grown, harvested and made in Ontario;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 36, the Local Food Act."

I support this petition, will sign it and hand it to Jack.

AIR QUALITY

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

"Whereas Ontario's Drive Clean program was implemented as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and vehicle emissions have declined significantly from 1998 to 2010; and

"Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

"Whereas the percentage of vehicles that failed emission testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

"Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is in fact less reliable and prone to error; and

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

"That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to phase out the Drive Clean program."

I support this petition, and I'm pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Bonnie.

DOG OWNERSHIP

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

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

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

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

On behalf of the over a thousand dogs that have been killed—and the families who love them—just because of the way they look, I'm going to sign this, and I'm going to give it to Glory to be delivered to the table.

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

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

“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 fully support this petition, and I give it to page Madelyn.

AIR QUALITY

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

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

“Whereas vehicle emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2010 that they are no longer among the major domestic contributors of smog in Ontario; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions is the result of factors other than Drive Clean, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

“Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false ‘fails,’ which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

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

“That the Minister of the Environment takes immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

I concur with this—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Parkdale–High Park.

AIR-RAIL LINK

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

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

“Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by 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.”

I agree, of course, and give it to Jack to be delivered to the table.

1530

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

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

“Whereas the agri-food industry is now, and has historically been, one of the primary economic drivers in Ontario; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario support local processors and producers in Ontario through purchasing and consuming locally grown and raised fruits, vegetables, meat and processed food products; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario farmers and Ontario food producers by leading by example; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario celebrates local Ontario producers and processors and promotes the good things grown, harvested and made in Ontario;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 36, the Local Food Act.”

I fully support this, Madam Speaker, and give it to Rosalin.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a very important petition here from residents of Prince Edward county in my riding:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents and municipalities across Ontario want the ability to veto and/or plan for industrial wind turbines in their community; and

“Whereas ratepayers in Ontario want all forms of energy generation to be affordable and reliable; and

“Whereas residents of Ontario want the feed-in tariff program to be eliminated; and

“Whereas residents of Ontario want to protect environmentally sensitive areas like the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine from the development of wind turbines;

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

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s bill, the Ensuring Affordable Energy Act, and call committee hearings immediately on the bill,” which will be debated this Thursday.

I support this and will pass it to the table with Stacey.

WIND TURBINES

Mrs. Jane McKenna: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents and municipalities across Ontario want the ability to veto and/or plan for industrial wind turbines in their community; and

“Whereas ratepayers in Ontario want all forms of energy generation to be affordable and reliable; and

“Whereas residents of Ontario want the feed-in tariff program to be eliminated; and

“Whereas residents of Ontario want to protect environmentally sensitive areas like the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine from the development of wind turbines;

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

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s bill, the Ensuring Affordable Energy Act, and call committee hearings immediately on the bill.”

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I’m going to sign my name to this—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. I continue to get petitions in from farm dealerships titled Stop the Tire Tax Hikes.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship’s eco fees for farm and construction tires;

“Whereas Ontario imposes tire eco fees that are dramatically higher than those in other provinces;

“Whereas other provincial governments either exempt agricultural tires from recycling programs or charge fees only up to \$75;

“Whereas Ontario’s opposition has proposed a plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling;

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

“Suspend the hikes to Ontario Tire Stewardship’s fees on farm and off-the-road tires pending proposals to lower costs.”

I support these signatures and sign my own.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The time for petitions has ended.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LOCAL FOOD ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LES ALIMENTS LOCAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 9, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013 /
Projet de loi 36, Loi édictant la Loi de 2013 sur les aliments locaux.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It’s always an honour to stand here and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, but today, to do the lead on An Act to enact the Local Food Act on their behalf is a special honour for me today. A lot of the people in Timiskaming–Cochrane are farmers or they’re the descendants of farmers. I’ve been a farmer my whole life and I’m going to focus today, in our lead, on how the Local Food Act relates to the agricultural sector. Some of my more urban members, when they speak on this, are going to focus on what the Local Food Act means to urban influences. I think that’s how we’re going to handle this today.

I would first like to take this opportunity to recognize the person who basically got me involved and is actually the reason for me standing here today.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Ernie.

Mr. John Vanthof: And no, it's not my uncle Ernie, the member for Oxford. He's the reason that I'm NDP.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes?

Mr. Steve Clark: I just think, since we do have a family connection, that he really should leave the good member for Oxford out of the conversation. We all know the member for Oxford's influence on that member.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I go back to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. Continue.

Mr. John Vanthof: Actually, I have a very good relationship with my uncle, the honourable member from Oxford. We get along on a lot of issues; we don't get along on political issues.

But the person who was really responsible for my entrance into politics is—well, I'll tell you the story.

Ms. Laurie Scott: You've got an hour.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's right, I've got an hour. I've never had to speak for an hour before in this House, and I'm going to take full advantage of it. So, 25 years ago, my wife and I had just bought a dairy farm—a small one; it was a bit rundown—and we were struggling. We had lots of big dreams but no equity. Anyone who has run a business knows that big dreams and little equity don't go together very well.

I was solely focused on trying to make our little farm run. One morning, someone came into my barn and asked me to attend a meeting of the Temiskaming Milk Producers' Association. His name was Albert Gauthier. I knew Albert by reputation. People from the city might not understand this, but I knew him from crop tours, because he ran a farm that I would drive by once in a while just to see how it was really done. He had the kind of farm where everything was perfect, and his cows gave the most milk in the district.

He showed up at my barn, and he talked to me for half an hour about why I should go to this meeting. At the time, I had no patience for meetings and, quite frankly, no interest.

Mr. Grant Crack: Quite a change from now.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. It's scary, actually. The only reason that I went to the annual meeting of the Temiskaming milk producers is because Albert Gauthier came to my barn and asked me. My wife and I went to that meeting and before I knew it, somehow Albert had me nominated to some kind of subcommittee. And 27 years later, I'm standing here.

Albert and I didn't always agree, and we fought lots of issues beside each other. Sometimes he laughed at my decisions. I'm pretty sure he voted for me, but I'm sure it was tough because NDP wasn't the Gauthier family's natural choice. He made a big commitment. I think it's really important that I recognize someone like Albert Gauthier and his wife, Jeanne d'Arc, not only for what they did for our community but what they did for my

family. There were lots of times when I needed someone's advice, and he was the man I turned to, so I would really like to thank him.

Many in this House are familiar with the slogan "Farmers Feed Cities." Now it seems that people in places of power have come to realize how crucial a role the agri-food sector plays in our province. It's about time. The agri-food sector employs over 700,000 people in Ontario and adds over \$34 billion to the provincial economy. If you think about it, it's the cornerstone of the provincial economy, providing employment throughout the province. It's not only the cornerstone; it's the largest economic driver in the province. Through the recent recession, it was the only sector that actually grew and continued to grow.

1540

But everyone has a different perspective of the food we eat. From the producer, the processor, the retailer, restaurant owner, the family with the means to purchase only organic or who can focus on local, to the mom who can't even scrape by for her kids by clipping coupons, food is a necessity for all, but not equally accessible to all.

Often, people who grow food for a living tend to be not less passionate, because farmers are certainly passionate about growing food, but we're more practical because our living depends on how our crops yield, what they are worth or how much milk is in the bulk tank. Many of today's farms are large, so the income of several families depends on the fate of that farm.

By the same token, someone of very limited income is probably less concerned where the food comes from than how much it costs, whether or not they can feed that family. For people being squeezed by the cost of everyday living, a rise in the cost of food can mean forgoing something else, and that's something—we are all in favour, Speaker, of promoting local food. But we all have to realize that for some in this province, for many in this province, the option of looking for local food isn't there. Their option is just making sure that they have enough money to buy food, and that's a big difference.

This afternoon, the reintroduced Local Food Act allows us the opportunity to add the views of the New Democratic Party to the debate on the bill and how it could impact the agricultural sector. That's where I'm going to focus. I'm a farmer and the only farmer in our caucus. I don't know how many other farmers there are, but that's where I'm going to focus.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: We have a farmer in the other caucus.

For those watching at home, I would like to give a brief history of this proposed legislation, just a bit of a recap of how it was enacted.

The reintroduced Local Food Act started out, as far as I can tell, as a Liberal campaign promise in the last election. They were suffering from some—how should I say it?—lack of connection in the rural community. You

know what? A discussion about local food might have helped their chances. I think that's where it started.

It was a good idea, because I'm not sure if local food really had caught on as much in the rural parts of the province as it had in the urban part. People in urban Ontario are really wanting to reconnect with where their food comes from, and for a lot of reasons. Local food tastes better. It just does. That's not a big argument that we have to make.

It's more available than it used to be; farmers' markets, there's a lot of places. People were already clueing in, as were farmers' markets, restaurants and even major retailers. They're starting to focus in a lot more—you'll find a lot more local food in major retail outlets, and that's because people are demanding it. If you run a business, especially a retail business, you are going to supply what people demand.

People are demanding local food, and that's a good thing. That's a great thing, actually. That's a great thing for consumers, a great thing for everybody in the chain and a fantastic thing for farmers in Ontario. That's why we can create altogether 700,000 jobs. That's a great thing.

There's one other thing that was driving the Local Food Act. It's the last I'm going to mention, but it was certainly not the least. Our leader, Andrea Horwath, had already introduced a local food bill. That bill, its focus was to set a target for local food purchases by government agencies. It was fairly straightforward. It would set targets, and those targets would provide, basically, a solid customer base for those food producers. It would also provide a really good example to private enterprise. Some of the aspects of that bill—some, you can still search for them—if you really look hard, you can still find them. But there are a lot of differences in what has been proposed here and what our bill was.

But let's go back to our history. After the election, the next time we heard about the Local Food Act was at the International Plowing Match in Ayr, where it was re-announced—

Mr. Steve Clark: To great fanfare.

Mr. John Vanthof: Great fanfare. Everybody was onstage. You know what? Who wouldn't want to talk about local food? It is a great issue to talk about. There's no greater issue for a press release than talking about local food.

Hon. Jeff Leal: You bet.

Mr. John Vanthof: Right? A great press release.

Then it was introduced into the Legislature by the then Minister of Agriculture. But after the technical briefings, we started to run into a bit of—how do I describe it? We were both underwhelmed and very concerned at the same time. The wording in the act—a little while from now in my hour, I'm going to discuss the wording in the reintroduced act—but the wording in the first act was very vague. We say this about a lot of Liberal bills, but this one—

Mr. Michael Mantha: Plan to make a plan.

Mr. John Vanthof: That wasn't even—it was a plan to talk about making a plan. It wasn't even about making a plan.

But where we had our problem is, you shouldn't really have to make a law to talk about making a plan. It contained no set goals or objectives; objectives and goals would be set by the ministry after the act was proclaimed into law. That was a problem for us. There would be consultation, but exactly who would be consulted with wasn't specified. There was, in the original act, in some of the supporting documents, some indication of how the consultation was to take place. Specifically, there was going to be a minister's forum. It also had some directions which the act was going to take: There was going to be support for direct farm marketing and farm markets—good things. It was very vague.

Once again, it was great for press releases. The Local Food Act has got no ending for great press releases. But in the end, there wasn't much meat on the bones.

Actually, there was only one action item, and that was the creation of a Celebrate Local Food Week. Even there—

Hon. Jeff Leal: You can't criticize that.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, but I can criticize that. Yes, Celebrate Local Food Week is a great idea. I would celebrate Local Food Week. It's a week to celebrate the quality, the taste and the availability of local food. As we all know, and as the minister tried to sing it last time he introduced it, good things grow in Ontario. Once again, great—

Mr. Steve Clark: Sing it.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Sing it.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, I'm not going to attempt that.

But Celebrate Local Food Week was the last week of May. I'm a farmer, and there's a few things that farmers know instinctively. There is a time to plant, there is a time to harvest, and there is a time to celebrate the harvest. And May is not that time.

Interjection: Asparagus maybe.

Mr. John Vanthof: Unless you want to eat asparagus or seeds, it was not—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What do you have against asparagus?

1550

Mr. John Vanthof: Nothing against asparagus.

You'd think you would want to hold the Celebrate Local Food Week at a time when there were multitudes of Ontario foods to eat—and we'll get to that.

Vague as it was, we were looking forward, as I am today—I was really looking forward to this debate because it would give us a chance to talk about agriculture in this Legislature. I think all parties would agree that we don't talk about agriculture enough in this Legislature, and I'm sure if you looked in Hansard from many years gone by, it used to be much more prominent. I'm told that the legislative calendar even used to revolve around agriculture. So it would give us time to talk about agriculture.

As I was preparing for the debate—a funny thing happened on the way to the debate. Do you know what happened? The government was prorogued. I can remember: I was sitting with the minister, talking about the Local Food Act, and he told me, “I have to go upstairs for a meeting.” That was the very night that the government was prorogued. Imagine my surprise—and I was surprised. I’m not going to go into a long discussion of why the government was prorogued. The Liberals used that time, a bit self-servingly, to pick a new leader. I don’t think they prorogued to improve the Local Food Act—maybe, because agriculture is pretty important; but I don’t think they did that.

The prominence of the Local Food Act continued to increase, because during the Liberal leadership campaign—and I’m sure everyone in the House will recall this—one of the candidates stated that if she won, she was going to take the portfolio of the Minister of Agriculture and Food. In the rural concessions, that didn’t really create too much of a buzz.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: It didn’t create a negative buzz either. But it wasn’t a real big press release. You know how we measure everything on that side with press releases? It wasn’t a real big press release.

Speaker, as we all know, that candidate is now the Premier, and she did fulfill her promise to become the Minister of Agriculture—

Interjection: And Food.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and Food.

When she did take the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, that did create waves along the back roads. It raised awareness and it raised concerns along the back roads. OMAF, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, is an incredibly diverse ministry. There are 200 commodities, plus all the people who process the food. It’s a big, big deal. It’s definitely a full-time job, and more. So people were concerned that if you’re Premier and the minister, you might not have the time to fully grasp the agriculture portfolio. They had real concerns with that. At local commodity meetings, the discussion at the lunch break often still reverts to that issue. Some people think, “Well, she became the minister because she has got some really good ideas.” Or some people say, “Oh, there are some really bad things coming.” You know what? The jury is still out on that.

There are those in this House who have brought up over and over again in their say-no-to-everything campaign that it’ll never work. We have a different take. We firmly believe, in the New Democratic Party, that being Minister of Agriculture and Food is a full-time job. There is no question about that—a full-time job, and more. But if the Premier specifically wants to take on the Ministry of Agriculture—

Mr. Michael Mantha: And Food.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and Food. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin continues to support me by mentioning—because most times, when farmers talk about

the Minister of Agriculture, they don’t always tack on “and Food.”

We believe that if the Premier really wants to take that job, there is no one better to take a couple of issues and move them down the field because there’s always—before I got this job, I actually lobbied here once in a while. I used to be on the board of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario; I’m going to talk a little bit about them a little bit later. Lots of times, we’d get to hear, “Oh, we would love to help you, if we could just get the Premier’s office inside.” Well, now we have got the Premier’s office inside because she’s the Minister of Agriculture—

Mr. Michael Mantha: And Food.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and Food. Thank you.

Interjection: Don’t forget the—

Mr. John Vanthof: Eventually, I will get this right.

But when that concerns the Local Food Act, it also puts more emphasis on what the Local Food Act actually contains, because for many, how seriously the Premier, or the Minister of Agriculture—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and Food, takes the Local Food Act is going to be a bellwether or a barometer of how seriously the Premier and her government are going to take the agriculture sector, the 700,000 jobs. I know all 700,000 jobs don’t depend on local food; we all know that. But it’s a bellwether, so it’s put a lot more focus, rightfully so.

One of the things the Premier said—one of the reasons she’s taken this portfolio is to put more focus on agriculture in the province. Great. But she has also put a lot more focus on the Local Food Act and what it actually contains. I think her reputation—someone at the OFA, from OMAF, said, “What would you like the Premier to be judged on when she’s no longer?”—because she’s going to be the Minister of Agriculture and Food, I believe, for a year—she’s committed to—if the government lasts that long. To us, the Local Food Act is a barometer.

That’s the history of the act. Let’s talk about the history of food. In the not-too-distant past, all food in this province—across the world but in this province, too—used to be local. That’s why we ate corn in August, asparagus—when does asparagus come out in southern Ontario?—strawberries in July, and we ate lots of beets, canned beets, and frozen beans in the wintertime. But over the years, our economy became more industrialized, and transportation and food preservation became quicker and relatively cheaper. Rural people moved off the farm, and the supermarket was born. We eat strawberries in February, but they’re not from our country, and they don’t really taste the same.

People have rediscovered their connection to local food and the people who grow it. As I said before, that’s a good thing for farmers, processors—everyone. There are fine examples of local food across this province. When I was listening to the Liberal lead—the member from Prescott mentioned some in his riding. The Premier mentioned some. I’m sure my colleague from Algoma—

Manitoulin, when he does his few minutes on this, is going to talk about some of the great food available. Hawberry Farms—there is some great stuff in Algoma–Manitoulin, as there is in Timiskaming–Cochrane.

For those who have never been to Timiskaming–Cochrane, and for all of those who think that there's nothing in northern Ontario but rocks and trees and lakes, you would be sadly mistaken. A lot of the people in this House, the first time—for a lot of them—that they came to Timiskaming–Cochrane was the 2009 International Plowing Match. A lot of them will tell you, when you come over that hill after three hours of Canadian Shield and there's 400,000 acres of farmland—200,000 in Quebec and 200,000 in Ontario—it's quite a sight. That's the Little Clay Belt.

1600

Not only does my riding contain the Little Clay Belt, but it contains the Greater Clay Belt. That starts about another hour north, and that's one million acres. Ours is 400,000; that one's one million acres. It's got more potential for agricultural development than anywhere else in this province. The only thing that's holding that area back—it's not the land. Why that area didn't develop like Timiskaming, like the Little Clay Belt, is because there are more mines and mills in that area. So every time farming was tough, it was easier to make money in a mine or a mill. That's why that land wasn't developed the same way ours was, because we don't have any really close mines or mills.

The proof of that is some of the most modern farms—and in my colleague Gilles Bisson's riding, Timmins–James Bay, they just had an opening for a dairy farm, the Haasen family, a two-robot dairy farm.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The Haasens.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, the Haasens. It's probably, as we speak, if not the most modern, definitely one of the most modern farms in Ontario. They are good farmers, and their farm is an example. There are other farms in that area, examples of what can be done in our part of the province.

So we know what we're talking about about local food. Not only can we do the production thing, but we also have local food processing, we have farmers' markets, small abattoirs. The one I'd like to spend a little bit of time on, since I have—I only have half an hour now. It's going pretty well.

But one that deserves a few minutes is Thornloe Cheese. Thornloe Cheese was a small cheese factory. It was bought up by a bigger company; once again, bought up by a bigger company. Seven years ago, Parmalat Canada announced that they were going to close Thornloe Cheese and take the quota somewhere else. The local farmers, we got together and, with the help of the community—it was a big effort; we had to move a few mountains. It was the first time in Canadian dairy processing history that a major dairy processor backed down and sold production quota to a small community-owned company. The people who ran Thornloe Cheese had some big hurdles. I'd like to thank a group who stepped in and who

now are the proud owners of Thornloe Cheese, and that's EastGen. It's a co-operative owned by farmers throughout the province.

Thornloe Cheese, after some really rough times, is now available in a lot of places; not just in Timiskaming–Cochrane, but across the province. If you go to the Royal York, down the street, you can get Thornloe Cheese. Many specialty shops and some bigger stores carry Thornloe Cheese.

If you see a Thornloe Cheese stand, I advise you to buy some Devil's Rock blue. It's in a little package; it looks like a little mountain. All Thornloe Cheese is named after places in Timiskaming–Cochrane. On Lake Timiskaming, there's a huge outcrop where you can look over—it's 600 feet up. It's beautiful; it's called Devil's Rock. That cheese is named after Devil's Rock. It is fantastic stuff.

So, in her lead, the Minister of Agriculture and Food stated that she felt, on the local food issue, that the public was probably ahead of the government. I'd say we would agree with that. The public is far ahead of the government on local food.

The real question that we have regarding this legislation is whether the Minister of Agriculture and Food is truly serious about protecting and improving access to local food, or whether the “new” Liberal government—that's the term they like to use—is just trying to get ahead of the local food parade and take credit for the work of others. That's the question, and that's what we're going to discuss about this.

I'd like to take a few minutes and talk about some other legislation that actually does protect local food, and one of those pieces of legislation is federal, but it's worth talking about. The CFIA regulates food packaging sizes in Canada. They won't be doing that very much longer if the Conservative cousins from our people to the right here have their way, because they want to stop that. They want to stop regulation of everything, to our right. I'm not wild about regulation on everything, but there are times when regulation is a good thing. So because we have regulated package sizing in this country, usually it's packaged in Canada and it uses Canadian products to fill those packages.

Heinz in Leamington is a good example. You know what? Heinz is threatened because of CFIA, because the Conservatives are cutting regulated package sizing. And it's not just Heinz. There are a lot of things that are threatened because of the lack of regulated package sizing, because when you regulate package sizing, you have the ability to regulate what goes in those packages. You have the ability to regulate the food, how the food is produced. You have a lot more control.

So will the Local Food Act have anything to do with this issue? No. Let's be upfront. The Local Food Act and the CFIA are two different things, okay? But there is a connection, not with the Local Food Act but with the Premier, because who better? This is one of those, when you want to move a ball down the field, the Minister of Agriculture and Food is the Premier.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The quarterback.

Mr. John Vanthof: She's the quarterback—and not just the quarterback; she's the owner of the team. So who better to go to the federal government and try and change their minds, and if you can't change their minds, try and come up with some plan to save thousands of jobs in Leamington, in Tecumseh, with the farmers? We talk here about the Local Food Act as a conception. That's local food that we're going to lose unless somebody steps up to the plate. There's one for the Minister of Agriculture and Food to take.

But we've got another issue that's not federal, it's provincial, so it's right up our alley, and it was passed in this Legislature almost 50 years ago. A lot of people probably don't know that. A lot of people know about supply management. That's how our dairy products and our poultry and eggs are regulated in this country. Everyone thinks that's controlled federally, and a big part of supply management is controlled federally because of tariff barriers, but one of the benefits to supply management is that there are dairy—and I'm going to focus on Ontario, right? There are dairy farms all across this province, from Cornwall to Rainy River, from Essex to Hearst—

Hon. Liz Sandals: The Haasens.

Mr. John Vanthof: Even farther north than the Haasens there's a dairy, and that's because of supply management. That's because they're guaranteed a fair price, and because they are regulated and because they work together, they also pool their transportation costs. It's actually an incredible system. They've had to fight, and we've had to fight, ever since it was implemented. It's always a fight, and part of that fight is federal, but there is a big part that's provincial, and a lot of people don't realize that.

How raw milk is protected from outside imports: That's federal. How a consumer's milk is protected: It's protected under the Milk Act, and that's provincial. So in Ontario, milk is milk. If it says "milk" on the package, it's milk. If it says "chocolate milk" on the package, because of the Milk Act and the regulations contained within, it's 90% milk and the rest is sugar and chocolate. But if it says "dairy beverage," all bets are off.

1610

Interjection: What is it?

Mr. John Vanthof: It can be a percentage of anything. But at least we have the definition. In Ontario, we have milk and we have dairy beverages, and that's because of the Milk Act. In some other provinces, you have something called "milk beverage." The "milk" is in big letters and the "beverage" is in little letters, so you think you're buying milk.

Thanks to the regulation in the province of Ontario—

Mr. Steve Clark: Whose regulation?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's a good regulation.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: A PC regulation.

Mr. John Vanthof: Even the PCs have a good idea once in a while. But that, folks, like the tariff protection, is always under attack because processors, especially the

big ones, can make more money with milk beverages than they can with milk. That's another issue that the Premier always has to be attentive to.

I think it's about time I actually started looking at the act itself. The reason that I talked about the first two issues—the CFIA and the Milk Act—is to kind of compare how this act stacks up to them.

I'd like to start with the explanatory note. Basically, the explanatory note is the Coles Notes of an act. You have to read farther than the explanatory note because the devil is always in the details. But if you want to get a quick view—and I'd like to read the second part. I think I'll start with the second part of the explanatory note:

The Minister of Agriculture and Food may "establish goals or targets to aspire to in respect of local food. The minister must engage in consultation before setting the goals or targets. The minister may direct a public sector organization to provide information that would assist the minister in establishing goals or targets, understanding steps that are being taken or have been taken to meet a goal or target, or assessing progress that is being made or has been made toward meeting a goal or target."

If this outfit had written the Milk Act, we would have lost supply management years ago. There is nothing here. I'm going to go through it step by step, but that is a big problem.

I'm going to go to the purposes of the act:

"The purposes of this act are as follows:

"(1) To foster successful and resilient local food economies and systems throughout Ontario." Sounds good.

"(2) To increase awareness of the diversity of local food in Ontario." Once again, good.

"(3) To encourage the development of new markets for local food." Good.

The big question is how. Those are all good, but how are we going to do that? That's where we get to the next part of the act.

The next part of the act is all the definitions, and that's good. The one definition we have a bit of a problem with is "local food," because it basically says if you have local food—here we go:

"(b) subject to any limitations in the regulations, food and beverages made in Ontario if they include ingredients produced or harvested in Ontario." If you're making apple pies or something like that and the cinnamon doesn't come from Ontario, is that qualified as a local food?

Interjection: Ontario apples.

Mr. John Vanthof: We have to make sure that says that somewhere, because I don't see it in the legislation.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Cinnamon; not the apple.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Cinnamon. Cinnamon doesn't come from Ontario, my friend.

But one of our biggest problems comes in section 3. Remember when I was talking about the first local food act and how Local Food Week was in May? They thought, "Wait a second; we should change that." Those people who were complaining about it being in May were

right. We should make the Local Food Week at a time when there's more local food. So what they did is they picked the week before Thanksgiving—

Mr. Grant Crack: What's wrong with that?

Mr. John Vanthof: I believe some people on the Liberal side said, "What's wrong with that?" Well, there is a little problem with that, because someone at the Ministry of Agriculture forgot to check their calendar. It's the same week as Agriculture Week, and there is a huge problem there, because to those looking in—one of the members across the way, from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell said, "What's wrong with that?" There is a big difference between celebrating local food and Agriculture Week, and I'm going to take a few minutes to explain the difference to you.

Agriculture Week is about the people who grow the food. There's a difference—a huge difference. Agriculture Week: It's about a farmer standing in the field in the spring, picking up a handful of soil and deciding whether that soil is ready to plant or not. Agriculture Week: It's about watching your crops wither in a drought, getting blasted by hail and wondering if you're going to make your payments that winter. It's about a combine pulling in and doing the outside round of your field. It's about the feeling you get when you know that that's going to be a bumper crop; that is an incredible feeling, after you've tended that crop all summer. It's about staying up all night and saving a heifer calf from your best cow. It's also about, a couple of days later, losing that cow to milk fever. It's about last Thursday when the farmers had to deal with the ice storm, and for the people who work in agriculture, their first thought was the welfare of their animals. That is Agriculture Week.

Agriculture Week is looking in the paper and seeing wedding pictures in front of tractors, either big, new John Deeres or old, restored ones. It's about weddings, births and funerals in little country churches. That is Agriculture Week.

And for the people on the other side and for the people who wrote this and for the people who can't tell the difference, I don't know if it's that they just don't care or are just too lazy to look or the whole ministry is just too much Toronto to really understand, but it is two different things. We will support this bill going to committee, but that is one thing that has got to change; otherwise, I will never vote for it.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: And to make fun of it, that it's the same, just proves that deep down, a lot of people on the other side do not understand farmers. Don't laugh. It's not the same. That one really, really bugs me.

"Goals and targets"—here we go—"4(1) The minister may, to further the purposes of this act, establish goals or targets to aspire to in respect of local food." Every time I read through this, "The minister may," I kept wanting to take a pencil and put in brackets "or may not." It was just a natural tendency: "The minister may or the minister may not."

Section 4(2): "Before establishing or amending a goal or target, the minister shall consult organizations that, in the minister's opinion, have an interest in the goal or target." We don't have any goals or targets specified, and you know what? The minister picks who he or she is going to pick to consult with. Who is the minister going to pick? The same people they picked to talk about the horse racing industry? Or maybe they're going to pick the same crack team that got the Local Food Week wrong twice.

1620

Hon. Jeff Leal: Elmer Buchanan?

Mr. John Vanthof: No, that wasn't Elmer Buchanan. That was you guys. Sorry.

Speaker, this legislation does not define who or when or how consultation is done. I'm sure stakeholders read the bill. They may mentally insert themselves into the clauses and think, "That's good. We can talk." But there's no assurance whatsoever that relevant consultation will take place on whatever issue the minister decides to consult on. Once again, this section has got to be amended so there's a clear understanding of who is going to be consulted with and when. I see big problems coming with this.

I know what they're trying to avoid. They're worried about how organic producers are going to be upset if there's somebody from Monsanto, and Monsanto is going to be upset from organic producers, so we might as well talk about this now before it becomes law, if it becomes law, as opposed to after.

Number 6: I've got to find number 6. That's almost my favourite clause in here. This wasn't in the original food act, by the way. This is an add-on, a quotation, an improvement.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Maybe.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, maybe.

"At least once every three years, the minister shall prepare a report that"—I've got to get my comma in the right place—"in respect of the reporting period,

"(a) summarizes the government's activities in respect of local food;

"(b) describes the local food goals or targets that have been established under the act...."

This is three years after the act is law. Don't you think it would make sense to describe the local food goals or targets that have been established under the act while you're approving the act?

I can just imagine me going back to people like Albert Gauthier and his son Yves, who actually is the manager of Thornloe Cheese, and he says, "How did you make your decision? What was going on with that?"

"Well, you know, I don't really know what the rules are. I don't know who will be consulted or how they will be chosen. I don't know if our region will be covered or not. But we will find out three years from now when the minister issues the local food report and accompanying press release." Come on. As a farmer, that's crazy, and as a legislator, it's even worse. How can you pass an act and then talk about how the goals that will be set will be set

three years after? And in big brackets, we have, “Trust us.” Come on, folks. That has got to be amended.

I appreciate, we appreciate that agriculture and local food is incredibly diverse. So you can't come up with accurate targets and goals sitting here. What this act has to do is actually lay out a consultation process and who to consult with, how it's going to be publicly held, how those decisions will be made—not for political reasons, but for policy reasons—and how they will actually work. You don't pass a law and then talk about the objectives of that law three years after you passed it. Come on. Really? I can't overemphasize that enough. That line is so good, I just have to read it again. I'm a bit frustrated, but—for Albert, I'm going to read it again:

« Au moins une fois tous les trois ans, le ministre prépare un rapport qui, concernant la période visée :

« ...décrit les buts ou les objectifs fixés en vertu de la Loi en ce qui concerne les aliments locaux... »

It doesn't even make sense to me in French. How? In all seriousness, it's nice to joke about this, but you cannot pass a law and pass the goals three years after the law.

Interjection: Who wrote that?

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, who wrote that?

Furthermore, this bill completely fails to address or even mention some of the issues that are impeding Ontario's access to local food. One of these issues—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaking of Uncle Ernie, I was so looking forward to having the member from Oxford speak before me, but it didn't work out that way, so he's just going to have to copy my speech now.

Furthermore, Speaker, this bill completely fails to address or even mention some of the issues that are impeding Ontario's access to local food. What I'm going to talk about here isn't a popular issue, but I've brought it up to the Premier, the Minister of Agriculture—

Mr. Michael Mantha: And Food.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and Food. It used to be Rural Affairs, but the member from Peterborough took that.

I think I brought it up to the Minister of Rural Affairs, as well, and we had a good meeting. I have a lot of respect for the Minister of Rural Affairs, but he should get somebody different to write this stuff. I talked about how some regulation is good. Well, in some cases, regulation is not so good. In some cases, especially for small processors, sometimes overregulation kills local food. I'd like to make it very clear that on this side, we are not in favour of compromising food safety in any way; no one is, I think we all agree.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: On the CFIA thing? Yes, maybe there's one I would agree with the Liberals on—one.

In the case of small abattoirs that have to—and I've got a couple of them in my riding. I've got Creative Meats in Warren, I've got Rheal's Meat Market, and I've got Mad Murray's in Holtyre.

Interjection: Mad Murray?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's what he goes by: Mad Murray. Murray has a right to be mad. Talk about

overregulation—Mad Murray had to go through an audit process on kill day. For those of you who come from the farming industry, from the agriculture industry, there are days in an abattoir when the abattoir is really busy. That is not the day that you do the routine inspection, because you're actually hurting animal welfare. This has nothing to do with meat—you have to have a meat inspector there; that's granted, but you could maybe schedule the routine inspections on days when you weren't doing your job. That's a huge issue. We've lost so many rural abattoirs. If you want to talk about food safety, when you overregulate something and you drive businesses like that—some people might not like what I'm about to say, but I'm a farmer, and I have the right to say it. When you drive small businesses like abattoirs out of business, do you know what happens? A lot of the same things happen, but they happen in someone's garage or behind someone's barn, where there is no regulation.

1630

Now, I've talked to the Minister of Rural Affairs and I've talked to the Minister of Agriculture and Food about this issue, but nowhere in the Local Food Act—and I know it's not a popular issue maybe in some places. But nowhere in the Local Food Act does it say how we are actually going to—how would I put it?—make a ratio between the level of regulation and the level of risk. A big place like Maple Leaf Foods has a higher risk because it has way more coverage. If something goes wrong, they have way more coverage. That's a huge, huge issue.

Another issue—much less contentious, perhaps—is access to local food across the province, specifically vegetables and stuff like that. Here, it's the Toronto food terminal, right? There should be more food hubs across the province. I see the Conservative member; he's nodding. In the PCs' white paper, they have mentioned that there should be two more, but do you know what the problem with—the PCs suffer from the same problem that the Liberals suffer from. They make decisions based on political purposes. So is it just a coincidence—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Is it just a coincidence that the two places where there should be food terminals, according to the PCs, are where there are going to be by-elections? You know, you should kind of base—and the same thing: You want more food terminals? We should actually have a consultation process before the decision is made and actually pick the spots where they actually would work the best.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You hit a nerve. They're both heckling you.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, I know. Everybody likes heckling.

So, in closing, I would like to make it very clear—

Mr. Michael Mantha: Oh, don't close.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, I've only got two minutes left. It went amazingly fast.

Our party is going to support—

Ms. Laurie Scott: You said you weren't going to.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no. We are going to support the Local Food Act going to committee, and it has to be the things that I've specified and the things that some of my more urban members are going to talk about, and some of my rural colleagues.

We want the Local Food Act to work, but the Local Food Act that has been proposed by the "new" Wynne government is just a press release, and we're going to have to work to make that actually work for local producers, for local retailers, for the processors and for the most important people, so people can actually have access to the food from Manitoulin, the food from Rainy River. I'm sure that in London there's some great local food. Davenport: There might even be local food in Davenport. I'm sure he will correct me. That's what we're supposed to do in this House.

I am incredibly disappointed with—I don't know how else to describe this bill—the laziness displayed in this bill. You've got to make it a lot better than this. We've actually got to get to the point where we have the goals and objectives, where we can vote on the goals and objectives before we pass the law. That would make sense to me.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm glad the Minister of Rural Affairs hears that, because I'm really shocked that he didn't pick this up. So be prepared for some major amendments—I'm sorry for the prop, Speaker. Be prepared for some major amendments so that we can actually make the Local Food Act work for Ontarians.

Thank you, Speaker.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to congratulate the honourable member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. He is one of the nicest guys in the House, and he's also one of the most entertaining as well. He did a great job on his first hour.

The member made some great points about what's happening in Ontario and Ontario's economy with regard to the \$34 billion that agriculture and food bring into Ontario; the 700,000 jobs. Those are all great, positive things. We've recognized that. We've also recognized, as the member had said, that people in the cities now are looking for more local Ontario foods. I would say that they're looking now more because of our investments we've made in Foodland Ontario, for example. We've invested over \$100 million in Foodland Ontario since we took office. So people are aware of what's going on in Ontario.

I want to make a comment about Agriculture Week versus Local Food Week: I just don't understand. He's giving me the impression that he's insulted by this and that perhaps farmers are insulted by this, but we respect what farmers do, so we're tying the two together to say, "Let's bring those people from the cities to acknowledge what the agricultural community does." We can actually all work together, because that's what this bill is all about: It's about inspiration; it's about aspirational goals.

We're looking at setting targets in conjunction with stakeholders. We're not going to be imposing targets that are going to affect our trade obligations in the future. We have to be careful, because we can't have our borders shut as well, because Ontario exports a lot of good Ontario food to other jurisdictions as well. So we are mindful of our trade commitments. That's why the bill is written the way it is. Could there be improvements? Perhaps. Wait to see.

But I can tell you that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food right now has a great minister and has had one previously, since I was elected in 2011. She is focusing on all the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to give comment on my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane, a farmer who—we like to see the input from the agriculture groups here. We even like to see them get elected.

He termed this bill, the Local Food Act that has been brought in by the government, as—I like that—a "lazy bill." Can I use that? It's a lazy bill. It's a good press release; I agree with him on that too. But it is really not getting to the root of a lot of the problems that our rural communities, our agricultural communities, are facing, right? The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane is right: There's a huge disconnect with the Liberal government and rural Ontario. We saw that in the results of the last election.

He mentioned some certain sections in the bill that there's no question—I love it. It's that, "The minister may, to further the purposes of this act, establish goals or targets to aspire to in respect of local food." So maybe they will, maybe they won't set targets. Maybe they will, maybe once every three years, kind of look at those reports, if they did set the targets or the goals to start with. So, very ambiguous terminology when really, what do you hear from small businesses? We're talking about agriculture in this bill—frustration; rules and regulations.

The PC caucus, under the direction of our critic, Ernie Hardeman, the member from Oxford, has done surveys. The number one thing: Rules and regulations are killing small business, driving farmers crazy; replications. I know that in my riding—it's a huge agricultural area and produces some of the finest products in Ontario; I'll give them a plug for sure—there's a billboard in one of the stores with just some of the permits. It's plastered with all of the permits that they have to have that are all, really, duplications. It could be streamlined much better. But that's just an example of some of the things that this government could actually do to improve the agriculture industry and that isn't reflected in this bill that we're debating today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: Madam Speaker.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mrs. Speaker.

It gives me pleasure to speak to G36, the Local Food Act. It also gives me great pleasure to stand behind our critic for agriculture. He's a gentleman who speaks from the heart. He's a gentleman who speaks from his expertise. He's a gentleman who speaks from knowledge. He utmost, at the forefront, has a passion about farming in this province. It's something that I believe this House lacks. I'm so very honoured to have him as a colleague, as a part of our caucus, because he certainly brings a different insight, and a true insight, as to the struggles that the agricultural sector and the farmers are feeling in this province.

1640

I can only relate to some of the concerns that I have been dealing with through my riding which are not addressed in here, which is, how is this actually going to impact people from Algoma-Manitoulin? How are they going to be able to participate and what is it going to mean to them? What does "local food" mean to people on Manitoulin Island or along the North Shore? What does that mean? Local food—I know what it means to them. It means in my backyard, in our area. I don't see those being referenced in this act.

What I hear from them is a level of frustration that, once again, we're not included in this process. We're seeing—and I've used this term in the past—a fuzzy-wuzzy, nice little title, splashed media hit with no sustenance as far as the bill.

I've engaged with those communities and those individuals, and they're looking forward to participating in this process, but they're frustrated as to the venue that they're going to be given to have a concrete effect on what this bill is going to mean.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate and pass comment on the comments from the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane. Any time you hear from a person who is intimately involved in whatever issue we're dealing with in this House, it's a positive for this House, and I think we all learn a little bit more.

First and foremost, we should all realize that farming is an economic activity. Sometimes we treat it as if it's something other than that, and there's a partnership. There are people who produce, there are people who sell and there are people who buy. I reside in the buying end of things. We go out shopping for food on a pretty regular basis, and the way that I learned more about food myself as an individual and as a politician was from a farmer friend of mine.

His name is Jack Philbrick, and he owned a tender fruit farm in the Niagara area, down in Vineland. Jack and I would snowmobile together and sometimes we would boat together. We'd get talking about what we did that week, and Jack introduced me to what the everyday life of a farmer is like. For a person who's always lived in an urban setting his whole life, I learned an awful lot about what makes the business tick, what makes the

business of farming tick, how it could be better, how policies from the government can influence that, how the food business works in general in the United States and Canada.

Also, I team that up with obviously the concerns we all have in this House with childhood obesity, with healthy eating. It seems to me that it's self-evident that if we can eat local food, it's healthier for us, it's better for our economy, it's better for the farmers, it's better for everybody if we can make this act work.

It strikes me that this is an act we should all be pulling together on. If there's room for improvement on it, that's great. That's what the committee system is for. But it strikes me as a bill that we can all get behind, at least to get it to the committee. I think it's in everybody's best interest that we do.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to acknowledge the members from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin and the member from Oakville.

First to the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, all good comments. His ideas—you know, they thought they were doing a good thing, putting Agriculture Week and celebrating Local Food Week together. My response is, could you please provide me a list of the people you asked before you made that decision? That's one of the problems with this bill—consultation first. As far as worrying about trade agreements, you're setting goals and basically saying you're not—no one knows better than a dairy farmer about trade agreements. You're saying you can't pass an act with goals and objectives in the act, you have to sneak them in three years later. Well, then, we might as well not have an act.

The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I agree with a lot of the things she said. The trick with regulations is, you can't throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are good regulations and there are regulations that are basically there for the sake of regulations, and not just for the sake of safety but for the sake of regulations.

My colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin has identified a big problem with this act. This act says everything to everybody, but if you really read it, it doesn't mean anything to anyone. Anyone can read themselves into the act, but it might not pertain to you at all. There are no definitions.

To the member from Oakville, I thank him for his comments. Just one thing: Farming isn't just an economic activity; it's a way of life.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a delight for me to enter the debate this afternoon. I must say, at the onset, it was not too long ago that I had the great opportunity to meet with my friend from Timiskaming-Cochrane. It was at the farmers' market, a Saturday morning in Peterborough.

The night before, I introduced him at the annual meeting and dinner for the Peterborough County Cattlemen's Association, and we showed a lot of Peterborough hospitality to the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane on that particular day.

I rise today in the House to join the debate of second reading of Bill 36, the Local Food Act. I'd like to thank my colleagues for their contributions.

As Minister of Rural Affairs, strengthening our rural communities is a top priority. I know how important Ontario's agri-food sector is. It's a strong contributor to Ontario, our way of life and our economy.

Ontario's farmers, Madam Speaker, grow and raise more than 200 commodities. We have about 3,000 food and beverage manufacturing establishments here—more than any other province in Canada.

This sector is important. It's responsible for \$34 billion of provincial GDP and accounts for more than 700,000 jobs.

We also have all the elements of success: a lucrative marketplace in which more than 80% of primary grocery shoppers intend to buy Ontario fresh food; more retail interest than ever, with many restaurants and grocery stores highlighting local food on their menus and in their aisles; and one additional element for success that trumps most others, Ontario's innovative farmers who are willing to grow the foods that people want.

I want also to remind this House that we have kept our commitment to bring forward a local food bill. We've engaged people in a conversation about how we could encourage more people to ask for and buy local food, and we're acting on that important concept.

Last fall, my colleague—our colleague—Minister McMeekin introduced a bill on this subject, and I want to thank him for all of his effort and good work that he's put into this initiative.

Last month, we were pleased to carry that commitment forward with the introduction of a new local food bill. I'd like to remind the House about the key provisions of the local food bill and the considerations around them.

If passed, it would:

- allow for the establishment of goals and targets for local food through extensive consultation; we listened when stakeholders told us they didn't want targets imposed upon them. As a government, we'll work with the public sector organizations toward these goals and share information on successes and best practices;

- celebrate local food with a Local Food Week;

- have the minister prepare a local food report on government activities that support local food every three years.

As has been said, this bill is just one part of our comprehensive strategy. Beyond this legislation, we'll also:

- lead by example through the Ontario public-service-wide policy, requiring ministries to consider local for food procurements under \$25,000;

- educate about the benefits to all our population about local food;

- support communities and regions working on local food;

- consult with stakeholders on a provincial designation system;

- continue to promote the Good Things Grow in Ontario through our local Foodland Ontario program; and

- fund local food projects across this great province.

The more appreciation and demand we have for local food and locally produced food, the more we can strengthen Ontario's agriculture and food industry.

Looking back, for more than three decades Foodland Ontario has done great work to promote local food to consumers. Today, 94% of all Ontario principal grocery shoppers recognize the Foodland Ontario brand symbol, and I'm told it's only second to McDonald's. Foodland's website has more than 115,000 fans, more than 15,000 Twitter followers and a new Pinterest page as part of that outreach.

1650

Foodland Ontario is about building partnerships. It now has almost 500 logo holders. That's a 240% increase since it expanded beyond traditional fruit and vegetables to include protein, dairy, egg, processed foods, and specialty items such as maple syrup and indeed honey.

Foodland works closely with producers and their associations in promoting the good things that grow in Ontario, and it recognizes Ontario grocery retailers for working with them to promote Ontario food in their stores. There are some very specific success stories around local food, and I'd like to highlight them in my local area.

The Kawartha Lakes Food Charter was adopted in the spring of 2011 to act as “a guiding document to assist in the development of food-related policies and programs in the” broader Kawartha Lakes area. The Kawartha Lakes Food Charter supports “a just and sustainable food system” that includes a vibrant community food culture, food security, community health, a strong farming economy and a healthy ecosystem.

The development of the Kawartha Lakes Food Charter was spearheaded by the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, the city of Kawartha Lakes economic development department, Toward Balance Support Network, Kawartha Region Conservation Authority, Victoria stewardship council, Kawartha Field Naturalists, individual farmers and citizens, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and the Ministry of Rural Affairs. The supporters of the charter are now actively working to develop action initiatives to implement the recommendations included in the Kawartha Lakes Food Charter.

Kawartha Choice FarmFresh is another example I'd like to mention. Kawartha Choice FarmFresh consists of a dynamic group of farmers, producers, chefs and retailers who promote and sell agricultural products grown and produced in the greater Kawartha region. Kawartha Choice FarmFresh members are individuals,

they're farms, partnerships or corporations who produce and sell within the greater Peterborough area and the city of Kawartha Lakes. From beef to buffalo, from honey to maple syrup, from apples to sweet corn, from wine and goat cheese to strawberries and emu meat, the Kawartha Choice FarmFresh logo is your assurance of the quality and integrity of locally grown food products.

The purpose of Kawartha Choice FarmFresh is to create a brand to identify these products to consumers who are eager to support local farms and businesses. The Kawartha Choice FarmFresh restaurant and food services members are local dining establishments that serve local products on their menus each and every day. Kawartha Choice FarmFresh also hosts a website that provides consumers with the opportunity to find Kawartha Choice FarmFresh farms, restaurants, retailers, farmers' markets and agritainment venues throughout the whole wide Kawartha region.

Kawartha Choice FarmFresh participates in fairs, trade shows and local food events to educate and inform consumers regarding the variety and availability of local food products. These events are a great forum for consumers to meet and talk directly to farmers and build new relationships. The Kawartha Choice FarmFresh website lists the following membership: farms, 116; agritainment operations, 23; restaurants and food services, 44; farmers' markets, 15; and retail establishments—Mr. Speaker, you'll want to know this—26.

There are also important points to bring forward around opportunities for broader public sector investment support. We want to bring more of the good things that grow in Ontario to your table, whether that table is in your kitchens at home or in our schools, daycares, hospitals and government buildings across this great province. That's why we're making investments to help increase the amount of fresh, healthy and delicious local foods in our public institutions right in Belleville, Ontario. Go to Belleville and you can take advantage of this kind of program. We've been successful.

Interjection: What about Scarborough?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Scarborough, here we come.

More Ontario food is now being served in daycares, schools, universities and colleges from Cochrane to Cobourg, from Windsor to Wingham, all across this great province. In the not-too-distant future, we'll be in Scarborough.

Our support helped launch the Greenbelt Fund's Ontariofresh.ca website as an electronic marketplace for more than 1,200 buyers and sellers of Ontario foods.

Combined, the total investments made by the province into broader public sector programming has resulted in \$26 million of additional Ontario food in the broader public sector, or a 5-to-1 return on investment for every public dollar spent. That's an incredible story on its own.

We are committed to continuing our support for initiatives that will bring more local food into Ontario's municipalities, long-term-care homes, hospitals and schools. It's a great thing we're doing, and we're going to keep moving forward.

Research and innovation is another important catalyst for agriculture and food. From current research into milk with cancer-fighting mineral supplements to healthier starches for everyday diets, agri-food scientists are coming up with new ways to provide healthier food for every resident in the great province of Ontario.

In addition, the University of Guelph and Wilfrid Laurier are looking at local food distribution systems that bring communities together around food hubs for healthier, local foods. This is supported by the great Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and the Ministry of Rural Affairs' New Directions Research Program.

Researchers are also trying to improve the nutrition uptake for residents of health care and long-term-care facilities through the important inclusion of local food in residence diets every day.

Mr. Speaker, science is helping the agri-food sector advance in other ways, like the intelligent vegetable-harvesting robots. Researchers at the university have developed this technology. This could emerge as a revolutionary technology for the Canadian greenhouse industry, giving growers a competitive edge.

The greenhouse story is important. Greenhouses in the Leamington area and the Niagara Peninsula are now exporting their product to the United States on a frequent basis. That's what Ontario innovation is all about.

On all fronts, people are working together to enhance and strengthen Ontario's agriculture and food industry and move us forward into this next century.

My friends, like we should be doing in this House, working together is key. We need to remember and value what is at the heart of it all: our land and the people who grow our food. Without them, we don't have any of the other great innovations, we don't have science developments, and business will not be able to grow and prosper.

Local food has many benefits—and a desire for healthy food goes hand in hand with what this conversation is all about.

How can we support healthy eating for our children and the next generation and ourselves? We know that type 2 diabetes, once known as a seniors' disease, is now affecting our schoolchildren. We know that the lion's share of our tax dollars goes to covering health care costs in this province. We are what we eat, so choosing healthy foods can have a significant impact on our quality of life and our economy. All of us in this House—and every Ontarian—have a stake in all of this.

Ontario's agri-food industry has already shown that it can adapt to changing needs. From ethnically diverse foods to foods that address special dietary needs like nut-free and gluten-free, the province's agri-food industry is already responding to different consumer demands. But there's always more we can do. Today's consumers are engaged in learning about food. They're reading labels. They're asking where their food comes from and how it is grown and produced. They also care who is behind this production. They want to know more about their food. They want to support Ontario's farmers and Ontario's food processors. With our local food bill and strategy,

we'll keep these important conversations going. We want to help this industry to continue to meet consumer demands.

I would like to close by reminding everyone that when we choose foods that are grown and made here at home, it is good for our families, it is good for our community, and it is especially good for Ontario farmers.

Our local food bill and the broader strategy will help more people find, buy and eat Ontario-grown, Ontario-harvested and Ontario-made food and beverages wherever they are, from every corner of this great province.

I encourage Ontario consumers to choose Ontario foods first whenever they can, and I salute the hard-working farmers and food processors and all the businesses connected to our agri-food industry for the great work they continue to do each and every day. Let's continue to support local food together, because when we work together we can build a better Ontario and make Ontario stronger for every one of our citizens.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Speakers and comments.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud to respond or to comment on what the Minister of Rural Affairs said. We're disappointed as a caucus—as are many stakeholders and people in rural Ontario, of course—with this government and with this bill, because it really doesn't do enough to support agriculture and local food. We understand that to support local food you need to support our farmers. This bill does nothing to address the challenges farmers are facing, such as red tape and regulation.

I know my colleague from Oxford as well as many PC MPPs surveyed our farmers over the last year; we did an online survey across the province to really engage our farmers and people in rural Ontario, and they're really concerned about the red tape and overregulation. Also, increasing hydro costs; we now know that there's going to be a hydro bill increase on May 1. And according to the Auditor General yesterday, the Mississauga gas plant scandal is going to cost ratepayers \$275 million; that's going to be put on farmers' hydro bills as well.

We're seeing, across rural Ontario, abattoirs closing. This bill does nothing to help the abattoirs across rural Ontario. Of course, finally, is the destruction of Ontario's horse racing industry. Thousands of jobs have been lost; we know thousands of jobs will be lost in the future.

Again, we need to support our farmers, we really need to support rural Ontario, and this bill just doesn't do enough. Agriculture and local food organizations submitted a large number of ideas and proposals for this bill which were largely ignored by the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government, who instead chose to introduce a bill with no substance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to join the debate, particularly on this issue. I'm glad to see food on the agenda here at Queen's Park. I've looked at the bill, and I

think, as my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane said, this is a plan to make a plan. It has very little substance that will actually support farmers in Ontario.

I think there is a real appetite—pardon the pun—in Ontario; I know that in my community there is an appetite for local food. People in urban centres like Toronto do want to support our rural friends, but I think we actually need some drivers put into this bill that are going to support the farm community, and that's what I don't see here right now. Unfortunately, while the Minister of Agriculture made a nice speech, there aren't that many people who tune in to the legislative channel, not enough people that will actually influence buying habits in Ontario.

While Grandma Grace does tune in regularly—good afternoon, Grandma; thanks for tuning in—she's already a supporter of locally grown food. The trick is to actually build in some education, which would be one thing for the broader Ontario community to support our farmers here, which is why one of the things that I am going to talk about when it's my turn is to actually bring some food education into our school curriculum. That's something that Sustain Ontario has recommended. I know from my experience working in schools in the past that some of the best educators in this province are actually kids; they go home and they tell their parents about the things they're learning. I know in my family that's how we got my dad to finally recycle, by going home and telling him, "Dad, you should really do this."

But in this bill right now there's nothing that actually helps that education process. I think there's a lot that we can do. It's a framework in place that we should build on—and I too would support this bill, but to make sure that we actually put some calories and some nutrition into this bill, because right now it's a bit empty.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd really like to congratulate the Minister of Rural Affairs for doing a great job at outlining some of the initiatives in his local riding and right across Ontario, from Belleville to Cobourg. Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, as everyone knows, has a number of local initiatives as well that I fully support.

I want to take a few moments to clarify exactly what the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane was asking about as far as some of the definitions, like what "local food" is. Local food, as he had indicated, is "produced or harvested in Ontario," and/or "subject to any limitations in the regulations, food and beverages made in Ontario if they include ingredients produced or harvested in Ontario." What I would like to say with regard to his comments on apple pie that has cinnamon in it is, that would qualify 100% under this initiative.

I can tell you that every time I drive down the 401, I pass the Big Apple, and I sometimes stop in to purchase a good apple pie from there. There's Colborne—Port Colborne.

With regard to the two different ministries, now we have agriculture and food, and a great minister paying a

lot of attention to farmers' needs and building on all of the great work we've done over the last number of years; and the Minister of Rural Affairs, Mr. Leal, who has taken on a very important portfolio. I thought it was a great idea to break up the two ministries. Now we're able to focus on a number of issues and differentiating between the two ministries.

I can tell you, as parliamentary assistant previously to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, that was a huge, huge portfolio, a huge ministry. As the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane had mentioned, over 200 commodities are produced.

Now we have focused attention on rural affairs and agriculture and food. It was the right way to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to stand up and join the conversation here on this very important bill in the Legislature. I'd like to thank the member from Peterborough, the Minister of Rural Affairs, for that paid political announcement. That's basically what it was.

He talks about the fact that we can accomplish this if we all just work together. It sounds great in the Legislature, it sounds great at press conferences across the province, but when it comes down to the nuts and bolts of actually working together, it just doesn't seem to work that way.

This bill has been called a lot of things here this afternoon. I believe the member from the third party called it a "fuzzy-wuzzy" bill. We've heard "lazy bill" here today. I think we've heard "window dressing." We've heard "public relations ploy." We've heard "propaganda" and "PR." It's anything but a bill that is going to fix local food and encourage more local food in the province of Ontario.

I can tell you, coming from Prince Edward-Hastings—and much of Prince Edward-Hastings is a rural riding; we do have the city of Belleville, but there's an awful lot of agriculture and a lot of food production facilities in Prince Edward-Hastings. This bill does nothing to address the needs in Prince Edward-Hastings. We've talked about it all afternoon.

I happen to be the critic for red tape for the Progressive Conservative Party. This bill does not address red tape in agriculture or in local food production. It's a huge issue, and the government just seems to breeze past it.

There are many, many items that are affecting rural Ontario. I know that the Minister of Rural Affairs is very concerned about these, but it seems as if his hands are tied a little bit by maybe his Toronto residents that sit in cabinet with him. He's not tackling the issues in the Green Energy Act and dealing with municipalities' control in placing these green energy projects.

We've seen what's happened with the harness racing industry. It's just been shameful, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): I'll return now to the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I've really got to thank all my fine colleagues who provided comments: Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Davenport, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and my good friend the radio announcer from Prince Edward-Hastings.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, this legislation is unprecedented in history by bringing forward the Local Food Act. I want to invite all my good friends from the official opposition and the third party, every Saturday morning, to where I'm at: the Peterborough farmers' market.

Let me tell you about the Peterborough farmers' market. It's at the Morrow Building exhibition grounds in Peterborough, right beside the memorial centre. The member from Timiskaming-Cochrane witnessed that when he was there. I gave him the royal Peterborough welcome. Every vendor has the Kawartha Choice sign. When you go in there, Mr. Speaker, you see this locally grown food, whether it's beef or buffalo, pork or venison, or strawberries or asparagus, or my favourite, Brussels sprouts, or potatoes or turnips—it's all there under the Kawartha Choice umbrella—the opportunity to see first-hand the men and women who work so hard each and every day to provide the best-quality food not only from my area but from right across Ontario.

1710

So this negativism that was displayed, Mr. Speaker, this afternoon is not what's going on in the back concessions of rural Ontario. We're growing the best food in the world.

When the former Premier went to China in January, that was an opportunity to sell more Ontario-produced food to the Chinese market.

Ontario food is the best in the world.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn): Further speakers?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 36, the Local Food Act.

Like many other bills this government has introduced this session, the Local Food Act is very familiar. While a few changes have been made to this bill, it is pretty much the same as what the government tabled before they decided to prorogue for four long months. As some of my colleagues have said during the debate surrounding Bill 11, the ambulance act, it's like the movie Groundhog Day: We've heard it all before.

The new Local Food Act that the McGuinty-Wynne government introduced does little to promote local food. It is filled with lofty goals and ideals, but it has very little substance.

Here's what subsection 4(1) of the bill, under the heading "Goals and targets," says: "The minister may, to further the purposes of this act, establish goals or targets to aspire to in respect of local food." To me, Speaker, these are very weak words. It does not demonstrate a commitment to local food.

In subsection 4(2), under "Consultation," the bill says, "Before establishing or amending a goal or target, the minister shall consult organizations...."

Under subsection 4(3), it says, "A goal or target may be general or particular in its application" It may be general or it may be particular.

What is the government trying to say? It seems to me that they are trying to have it both ways. "May," "shall," "aspire"—these are all vague words, and they do little to promote local food.

We in the Ontario PC caucus support local food. Coming from a rural riding, I know first-hand about the importance of agriculture. Farming and agri-food contributes more than \$33 billion to the Ontario economy each year and employs 700,000 Ontarians.

Ontario is Canada's largest food processor. According to the association of Ontario food processors, there are about 3,000 small and large food and drink processors in the province. These can be large operations such as Heinz, located where I grew up in Essex county, or they can be small bakeries that employ a few staff.

In order to have local food, you need local farmers. This government's love of red tape and duplication has forced many food processors and agribusinesses out of business. A glaring example is the closure of many small abattoirs. I've talked to people such as Joe Abate of Abate Packers in Arthur. Joe is also president of the Ontario Independent Meat Processors. I have also talked to the owners of Harriston Packers, the Oelschlagel family. These gentlemen tell me that the only constant thing in their business is that they never know what to expect when an inspector visits. Some weeks the rules say one thing, and the next week there's something different. It just depends on who the inspector is.

I believe in food safety. Don't get me wrong: That is paramount. However, when we have small business operators facing rules and regulations that are like a moving target, it's no wonder that Ontario abattoirs are closing.

I have heard about one operator who was told that his meat-cutting counter had to be a certain number of inches from the floor. A few weeks later, a different inspector visited the operation and told him that the counter should be a different number of inches from the floor. With changing rules, how can a small business owner compete? With new regulations coming at them from every direction, how can they stay in business? The answer, sadly, is that many of them are not staying in business. Without local abattoirs, we cannot have local meat in our restaurants.

On the topic of local restaurants, I would like to talk about the renowned Stratford Chefs School in my riding. Students come from across the globe to come to Stratford to learn skills and gain experience in the culinary field. Some of the graduates go on to international careers and many others establish local restaurants. They want to serve local food. The customers ask for it, and they know that local food is safe, fresh and delicious. However, because of the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals' regulatory barriers, red tape and duplication, they are finding it more and more difficult to source locally raised meat to serve their customers.

The part-time Minister of Agriculture—sorry, make that Agriculture and Food. I forgot to include the "food" part just like she did in her swearing-in ceremony. Well, she promised to bring forward a new, stronger Local Food Act upon becoming Premier. What I see in Bill 36 does not live up to that promise. We have a weak bill, filled with weak words and weak commitments.

One other area of the Local Food Act I'd like to talk about is section 3. It says, "The week beginning on the Monday before Thanksgiving Day in each year is proclaimed as Local Food Week." Well, Speaker, we already have a week set aside at this time for special recognition. It is Ontario Agriculture Week. My predecessor, former Perth MPP Bert Johnson, introduced a bill to proclaim Ontario Agriculture Week in 1998. The Ontario Legislature passed Bert's bill with all-party support. Now the Premier/Minister of Agriculture and Food wants to replace this important week with Local Food Week. It seems she forgot all about Ontario Agriculture Week—cut and paste. Ontario Agriculture Week is a credit to Bert, a credit to Perth-Wellington and, most importantly, a credit to farmers. Why in the world would anyone want to replace it?

As I said before, in order to have local food, you need local farmers, but the government doesn't seem to get this; otherwise, they wouldn't have forced new eco fees on farm tires. Farmers are facing huge increases. Farmers across Perth-Wellington and the entire province are outraged by these enormous fees. This is one more Liberal tax increase they cannot afford.

As my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga has pointed out, the Liberals have now begun to tinker with these fees. They have slightly adjusted their eco tax funding formula to delay part of the massive new charges being added to farmers' bills for tractors and farm equipment. Instead of facing a 2,000% increase, they are going to charge them 1,000% this year and 1,000% next year. Only a Liberal would take pride in this. You don't solve the problem, you just delay it; you defer it, you pass it on to another year.

Another way the McGuinty-Wynne government has put up barriers to our farmers and agri-food sector is through skyrocketing hydro rates. With their failed Green Energy Act and the scandalous cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants, the Liberals clearly show they do not have an energy policy. They figure it out on the back of an envelope and hope for the best. The dramatic hydro rates that Ontario residents are facing show that this approach is not working. If this government truly wanted to promote local food, they would reduce red tape, lower hydro rates and help our farmers instead of hindering them.

One example of the red tape and the runaround that farmers face is when trying to certify grain dryers. The Canadian Standards Association is no longer precertifying grain dryers and the TSSA, the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, a provincial body, is now charged with the responsibility for field inspections instead. Farmers in Perth-Wellington have told me that the TSSA

is a large, complicated and expensive bureaucracy. When they need to repair or replace a burner on their grain dryers, they can wait for an inspector to come from Toronto to inspect the part. Mother Nature doesn't wait. When the crops are ready to be harvested, they are ready to be harvested.

I have written to the former and current Ministers of Agriculture and Food on this issue, as well as the Minister of Consumer Services. I have met with local representatives of the Grain Farmers of Ontario to find out how this problem can be addressed. I have asked questions in the House about the grain dryer issue, and I have been working with my caucus colleagues to find a solution to this important issue.

1720

The grain farmers supply Ontario, and in fact the world, with high-quality products. The Grain Farmers of Ontario is an organization that represents Ontario's 28,000 growers of corn, soybeans and wheat. Their farmers' crops cover five million acres of farmland across the province and are a major economic driver for Canada. Ontario-grown corn, soybean and wheat crops generate over \$2.5 billion in farm gate receipts. They result in over \$9 billion of economic output and are responsible for over 40,000 jobs in the province. Clearly, grain farmers are an important part of the agri-food sector.

When they face red tape from the TSSA, everyone is affected. As I said before, if you want local food, you need local farmers. This government's red tape and duplication is hurting local farmers.

Earlier, I talked about the fact that this bill is just like the previous Local Food Act the government introduced last fall. As Yogi Berra said, "It's déjà vu all over again." Farmers, commodity groups, agriculture stakeholders and the PC caucus all put forward a number of proposals that would strengthen our food system. Our suggestions would increase access to local food and help our agricultural sector. We are disappointed that the government has chosen to ignore these initiatives and reintroduce the same weak act as they did before. One of the organizations that put forth concrete ways to improve the Local Food Act was Sustain Ontario. They carefully considered our agriculture industry and food system and made many important suggestions to the government.

In April 2012, Sustain Ontario released a draft of their plan called the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy: A Plan for Healthy Food and Farming. It contained 81 specific strategies the government should consider. They even provided examples of policies and policy-related activities that would support each of these actions. But did the McGuinty-Wynne government listen to Sustain Ontario? No. After all the consultation Sustain Ontario did, there is only one of those initiatives reflected in this Local Food Act: government procurement.

There is nothing in Bill 36 to recognize the many parts of our food system. It fails to meet the feedback they received from stakeholders requesting more food education. It neglects to set measures to provide people with the skills and knowledge they need to support healthy

eating. The Local Food Act, in its current form, does nothing to increase access for Ontarians to local food or address the economic impact on our food system.

I also read a document sent to me by the Canadian Environmental Law Association. It was a model for a new, improved Local Food Act. The Canadian Environmental Law Association put forward many concrete ideas on how to make this legislation better. Their proposed bill is 28 pages long. The government's bill is only four pages long. Clearly, Bill 36 is short on detail and short on content.

Agriculture is a vital part of our economy and our lives. The importance of agriculture couldn't be more evident than in my riding of Perth-Wellington. In Perth-Wellington, 20% of all jobs are tied to agriculture. For every on-farm job, there are an additional 1.26 jobs off the farm.

In Wellington county, agriculture represents in excess of \$433 million in total gross farm receipts. The food and other agricultural products that sustain us are the result of the skill, hard work and dedication of Ontario farm families and farming communities.

Farmers supply us with delicious, safe and affordable food. Ontario farmers grow more than 200 different agricultural commodities, including a variety of foods such as fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, greenhouse vegetables and ornamental flowers. Farmers in Perth-Wellington grow the best food in Ontario. We also have some of the best restaurants, shops, farmers' markets and events that showcase and promote local foods.

One of the events that celebrates local food is Savour Stratford. This culinary event draws thousands of people, and 2013 will be the sixth annual celebration. Savour Stratford was awarded the best culinary experience in Ontario by the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance. Savour Stratford features chefs who use local food to make delicious dishes and it showcases local retailers who sell local food. It is a wonderful celebration held every September, and I encourage all members of the House to attend. They even have a culinary getaway, with special offers at local restaurants and bed and breakfasts.

Another way that local food is celebrated in Perth-Wellington is through the Butter Tart Trail. Winding through Wellington North, the trail includes stops at various antique shops, farm markets, artisan studios and, of course, bakeries that serve butter tarts. Some favourites include the butter tart served with a scoop of ice cream and the official goat butter tart, made from real goat milk butter. Not only is this a delicious way to explore Wellington North, but it is an economic development tool. I want to commend the council and staff of Wellington North, the tourism committee and all of our local businesses that take part in the Butter Tart Trail.

Farmers in Perth-Wellington need a new and improved Local Food Act and an act with firm goals and strong commitments, not weak words and vague goals. The government should look to Perth-Wellington if they

want to know how to do local food right. As Savour Stratford says:

“We have been cultivating our local culinary heritage and pleasing palates since 1832.

“Some would say our passion for great food is larger than our passion for the theatre.

“It begins with the quality and freshness of our organic produce, our artisanal breads and cheeses, pasture-fed organic beef, Amish-raised goat milk and heritage pork—all originating from surrounding Perth county.”

Producers in Wellington county also know about the importance of local food. They sell their products at local farmers’ markets in Palmerston and Harriston, and many of them supply goods for the Slow Food movement in Guelph. The McGuinty-Wynne government could learn a lot from the Slow Food movement. The goal of Slow Food is to connect food producers with consumers and to support and advocate for food choices that are good, clean and fair. There’s a Slow Food market in Stratford every Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. that accomplishes this very goal. I hope that all members of the House have a chance to visit sometime.

The Slow Food movement knows about the importance of connecting food producers with consumers. We in the Ontario PC Party know this as well. In our white paper *Respect for Rural Ontario*, we have put forward the idea of creating a new regional food terminal in order to bring local food to local consumers. This is an idea that should be explored.

The Ontario Food Terminal in Toronto has done a great job in promoting local food. I had the opportunity to tour the terminal earlier this year, and I was impressed by the measures they have taken to support local producers. However, the food terminal is bursting at the seams. It has outgrown its home. Instead of expanding on expensive lands in Toronto, our white paper proposes looking at building a new regional food terminal. This is something that Sustain Ontario, the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming, agrees with. They note that regional food hubs contribute to a better Ontario in the following ways:

—They provide small and medium-sized farm operations with increased market access, therefore leading to economic benefits for both farmers and consumers.

—Regional food terminals are also better for the environment. Food travels less distance.

—Regional food terminals also re-establish farm-to-city links. Sustain Ontario notes that as our food is produced further away, citizens lose sight of where their food comes from and what to do with it.

Earlier this month, I hosted an agricultural round table in Clifford. Along with my colleagues the member from Huron–Bruce and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, we heard from farmers from across the region. They told us about their concerns with rising taxes, rising hydro rates, and rising red tape and duplication. They told us that they worry about the next generation of farmers. Many young farmers cannot take over the family farm because of increasing production costs.

The participants at the round table also talked about the improvements that are needed to our risk management programs. We heard about the negative impact that this government’s cancellation of the Slots at Racetracks Program has had on our region. We also heard about the concerns with the Green Energy Act. People are upset that their local, elected municipal councils are being over-ruled. Local municipalities are not allowed authority over the placement of industrial wind turbines.

People attending the agriculture round table also raised the issue of municipal infrastructure funding. They worry that rural and small-town Ontario are being left behind as this government focuses on funding transit in large urban centres.

1730

Earlier this month, I had an opportunity to participate in the annual MP and MPP forum hosted by the Perth County Federation of Agriculture. Farmers talked about the impact that this government’s policy is having on them. They raised many concerns, including eco fees on farm tires, the power of the OSPCA, the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, and the Green Energy Act and Risk Management Program.

Bill 36 does not help move local food from our farmers’ fields into local stores and restaurants. The bill does little to bring Ontario food into our government institutions, and it does not help put more local food on dinner tables across the province. It would be respectful to a previous member, Bert Johnson, to not replace his bill with this bill. We must maintain Ontario Agriculture Week out of respect for Bert and our farmers.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It’s a pleasure to be able to rise and contribute to the debate on this bill. As the member from Perth–Wellington said, this is a bill that is short on detail and short on content. It is essentially a plan to create a plan.

Earlier today, my colleague and seatmate the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane raised some very good points: that this legislation was really created without substance and that essentially what the government decided was, “Well, let’s implement the act, and then sometime in the next three years we can develop some goals and targets.” It’s sort of like putting the cart before the horse, and it doesn’t make a lot of sense.

I’m not an expert, but I also don’t claim to be an expert, and this is a government that has messed up. First of all, as my colleague mentioned, this is a government that proposed putting the Local Food Week in May, and then it was brought to their attention that we don’t necessarily have a lot of local food that’s harvested in Ontario and is ready for the first week of May—and then they changed that to the week before Thanksgiving, which is in direct competition with Agriculture Week. This is a government that’s been essentially in a tailspin, right from the very moment that the Premier was sworn in as the Minister of Agriculture, only to later be sworn in as the Minis-

ter of Agriculture and Food, and they still can't get it right.

What this government needs to do is, first of all, learn the file before they propose any kind of feel-good legislation. They need to consult with and they need to listen to the people who live and work in the industry, because there is a lot of knowledge to be gained. I mean, just listening to my seatmate was an educational experience for me. I know what I learned in one hour already goes a long way towards realizing that this bill falls drastically short.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to congratulate the member from Perth-Wellington on his remarks. However, I do have some concerns.

The member makes a claim that this is a weak act with weak goals. Well, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that that surprises me, coming from a member of the Conservative Party that has consistently requested a reduction in red tape, which this government has undertaken in a number of circumstances. I think what he's asking is to implement more red tape and actually force people who are taking the local initiatives to hit certain targets.

Well, that's not what the bill is about. This is a bill about public awareness. It's an aspirational bill. It's a bill to encourage people in the cities to work with our farming community. It's for our farmers to respect the people in the cities and encourage them to work in partnership with them as well.

So I do take somewhat of a concern—not an offence, but a concern—to the fact that there's some discussion on whether agricultural week can be mixed with Local Food Week. Well, let me tell you, from my perspective, I think they go hand in hand. I mentioned previously that there's no reason why people right across Ontario can't support our agricultural community by sharing in a very important week for our farmers and having all Ontarians work together to support the things that they do, the things that they grow and the great produce that they provide to our urban areas.

I don't understand. I think they had to look, on the other side, for something to complain about, because I think the stakeholders like this. Madam Speaker, I met with AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. They respect the fact that we're respecting them. They don't want set targets. They don't want legislation that's going to force them—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a great honour to stand here today and talk about this proposed bill by the Liberals.

My esteemed colleague here from Perth-Wellington said so eloquently how former member Mr. Bert Johnson, who represented his riding with distinction and was a Deputy Speaker, deserves full credit for everything that he fought for: for rural Ontario, agriculture and food.

I just want to say that this government seems to have forgotten, if they didn't know already—they're trying to take ownership of something they don't understand or respect, and know nothing about, and that's rural Ontario. I have grave concerns, coming from rural Ontario and being a beef producer and a cash crop producer myself. I can speak with some knowledge and understanding of the people of Northumberland-Quinte West who provide this province, like other farmers across this great province, with the food that's required, that we bring to large urban centres here.

I'd be more than willing to have the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell come down to my farm in my great riding of Northumberland-Quinte West and give him a tour of the Big Apple in Colborne and seeing some of that local produce being distributed and baked there.

Also, I would encourage the member to come down. It's almost stone-picking season, and I could use an extra hand. If he really wants to see the work ethic and the ingenuity and how Ontario was built and prospers in rural Ontario, I encourage him to come down. We'll water him, we'll feed him and we'll make sure that he sleeps soundly at night, because we work a little bit harder than we do here at Queen's Park.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been sitting here, listening to a lot of the debate that has been going on. Again, I must say I've enjoyed a brief discussion that I've had with a colleague of mine who actually knows this field, who comes from the farming field, and that's the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Anyway, when I was reading the purpose, it says:

“Purposes

“1. The purposes of this act are as follows:

“1. To foster successful and resilient local food economies and systems throughout Ontario.” Maybe for a local farmer up in my area or across the north, it can translate to this. It says: “The government will take credit for the initiatives of innovation practices by local farmers.”

If you look at number 2, it says, “To increase awareness of local food in Ontario, including the diversity of local food.” But when you do a translation for a local farmer in northern Ontario, it says, “The government will capitalize on pre-existing advertising developed by local farmers' markets.” Could be.

If you look at, “3. To encourage the development of new markets for local food,” well, to them, it means, “The government told you to do it, work it, set it up, research it. Then we'll say we helped you do it.”

Mr. John Vanthof: That's about it.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes. When you look at it—and I don't want to make—

Mr. John Vanthof: Plain northern language.

Mr. Michael Mantha: But that's in plain northern Ontario farmers' language, where there really isn't very

much—and I'm really looking forward, later on in the week, to bringing in a lot of the aspects and the opinions from farmers in Algoma–Manitoulin, because there are many of them and their voices are not being heard. I'm hoping that I can give them a little bit of a voice here—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Perth–Wellington has two minutes to respond.

1740

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to thank the members from Kenora–Rainy River, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Northumberland–Quinte West and Algoma–Manitoulin for their comments.

Farmers don't need more regulation. They don't need it. When we moved to the Monkton area and bought the dairy farm, we used to take our animals to an abattoir just around the corner—handy as anything. It's gone because the owner there, a number of years ago, said, "Enough's enough. I'm getting out of this thing. I can't stand these guys running around, telling me how to do my business." So over-regulation has been a—

Interjection: A thorn.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: —a thorn in the side of business in rural Ontario for years. This government seems to come up with schemes to increase their income all the time, and they seem to burden rural Ontario, as they do urban Ontario. The eco fee tax is just a perfect example.

I've got a letter here from Darcy Higgins, executive director of Food Forward, and he says, "A Local Food Act should support all hospitals, education and other institutions to increase their purchase of local, socially, environmentally sustainable food." They also want the government "to conduct a review of business regulations to ensure that small-scale food and farm enterprises have a level playing field and a fair chance." Why wouldn't you do that? Because red tape seems to be in your blood.

These are great ideas, and I thank Food Forward for their input on how the Local Food Act can be improved. Mr. Higgins also points out in his email that the purchase of sustainable food is the fastest-growing part of the agri-food sector. He notes that "young farmers and entrepreneurs are choosing to produce artisanal and culturally diverse foods."

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: As always, it's an honour for me to rise in this assembly on behalf of the people of Davenport, and I'm happy to speak to Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013.

Local food is a matter of great importance to the people across this province, and it's of great interest to me and to residents of my community in Davenport. Bill 36 is a first step toward supporting local food in Ontario. It shows that this government has finally gotten the message that local food must be made a provincial priority.

Unfortunately, Bill 36 in its current form does little to guarantee real government action. It does little to begin the transformation of our current food system, to actually support Ontario farmers or encourage more sustainable

farming. Bill 36 does little more than promise a conversation about local food. It does little more than establish a Local Food Week in October, and we've heard about some of the problems with that chosen week.

I'm quite sure that we can do better. So while it might be hard to muster up too much excitement about the promise of another conversation from this Liberal government, I believe that this is an opportunity for the growing food movement in Ontario to come to the table, to push for a comprehensive food strategy and to demand real action on food security.

New Democrats will see this bill go to committee so that the good people of Ontario can bring their ideas to the table to make it stronger. But this government needs to stop playing lip service to the idea of local food, and it should commit to real action through legislation that would promote local food in Ontario.

I believe that it's time to put food first in Ontario. It's time that parliamentarians and policy-makers start to take notice and pay attention to an issue that is on the minds of people in Ontario. It's on the minds of people from Toronto to London, from Prince Edward county to Attawapiskat. Food is on the minds of people in Ontario. It's on the minds of busy parents who are thinking about what they're going to feed their kids for dinner tonight when they get home after a long day at work, and it's also on the mind of the parent who has lost his job and is grappling with how he will put food on the table for his family this month.

Of course, food is always on the minds of our farmers who struggle to pay their bills in Ontario. Food is also on the minds of our doctors and nurses, who watch as a generation of children is raised on processed sugary and salty foods. I think that food is on the minds of our teachers in Ontario, who saw too many of their students arrive at school this morning struggling to concentrate because they didn't have breakfast.

Food—nutritious, sustainably farmed, accessible Ontario food—should be top of mind when it comes to public policy. But only a few parliamentarians have brought these issues into this House. My colleague France Gélinas, the health critic for the NDP, understands the health costs of poor nutrition. This is why she has pushed in this House for better food labelling on chain restaurant menus. My colleague Rosario Marchese has advocated the banning of advertisements that push junk food on children. Our leader, Andrea Horwath, introduced a local food act back in 2010.

All of my colleagues who enter this House and represent our communities as New Democrats—not as Liberals, not as Conservatives—do so because it is our fundamental belief that no one should be left behind in Ontario. These are the roots of our party going back to the CCF that brought together farmers and labour groups, and these are the same principles that guide New Democrats today. Call it democratic socialism or social democracy, but we work with the NDP because we believe it is our collective challenge, our collective struggle, our col-

lective responsibility, to fairly share the bounty of this province and make sure that no person goes hungry.

This is why we fight for public services. This is why we fight for affordable housing, fair wages, social assistance and child care for everyone. This is why we continue to speak up for those who are falling behind and for those who are being pushed out of our cities and pushed off their farms because life has become too expensive. It's because access to nutritious food should not be a privilege that's reserved for only some.

We believe that every person in Ontario should be able to put good, healthy food on their table, and if imitation is the highest form of flattery, then I suppose New Democrats should be somewhat flattered. That's because of the bill from back in 2010 that was brought forward by Ontario NDP leader, Andrea Horwath. She introduced a bill back then called the Government of Ontario Buy Local Food Act. Ms. Horwath's bill contained some similar objectives to the current bill we're debating today.

While the current bill, Bill 36, really only begins to identify local food as an issue of importance, Ms. Horwath's bill proposed concrete steps for action that would begin to transform our food system. Horwath's bill would have required provincial government ministries to purchase local food. It would also establish firm targets for buying local food and organic food, unlike this government's bill, which makes targets optional.

In contrast to Andrea Horwath's bill which had concrete, practical steps and a timeline for action to support an Ontario local food system, the government's current bill reads more like a plan to make a plan. Now, perhaps this bill is the result of hard-learned lessons from this government to stop over-promising and under-delivering. After all, we've been through this before. If big government statements and broken promises could feed the people of Ontario, we'd have an abundance of local food for every person in this province.

The fact is that, once again, the people of Ontario are far ahead of the Liberal government of Ontario. Certainly many individuals in Ontario take steps to support local food and local farmers by searching out and purchasing Ontario-grown food at their grocery stores and farmers' markets. I'd invite members of the Legislature to travel west on College Street on any given Thursday afternoon and join the hundreds of Davenport residents at the Dufferin Grove farmers' market. This is one of many farmers' markets across the city that are making the connections between rural and urban Ontario and making the connections between field and table.

Others are making individual choices to join a CSA, a community-supported agriculture program. This is something that we do in my home where, at the beginning of the season, we pay an upfront investment to support a small farm run by our good friend Tony Neale at Wheelbarrow Farm just outside of Toronto. This helps him make the necessary inputs at his farm. In return, he delivers a box of fresh, locally produced, sustainably grown food to one of our neighbours every second week where we can just walk down the street and pick it up.

Many people in Davenport are already growing their own food, in fact, in their backyards, or they're sharing a backyard or a community garden plot. All of these individual choices and actions are important, but if we are to make significant progress towards a more sustainable food system in Ontario, it's time for the Ontario government to take its cue from the people of Ontario and introduce meaningful legislation to put Ontario food first.

For years before I was elected to represent Davenport in this Legislature, I worked in the Davenport community as a community worker. I worked for an organization called The Stop Community Food Centre. The Stop has innovative food programs that have in fact captured the imaginations of people across our city, and their impressive staff and volunteers have helped to raise issues of food security across Toronto. The Stop's food programs include community gardening, community kitchens. These bring people together, build community, and increase food literacy and food skills.

1750

On most weekdays, The Stop provides free meals to low-income community members. Incredibly, many of these meals are now using fresh ingredients purchased from local farmers. The Stop does all of this good work with very little help from this government. Instead, The Stop delivers its food programs thanks to the help of thousands of donations from private donors. I think this highlights the problem in Ontario. While individuals and not-for-profit organizations are doing their part to build a better food system, our government is not doing their part. Even though we know that every job in the agricultural sector supports four additional jobs in the local economy, the government continues to let us down. It's time for the government to step up and make a real commitment to put food first in Ontario.

The truth is that so many people in Ontario have all but given up on government. Instead of demanding that government protect the public interest, protect our natural resources, protect our food, land and water, and protect our health, many in the food movement have given up on government. They look elsewhere for hope. Admirably, food activists persist on their own to take action as individuals in their communities or small organizations.

The North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce, for example, recently demonstrated the power of rural and urban folks working together when it effectively mobilized strong opposition to the Melancthon mega quarry. On the heels of this victory, NDACT has been pushing for reform of the Aggregate Resources Act and the provincial policy statement to protect prime agricultural farmland and Ontario's drinking water. The Ontario government should be listening to groups like these who are advocating for policies that will protect our food security now and into the future.

The not-for-profit sector has proven time and again the value of food programming. Organizations like The Stop, like Foodshare, like Green Thumbs Growing Kids have clearly shown the benefit of food programming, from snack programs to community gardens and community

kitchens. So why must they continue to spend valuable staff time writing grant proposal after grant proposal and organizing fundraisers? A government that was in fact serious about supporting local food and Ontario food organizations could easily provide funding to support community food hubs and community food programs across Ontario. The provincial government should be finding ways to facilitate and support these innovative programs, but so far I don't see anything about this in this legislation.

Our leader Andrea Horwath's original private member's bill correctly identified government bodies and public agencies as important agents of change. The MUSH sector—our municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals—represents a powerful economic tool that could be used to support our local farmers, and it could be used to create stronger markets for local Ontario-grown food.

I know that individuals are already doing this work. My former colleague at The Stop, Joshna Maharaj, has taken up the challenge of trying to revolutionize hospital food. She's working just down the street here at Sick Kids Hospital. And I think hers is a very sensible idea: It's to provide real food in hospitals. When people are sick, why not provide them with real, nutritious, Ontario-grown food? It makes good sense to me.

But why aren't hospitals around the province getting this kind of support to do this? I'm looking forward to the day when a Premier or a health minister or a Minister of Agriculture and Food picks up the phone to call people like Joshna or folks at The Stop or folks at Foodshare, and that minister thanks them for all the hard work that they've done and asks for their advice on how to invest public money into community food programs. These programs and organizations are sensible investments in promoting wellness, in making our communities healthier, and they could also support the local food economy in Ontario.

I want to take a moment to talk about schools, where kids are going to school hungry, where we are raising a generation of students who lack basic food literacy and food skills. I listened as my colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane spoke. In fact, people around this House were listening closely, and it's a rare occurrence that that actually happens. I think because John Vanthof is a farmer and has actual experience growing food—that's actually something that most people in this city of Toronto don't understand and don't know how to do, and most people in this House don't understand.

Speaker, I think if you ask most kids where their food comes from today, they might think that it comes from the grocery store. It might come in plastic—not you kids. You guys know where it comes from; it comes from farms, but other kids—a generation of students, I think. A generation of students don't know how to cook, they don't know how to identify nutritious food and they don't know where their food comes from. This is a generation of kids who will grow up into adults and parents and who will lack basic food skills. I believe that our province

should be promoting what I would call an integrated food curriculum in every school, to teach children basic food skills and food literacy. This is something that Sustain Ontario has suggested and recommends. Any person that I talk to agrees with this; it makes sense to people.

This government should be supporting schools to establish new school gardens and kitchens as tools to teach students. We've all heard news—at least in Toronto—about schools that are selling their green spaces in our cities to raise funds, and to me this is unacceptable. Instead of selling off valuable school land, we should be transforming those buildings into vibrant community hubs where the green spaces can host community gardens and students can learn important skills taking care of a garden—and where students and community groups can access school kitchens as well.

While we're talking about schools, I think we should use this bill as an opportunity to get more healthy food into our schools. Let's talk about developing a universal student nutrition program. I would call it an apple-a-day program, because an apple a day would nourish Ontario students. It could nourish them with a locally grown piece of fruit or vegetable, and it would also support our Ontario farmers. A public program like this would do two things: Obviously, it would promote good health and eating habits in our schools, and it would also create significant buying power to support Ontario farms.

It's clear that too many kids are going to school hungry. Food bank use in Ontario is at an all-time high: Over 412,000 individuals every month cannot afford to feed themselves or their families, and this is absolutely unacceptable. Every person in Ontario should be able to afford to feed themselves and their families, and to do this without stigma or shame. This is why I believe that a universal student nutrition program would help kids access nutritious food in their schools in a way that doesn't create shame or stigma.

Speaker, I don't know if you've been into a school lately, but not every kid in school is bringing a lunch to school. Not every kid is able to participate in what people often call pizza lunch days. Some kids are able to purchase their snacks and lunches, while other kids don't have access. This makes sense to me: If we believe in a public education system and we believe in supporting it, why don't we make sure that kids have the proper nutritional support to be able to learn in their schools?

On top of this, we desperately need a social assistance system in Ontario that addresses the chronic food insecurity and health risks faced by welfare recipients in this province. This is something that this government desperately needs to take action on. It is hard to come into this House day after day as we debate bills that have been introduced and reintroduced, knowing all the while that there are people in this province who, by design, do not have enough resources to feed themselves or feed their families.

If there is any member in this House who could stand up and tell me honestly that you could live anywhere in this province as a single person for \$600 a month, I

would like to see them try that. I would say that to my Conservative colleagues and my Liberal colleagues: This is just not right. It's unacceptable, it's unjust, but it's also just unhealthy, for God's sake. People are getting sick because they can't afford a nutritious diet. Instead of just having these debates over and over again, I wish that this government would look at the recommendations of the social assistance review and, first and foremost, increase people's benefits so that they have access to good, healthy food, because poor diet and lack of access to nutritious food is a leading cause of poor health, and it's growing the health care costs for this province as well.

I believe that we all have an interest in seeing access to food improve in our province, and it's something that I would ask members in this House to build consensus with so that we can reach that vision.

1800

New Democrats will be supporting this bill, but we would like to see more. The people of this province are way ahead of this government in driving the market demand and benefits of local food. This bill, Bill 36, was an opportunity for the new Minister of Agriculture to come up with a local food act that would take concrete action to support people in this province to buy and eat local. This bill reads more like a statement of support, and that's simply not enough. A plan for a plan is not enough. New Democrats will continue to push for a strengthened Local Food Act that will get real results for rural, urban, young and old folks alike. We will work to get this bill into committee, where we hope MPPs in this assembly will listen to the good people of Ontario and put food first.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We are going to have late shows. Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

WASTE DIVERSION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given yesterday by the Minister of the Environment. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter.

The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: First of all, I want to start with the facts to set the record straight. Let's be honest; the Liberals have spread so much disinformation in the course of a couple of weeks that it would make, in fact, Bernie Madoff blush. I'll be going over a little history lesson that I hope the parliamentary assistant will take back to the Minister of the Environment. I know the minister has in fact been spending a little too much time in fantasyland as of late, so I want to make sure he's able to

rejoin the rest of us in the real world sooner rather than later.

It's now been more than 10 years since we introduced the Waste Diversion Act, which was designed to encourage people to reduce, reuse and recycle, as well as create a more stable funding formula for the blue box program. We took a bold step forward to help our municipal partners and to protect our environment, so I must say it's unfortunate to see that this act has been used by the Liberals to create eco taxes, massive government-mandated monopolies and excessive bureaucracy.

Let's skip ahead six years to 2008. The Liberal government, in its never-ending desire to squeeze more money out of Ontario taxpayers, included the province's first eco taxes under the Liberals' municipal hazardous or special waste program. This was a new concept at the time that the Liberals firmly defended, saying that eco taxes are just the cost of dealing with waste. In fact, the former Minister of the Environment encouraged businesses to charge eco taxes and put them on the price tag, saying that "it would clear it up and make the consumer aware." At the time, consumers only had to deal with eco taxes when they went to the store to buy a can of paint, get some batteries or put a new oil filter in their car. They didn't like the fees, but that didn't stop the Liberals from moving forward.

Next, the Liberals started the recycling program for electronics by establishing a regulation for waste electrical and electronic equipment in 2009. The Liberals' aim was to force consumers to pay for e-waste so they could subsidize their buddies in the recycling industry. It wasn't long until consumers started seeing eco taxes on their receipts for TVs, computers and iPods. They didn't like it, but guess what the Liberals decided to do? They kept moving forward together.

Next was the Liberals' tire tax program. Even though 90% of tires were being diverted from landfills under a free market system, the Liberals claimed Ontario needed a tire recycling program, without giving a valid reason. Since 2009, tire recycling costs have soared and the Liberals' bureaucracy has rapidly expanded. Just think that Ontario Tire Stewardship now has a budget of \$70 million.

Obviously, Ontarians were enraged with all the new eco taxes cropping up on their bills, but that didn't stop the Liberals. Clearly, the environment minister has been speaking out of both sides of his mouth. Hearing the environment minister talk about the need to now overhaul the Waste Diversion Act is quite rich, because it was his government that used this piece of legislation to create massive new bureaucracy and taxation powers by introducing three more recycling programs. If the Liberals thought the Waste Diversion Act was bad, why did they use it to create three more waste diversion programs? Why, after 10 years, did they not amend it? Ask yourself that: Why? Why did you bring in three new programs, and why didn't you amend it, then, after 10 years?

The environment minister should listen to the Ontario PC Party and return government to its role as a regulator and leave recycling to the free market.

I talked about the minister speaking out of both sides of his mouth. He has had no regard for consumers. The Liberals gave Stewardship Ontario the green light to slap eco taxes on thousands of new products in July 2010. This time, however, consumers have had enough. We all know the story well. The public outcry was so great that the Liberals decided to remove the eco taxes and dole out \$18 million to cover the costs of continuing the program—of course, without telling anyone.

I hope the parliamentary assistant is taking notes, because I really hope this is enough to snap the environment minister out of his trance. Despite all of this history, the environment minister still has the nerve to first pretend that he doesn't know what eco taxes are, then blame industry and then, after getting called out, point the finger at us.

I want to state this again for the record: There were no eco taxes under the former PC government. Eco taxes were created by the Liberal government in 2008 as part of their greenwashing agenda.

Clearly, the environment minister has been speaking out of both sides of his mouth—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The parliamentary assistant: You have five minutes to respond.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and have the opportunity to respond to the member's question.

We're here today to discuss the result of legislation passed into law by the Progressive Conservative Party in 2002. That was over 10 years ago, as you said. The Waste Diversion Act, 2002, put a system in place that allows private sector cartels to pass the fiscal responsibility for recycling products directly to consumers in the form of an industry-created eco fee.

This debate would be not be taking place if the Tories had just taken the time to properly consider the effect that their Waste Diversion Act would have on consumers and Ontario diversion rates.

They had the opportunity to create an act that could have done what its name implies: divert waste. Instead, the waste reduction act has stifled diversion in Ontario by calling for industry-run recycling cartels, as opposed to placing the onus and responsibility where it belongs: with the individual producer.

This could have been easily done by establishing a model requiring true individual producer responsibility. The Tory decision to hand responsibility for waste diversion to these cartels rather than to individual producers, where it belongs, is at the heart of the problem we are debating today.

Recycling a product at the end of its useful life is part of the cost of doing business, plain and simple, just like paying employees' wages, gassing up a delivery truck or writing the rent cheque. You don't see a rent surcharge

on your sales slip, and there's no reason you should see an eco fee on that slip either.

It has become abundantly clear to pretty much everyone who has had to deal with the Waste Diversion Act that it is a flawed piece of legislation and it must be replaced. Over the weekend, the head of the Ontario Waste Management Association, Rob Cook, put it quite simply: "There's no point in tinkering with the legislation because it is fundamentally flawed—the problems are rooted in the philosophy of the act."

Our intention is to replace the Waste Diversion Act with new and stronger legislation, legislation that will, if passed, increase diversion and protect consumers. The job of government will be to set clear environmental requirements to ensure that end-of-life products are recovered, reused and recycled, and kept out of the environment.

It is the producers that will ensure that innovative options for recycling, including product and packaging design, is achieved at least cost, and not have the costs automatically passed on to consumers. Lower recycling costs will be in the producers' best marketing interests and will mean more competitive prices.

Our approach, to engage the innovative creativity of individual private sector producers, will be contained in legislation that we intend to introduce later this session. It's time to shift our energies from merely managing waste to reducing it, while recovering the economic value of the waste stream and creating more recycling jobs.

I would like to finish by asking the member from Kitchener–Conestoga: Who was looking out for consumers when his party's flawed Waste Diversion Act was passed? The person who was charged with protecting consumers while this piece of legislation was passed—the Minister of Consumer Services at the time—was your leader, Tim Hudak, godfather of all eco fees. So if you're truly concerned about protecting consumers, look no further than to your own leader for the cause of your concern. He let it happen. Our government is going to fix the Tory mess. I'd invite the member across the aisle so that he can be a part of this and many other important reforms.

1810

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question yesterday by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the Premier may respond for up to five minutes as well.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker; as you've noted, I did request a late-show debate because of my dissatisfaction with the answer given by the Premier—I'm very pleased to see the Premier here this evening—dissatisfaction concerning her commitment, her priority, for social service reform that I would notice on a nightly

basis on television just after your success in the leadership.

I note from the outset that my dissatisfaction results from the fact that the Premier, while making reference to the details that she said the minister would provide, failed to provide any details whatsoever. We were left with a number of old saws, “discussions,” talking with the assurance that we’re “moving forward”—we do hear that a lot—“preparing” and “committed to beginning to implement.” “Committed to beginning to implement”—that’s what you said, Premier, and again, what does that mean? The bottom line of my question is, when it comes to consolidation—the integration of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program to help get recipients jobs—people would like to know: Are you in or are you out on that one?

If you’re in, how will that work, given that ODSP is currently funded 100% provincially and OW is at 86%. Where will the incentive be for municipal staff to find efficiencies with respect to the disability program within a consolidated system if they’re not the ones footing the bill? If you’re in, will there be public consultation? If you’re in, will there be distinctions based on disability needs? Has that been thought out?

In my original question yesterday, I mentioned that our official opposition published a white paper, a paper to cut duplication and to cut the bureaucracy, again with a focus on helping to better enable people on disability to secure employment. I made mention of the all-party support at second reading for a private member’s bill to foster employment and to permit disabled people to keep more of their own money—that was three years ago. I made mention of a private member’s bill I introduced a month or so ago to cut waste through consolidation, while—ever-important—protecting the distinct needs of people with disabilities.

That’s what we’ve done. We want to know what you’ve done and what you’re going to do. The question remains: What happened? What’s happening here? What happened to your priority to reform social assistance? Again, are you in, or are you out? I have a feeling that in a few minutes we may get an answer to that.

What of fostering employment through allowing recipients to keep more of their earned money? We described this in our white paper. It was in our private member’s bill. We read that in the report by Lankin and Sheikh. Again, are you in or are you out when it comes to encouraging recipients to attain the dignity that accompanies a job? Will this be your priority?

At last count, the ODSP program caseload had increased by 49%—that’s since 2003—approximately 400,000 people, while 475,000 children, women and men are on welfare. My question is, are these numbers current? Perhaps you could update the House on that trend—and it’s obviously a trend in the wrong direction. We’re looking at approaching something like a million people on social assistance in the province of Ontario.

I think of the 800 rules and regulations that force many case workers to spend 70% of their time dealing with these kinds of issues rather than helping out.

Social impact bonds—again, to encourage innovation in service delivery.

The concept of pay for success: Drummond talked about that one. Are you in on that one specifically, or are you out?

What’s the holdup? We’d like to find out this evening just where we stand in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Premier has up to five minutes.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member opposite, because I think it bespeaks a level of common ground between us on this issue that I haven’t heard before. I’m encouraged to hear the question. I’m encouraged to hear the remarks today about the concern around making our social assistance system more rational.

I would just say to the member opposite that, having been in this office for about nine weeks, my commitment to implementing the recommendations of the report has not diminished in any way. I’ll go into some detail about that, but I am pleased that the question has been raised by the party opposite because I think that it suggests that perhaps the party opposite is getting ready to read the budget, look at what’s in it and possibly support it, because it’s obvious that there could be some common ground there.

The answer to the question is simple: I remain absolutely committed to reforming social assistance in Ontario, building on the advice of the Lankin-Sheikh report. That is my position; it has been my position. As I say, I have been in this office for a very short time. We are going to move ahead on that. As the member opposite knows, the report outlined 108 recommendations across six key themes that our government is looking at as we continue to build a stronger, healthier and fairer society by reducing poverty and increasing opportunities for the people of Ontario.

I just want to remark that this is the government that put in place legislation that requires us to report on poverty reduction. It’s the first government that has had a Poverty Reduction Strategy. To even put poverty and the reduction of poverty on the legislative radar screen and to put in place a policy and legislation that hold the government accountable for reduction on indicators that are so important in people’s lives is a huge step forward, I think, and it was our government that took that.

We know that social assistance as it exists today is not helping our most vulnerable people as it could be. That’s how we know that there’s more work to be done and that’s why we undertook the first major review of social assistance in the province in over 20 years. It hadn’t been done for 20 years, so we identified that as an issue and we acted on it by putting this review in place. We support the objectives described in the report. We’re committed to the end goal of reducing poverty and increasing opportunities, and that’s why the review remains a priority for the government. That’s why I directed, pretty much im-

mediately when I came into the office, the secretary of cabinet to put together an implementation plan for the recommendations in the report, and that is the work that has been ongoing since I was in this position.

The Minister of Finance has said, in the runup to the budget, that we're preparing to implement recommendations from the report. That's why the Minister of Community and Social Services is talking to folks on the front line, because it's not a straightforward issue. Unravelling the tangle of rules and the jurisdictional issues is not straightforward. It's not simple. We need to make sure everyone can take part in that process, because we want everyone to take part in the economy. We want the systems that the government sets up not to get in the way of people taking part in the economy but in fact to support people having a job, getting a job and keeping that job.

That's what we're going to be working on. I hope the party opposite will work with us on that and support us on that front.

1820

Social assistance has been and will continue to be a priority for our government. In 2012, in our budget, we confirmed that the government remains committed to protecting the gains we've made in education, health care and social programs. We raised social assistance rates by 1% again last fall. That means that we've raised rates by a cumulative 14.9% since we took office in 2003. What that means is that this initiative will provide about \$55 million annually in additional benefits to families and individuals receiving social assistance. We're ensuring that the social assistance system is there for the people who need it.

Our social assistance programs, as you know, Madam Speaker, provide so much more than a cheque. They provide employment supports and skills training to people in order to help them reconnect with the labour force. They provide child care supports so people can work and earn their way back to a better life for their families. They provide job placements—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It goes so fast.

TOURISM

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Kenora–Rainy River has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given yesterday by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The member has up to five minutes, and the minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Tourism what this government's strategy is for promoting tourism in the northwest, and I did not receive an answer. Nor did I receive an answer last year when I asked, on nearly two dozen occasions, for the minister to explain why the travel information centres in Fort Frances, Rainy River and Kenora

were closed while other centres at less busy border crossings remained open.

This has been a major concern because here we have an industry, tourism, that is essential to our northern economy, yet the minister in charge of protecting and promoting that industry has no knowledge, nor has he attempted to gather knowledge, of a very significant part of our province's economy.

Each year, tourism in the northwest contributes more than \$430 million into the provincial economy. With the downturn of our province's forest industry, many communities in the northwest became more and more reliant on tourism, whether it's cottagers and other visitors from Manitoba and other western provinces coming to Kenora and Lake of the Woods, or a huge influx of visitors from the midwest United States who visit hunting and fishing lodges scattered throughout more rural areas of the riding of Kenora–Rainy River.

While small in size, these mom-and-pop operators make significant contributions to our local economy. I know this first-hand because my parents operate Lac Seul Onaway Lodge, and each week they, just like dozens of similar operators, spend thousands of dollars on groceries for their guests, gas for their boats, and minnows and other supplies that help fuel our economy.

Despite the tourism industry in many ways being the backbone of our economy, these operations have not received the respect they deserve from a Ministry of Tourism that has taken no steps to alleviate the impacts of bad government policy on our region's operators. The minister and his department haven't taken the time to learn about the market area, and for much of the last year they justified closing the centres in my riding while keeping a centre in Pigeon River near Thunder Bay open by saying that it served a vital US tourism market.

I agree that American tourists are vital, but border crossing statistics show that Fort Frances and not Pigeon River is the primary entry point, at some points during the year serving almost twice as many visitors. In fact, the ministry's own statistics show that not only did the travel centre in Fort Frances continue to serve significantly more visitors, but the decline in visits in Pigeon River was much steeper in the last 10 years than for any of the three that they chose to close.

In fact, the minister's own parliamentary assistant, the member from Niagara Falls, even conceded as much in an interview with the Kenora Daily Miner newspaper last year. He said, "I've given that to the Minister (of Tourism Michael Chan)'s office chief of staff and said, 'let's take a look at this, let's talk to the bureaucrats who have given you the advice that they should be closed to see if they're taking into account the factors that Sarah mentioned.'" He said, "I'm prepared to take it forward. It's a valid series of concerns."

Instead, the ministry chose to close the centres in favour of its travel application for smart phones, where it once again failed to verify the effectiveness of this policy. Had they done the necessary groundwork, they would have found out that much of the northwest,

including most of the areas where tourist businesses are operating, are dead zones for this technology. Not only that, but this app, which was created by this government and heralded as being a bona fide replacement for the travel information centres, isn't unique, and it doesn't reflect the experiences that we are trying to market, such as nature, hunting and fishing.

Further, the biggest insult is that when you take the time to explore the app, you quickly discover that it completely fails to include any meaningful content for the northwest—this at a time when we are put at a competitive disadvantage by this government's HST, a tax that does not exist in northern Minnesota and Manitoba. And now this government is allowing billboards promoting outdoor recreation such as hunting and fishing in Manitoba—the business our operators in Kenora–Rainy River need—to be put up all across the northwest.

So I will ask again, what is this government's plan? The tourist operators in my region deserve answers, and the answers they have received to date are not supported by any facts.

Hon. Michael Chan: The member opposite talked about this issue about a year ago, and here we go, we're going to talk about the same issue. Last year, I think my PA responded to the question, but anyway, I'm going to try that one more time today.

Speaker, it is really a pleasure to rise today in the House and speak to our government's strategy to support tourism in northern Ontario. It is no secret that the tourism industry, the tourists, and the ways in which the market and consumers interact have changed. We found that Ontario tourism information centres throughout the province were experiencing declining demand. Not just in the year prior to closure or five years prior to closure, but for the past 10 years visitation decreased by 50% to 80% in Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River. We saw people relying less on OTICs; we heard a call for greater accessibility in the information age; and we responded in recognition that marketing is much more than keeping underperforming OTICs. It requires a decisive approach. It demands innovation. It calls for us to think outside the box and leverage the tools necessary to bring tourists to our great province, and that includes northwestern Ontario and northern Ontario.

Our government deployed a robust tourism strategy in the north by providing necessary tourism infrastructure. We established the new regional tourism organization in region number 13, one that covers northern Ontario, with over \$18 million from 2010 to 2014, to effectively draw upon our tourism assets in the north, aggressively market northern Ontario to other centres, including Minnesota,

Toronto and Ottawa, and to drive the economy in our northern communities by increased visitation.

Speaker, allow me to remind you that before RTO 13 and our \$18-million support for northern Ontario, there were zero ministry dollars invested in a northern tourism strategy—not even a penny. But through RTO 13, our government increased tourism support to the north by \$18 million, and we did not stop there.

On top of that, we invested approximately \$5 million annually since 2003 for the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp.'s northern Ontario budget.

We supported festivals and events—over 130 events in northern Ontario—through Celebrate Ontario, employing thousands of Ontarians, many of them youth.

We introduced a tourism presence in the Ministry of Transportation's 23 new high-traffic highway service centres.

We continue to operate our travel information call centre, a toll-free service for tourists to access a travel counsellor.

We directed the OTMPC to develop a web-based portal to provide tourism information to visitors within our borders and beyond.

We, as a government, have been proud partners of tourism in the north:

- committing over \$68 million since 2003—that includes Kenora, Rainy River and Fort Frances;

- proactively profiling our tourism assets for visitors as they begin to plan their vacations;

- realigning our tourism marketing online services; and

- stepping up Ontario's 24/7 electronic and Internet-based travel marketing presence to meet consumers' travel research and booking preferences.

Speaker, when something is not working we must find new ways. We must change the course. We must adapt. Our market has changed, evolved and transformed. If tourism in northern Ontario is to be successful, it needs to compete with other jurisdictions.

As more and more travellers turn to the Internet to organize their trips, we are meeting the expectations of the competitive travel market by focusing our efforts on enhanced Internet-based services. Speaker, with new technologies, with new communication tools, with new access to information, we need a new way. We need a way forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1831.

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Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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| Bartolucci, Rick (LIB) | Sudbury | |
| Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB) | Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest | |
| Best, Margaret R. (LIB) | Scarborough–Guildwood | |
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| Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | |
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| Delaney, Bob (LIB) | Mississauga–Streetsville | |
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| Fife, Catherine (NDP) | Kitchener–Waterloo | |

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| Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | |
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Jagmeet Singh
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Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Continued from back cover

Correction of record

Hon. John Milloy 1216

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

**Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances),
2013, Bill 11, Ms. Matthews / Loi de 2013 modifiant
la Loi sur les ambulances (services d'ambulance
aériens), projet de loi 11, Mme Matthews**
Second reading agreed to 1216

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Boston tragedy

Mr. Todd Smith 1217

Tenant protection

Mr. Jonah Schein 1217

Israeli Independence Day

Mr. Monte Kwinter 1217

Ronald John Edwards

Mrs. Jane McKenna 1217

Equal Voice

Ms. Cheri DiNovo 1218

Women's issues

Ms. Dipika Damerla 1218

Don Bumstead

Mr. Bill Walker 1218

Father Serra Separate School

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield 1219

Ralph Klein

Mr. Ted Arnott 1219

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac) 1219

Report deemed adopted 1219

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Children and Youth in Care Day Act, 2013, Bill 53,
Ms. Wong / Loi de 2013 sur le Jour des enfants et
des jeunes pris en charge, projet de loi 53,
Mme Wong**

First reading agreed to 1219

Ms. Soo Wong 1219

Order of business

Mr. Jim Wilson 1220

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Air quality

Mr. Steve Clark 1220

Government services

Mr. Michael Mantha 1220

Automobile insurance

Mr. Bill Mauro 1220

Springwater Provincial Park

Mr. Jim Wilson 1221

Air-rail link

Mr. Jonah Schein 1221

Agri-food industry

Mr. Bill Mauro 1221

Air quality

Ms. Sylvia Jones 1221

Dog ownership

Ms. Cheri DiNovo 1221

Electoral boundaries

Ms. Soo Wong 1222

Air quality

Mr. Rob E. Milligan 1222

Air-rail link

Ms. Cheri DiNovo 1222

Agri-food industry

Ms. Soo Wong 1222

Wind turbines

Mr. Todd Smith 1223

Wind turbines

Mrs. Jane McKenna 1223

Tire disposal

Mr. Toby Barrett 1223

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

**Local Food Act, 2013, Bill 36, Ms. Wynne / Loi de
2013 sur les aliments locaux, projet de loi 36,
Mme Wynne**

Mr. John Vanthof 1223

Mr. Grant Crack 1231

Ms. Laurie Scott 1231

Mr. Michael Mantha 1232

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn 1232

Mr. John Vanthof 1232

Hon. Jeff Leal 1232

Mr. Monte McNaughton 1235

Mr. Jonah Schein 1235

| | |
|---|------|
| Mr. Grant Crack..... | 1235 |
| Mr. Todd Smith | 1236 |
| Hon. Jeff Leal | 1236 |
| Mr. Randy Pettapiece | 1236 |
| Ms. Sarah Campbell | 1239 |
| Mr. Grant Crack..... | 1240 |
| Mr. Rob E. Milligan | 1240 |
| Mr. Michael Mantha..... | 1240 |
| Mr. Randy Pettapiece | 1241 |
| Mr. Jonah Schein | 1241 |
| Second reading debate deemed adjourned..... | 1244 |

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR
LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT**

Waste diversion

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Mr. Michael Harris | 1244 |
| Mr. Phil McNeely..... | 1245 |

Social assistance

| | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| Mr. Toby Barrett..... | 1245 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne..... | 1246 |

Tourism

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Sarah Campbell | 1247 |
| Hon. Michael Chan..... | 1248 |

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 16 April 2013 / Mardi 16 avril 2013

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Highway Traffic Statute Law Amendment Act, 2013, Bill 34, Mr. Murray / Loi de 2013 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne le Code de la route, projet de loi 34, M. Murray

| | |
|--|------|
| Mr. Frank Klees | 1197 |
| Ms. Cindy Forster | 1203 |
| Hon. Glen R. Murray | 1203 |
| Mr. Steve Clark | 1204 |
| Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong | 1204 |
| Mr. Frank Klees | 1204 |
| Second reading debate deemed adjourned | 1204 |

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

| | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Michael Harris..... | 1205 |
| Mr. Mike Colle..... | 1205 |
| Mr. Jim Wilson | 1205 |
| Ms. Cheri DiNovo..... | 1205 |
| Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield | 1205 |
| Mr. Steve Clark | 1205 |
| Hon. Michael Gravelle | 1205 |
| Mr. John O'Toole..... | 1205 |
| Hon. Deborah Matthews | 1205 |
| Mr. Kim Craitor | 1205 |
| The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)..... | 1205 |

Boston tragedy

| | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Hon. Yasir Naqvi | 1205 |
| The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)..... | 1205 |

Visitors

| | |
|-------------------------|------|
| Mr. Gilles Bisson | 1205 |
|-------------------------|------|

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Power plants

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Victor Fedeli..... | 1205 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1206 |
| Hon. Bob Chiarelli | 1206 |

Power plants

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Mr. John Yakabuski | 1207 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1207 |
| Hon. Bob Chiarelli | 1207 |

Power plants

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Ms. Andrea Horwath..... | 1208 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1208 |

Power plants

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Ms. Andrea Horwath..... | 1208 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1209 |
| Hon. Bob Chiarelli | 1209 |

Power plants

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Frank Klees | 1209 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1210 |
| Hon. John Milloy | 1210 |

Power plants

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Mr. Peter Tabuns | 1210 |
| Hon. John Milloy | 1210 |

GO Transit

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Helena Jaczek..... | 1211 |
| Hon. Glen R. Murray..... | 1211 |

Power plants

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ms. Lisa MacLeod..... | 1211 |
| Hon. Bob Chiarelli | 1212 |

Health care funding

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Taras Natyshak | 1212 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1212 |
| Hon. Deborah Matthews | 1212 |

Immigrant services / Services aux immigrants

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Mr. Shafiq Qaadri..... | 1213 |
| Hon. Michael Coteau..... | 1213 |

Power plants

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Mr. Steve Clark | 1213 |
| Hon. Bob Chiarelli | 1213 |
| Mr. John O'Toole..... | 1214 |

Correctional services

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong | 1214 |
| Hon. Madeleine Meilleur | 1214 |

Beekeeping industry

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Bill Mauro | 1214 |
| Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne | 1214 |

Power plants

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Ms. Lisa M. Thompson | 1215 |
| Hon. Bob Chiarelli | 1215 |
| Mr. Bill Walker | 1215 |

Property taxation

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Mr. Michael Mantha..... | 1215 |
| Hon. Charles Sousa | 1216 |

Continued on inside back cover