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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Monday 29 April 2013

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Lundi 29 avril 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 April 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 avril 2013

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to welcome the Canadian Beverage Association. In the members' gallery are Jim Goetz, president of the Canadian Beverage Association, and member representatives including Neil Antymis, PepsiCo Beverages; John Challinor, Nestlé Waters; Wayne Delfino, Canada Dry Mott's; Jenny Gusba, PepsiCo Beverages; Erika Mozes, Coca-Cola Canada; and John Wren, Cott Beverages. I hope the members will take time to meet with them at their reception this evening in the legislative dining room.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Joining us in the east gallery at some point: Donna Tranquada, from the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce; Carl Cosack, who's the chair of that same group; Dave Vander Zaag, who's a Melancthon potato farmer; and Harvey Kolodny, professor emeritus, Rotman School. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to introduce a summer intern who's going to be working in my office for the next number of months: Eugenie Lambert, from Paris, France. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome folks from the Nature Conservancy of Canada here today. Kate Lyons is the chair of Nature Conservancy of Canada in Ontario, and James Duncan is the vice-president in charge of Nature Conservancy of Canada in Ontario.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome to the House Kyle Olsen. Kyle is a former resident of Toronto Centre, but he now works for Premier Alison Redford in Alberta. Let's show him how we operate here.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have four special guests here today: Kayla Goulding, from my riding, painted a beautiful picture which we're unveiling today at 1:30 in my office, room 444—everyone is welcome—and her friend Brie Welch. Marg Goulding is here; and Al Goulding is here. He's the co-founder of Railway City Brewing, whose Dead Elephant Ale is served every day in this fine establishment.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I have three guests here today from the People First group: Kory Earle, Marg McLean and Richard Ruston. Welcome, all.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to welcome two residents from Prince Edward county here today: Lyn Tracey and her daughter, Rachael Tracey, sitting in the west members' gallery.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to welcome Elena Woydich, a German exchange student who is staying with a family from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and a friend of hers, Alexa Tagura, who are here today to see how Queen's Park operates.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome, from my riding of Durham, page Tenzin Shomar. Here today also are his father, Phurbu, as well as his mother, Tsering, and his sister, Dephel. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Good morning. I too would like to welcome Kate Lyons and James Duncan from the Nature Conservancy of Canada in Ontario. I encourage all members to drop into their reception in committee room 230 following question period. Welcome, and thank you for all the work that you do.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to welcome Anne Nahuis, Bernard Pope and Robert Wright from the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture. Welcome.

Mr. Frank Klees: This may be unconventional, but I want to extend congratulations to the member from Nepean–Carleton on her Sens stumbling into the playoffs, and we wish them an enjoyable four games.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That was unorthodox. Further introductions?

Finally, I have one. Would the members please join me in welcoming a visiting table officer who is on attachment this week with our table. Shannon Dean is the senior parliamentary counsel and director of House services with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Welcome.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think the Minister of the Environment is asking me to help him today.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: We have a class from Mississauga South just arriving—I'd like to give them an opportunity to walk in—they're from St. Paul Secondary School. There are going to be about 75 students listening to us cordially discussing and debating today, and I appreciate the students being here from grade 10 civics classes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll have one more call for introduction of guests. There being none, it is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. At 11:30 today, just after question period, Jim Wilson, the PC House leader, the member for Simcoe–Grey, will be tabling a want of confidence motion in the assembly. The motion will reflect the sadness, anger and frustration of Ontario taxpayers that the Liberal Party is putting their own interests ahead of the interests of taxpayers, that you chose to spend probably over \$1 billion to cancel gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga instead of addressing the real concerns around jobs and spending within our means.

Premier, given the seriousness of this issue and the motion coming before the House today, will you agree to have this motion debated here in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is absolutely within the purview of the party opposite to work to hold the government to account. In a minority Parliament it is absolutely within his control to suggest that there be a non-confidence motion at any point.

But the reality is, we have a very large confidence issue that will come before this House very shortly. Within this week, we're going to be presenting a budget. I really believe that the fact we're introducing the budget on Thursday gives this Parliament an opportunity to vote on and express confidence or non-confidence in the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: This is helpful that the Premier acknowledges the rights of the opposition to bring this forward, and I assure you, we take this with the utmost seriousness and we believe we need to do the right thing on behalf of Ontarians. But I worry, Premier, that the NDP has already indicated that they're willing to prop up your government if you make enough commitments around increasing taxes and spending.

I think this matter is serious enough in itself. It crosses the line towards a government that appears to be corrupted to make these types of decisions. You were around the cabinet table, a senior McGuinty minister who has a hand in these decisions. I think that the people around Ontario want to see the gas plant scandal put before a vote to the assembly. Do they have confidence in a government that has made this decision and if they stay in office will simply do so again? Premier, will you do the right thing and allow this motion to stand for debate and a vote in the Legislative Assembly?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've done exactly what I said I would do on the issue of the relocation of gas plants. I was committed to being open and transparent. That process is unfolding in committee.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, the confidence vote, the confidence issue that will be before this House, the budget, is extremely important to the people of Ontario and I think that the people of Ontario—not to put thoughts in their minds, but I would expect the Leader of the Opposition would read the budget before he decided not to vote for it.

To be fair, the third party has simply said that they are going to look at the budget before they make the decision. There is no guarantee, and I completely respect the decision that the third party has taken. But I think it is questionable that the Leader of the Opposition has said that he's not even going to look at the budget before he rejects it out of hand.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier knows we've had a number of meetings where I put ideas on the table to get our economy going again, to restore hope to those who have lost hope in the province, and also to bring forward a budget that actually reduces spending, not increases spending.

You've made a decision, as you indicated in your interviews this weekend, that you and I don't see eye to eye on how to approach the big issues. I respect your opinion. We just simply disagree on the approach.

But here's what this comes to. This is what I worry about. The Liberal government, in your words, made intentional decisions to cancel, first, the Oakville plant, no matter what the cost, and then a year or so later you decided to cancel the Mississauga gas plant, no matter what the cost, instead of addressing the big issues. If you got away with it for Oakville, if you got away with it for Mississauga, why should taxpayers not believe that you're going to try it again? That's why we need this vote. How we know you won't try to pull this stunt again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to go back to the discussions that the Leader of the Opposition and I have had. They have been very collegial, and it has been a pleasure to be able to sit down with him. In fact, if he were to read the budget before he decided not to vote for it, I believe he would see that there are issues that have been raised by him and by a member of his caucus. The member for Haldimand–Norfolk, for example, called on us to implement the Brighter Prospects report to look at the untangling of the social assistance program and to look at the recommendations that Munir Sheikh and Frances Lankin put forward. I think if the Leader of the Opposition took the chance to look at our budget, he might see that we are moving in that direction, and he'll be able to see that on Thursday.

I believe, I contend, that there will be common ground in our budget that both the Leader of the Opposition and his party and the NDP could find if they chose to read the budget before they rejected it.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier on the topic of the confidence motion around the cancellation of the gas

plants in this province and on the topic of the budget vote.

There used to be a day when there was modesty about budgets. You'd wait and see what was in the budget. These Liberals have been very clear on the direction they're going to go. You've basically had a new spending announcement every day; you're making another spending announcement later today. You've already signalled that you're going to increase taxes in the province. You call them revenue tools, but you're increasing taxes.

Speaker, more of the same is not going to get us out of this mess. We need to go in the opposite direction: Hold the line, reduce spending and lower taxes.

Let me ask you this: We know the kinds of games Dalton McGuinty played. He prorogued this Legislature for four months; you supported that decision. Please don't tell me that you'll engage in Dalton McGuinty games by trying to block this very important motion of confidence. Please tell us, Premier: You're not going to stand in the way and block what Ontarians want us to do and have a vote on this measure?

Interjections.

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

We've started that process again today, and I'd like to stop it, which is when somebody is putting the question, I'm hearing people from that side of the bench say stuff while the person is putting the question, which is not helpful; and in this case, when the answers are coming, I'm hearing heckling from the answer. I can't hear either one as clearly as I'd like to, so please respect each other on both fronts, and then also tone the heckling down.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is a process under way. There is a process under way in the justice committee, where a full range of questions is being asked about the issue that the Leader of the Opposition is raising, the issue around the relocation of the gas plants. I wrote to the Auditor General. I asked that he examine the cost of the Oakville relocation. I am appearing before the committee tomorrow. I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition has agreed to do that. He's been asked, but my hope is that he would also appear before the committee.

So that process is in place, and because the committee has a broadened mandate, they're able to ask questions on a full range of all the issues surrounding the relocation of the gas plants.

There is a confidence issue coming before this House that will affect everyone in this province, Mr. Speaker, because the budget is wide-ranging. All of the issues in the budget will affect the people of Ontario. I believe that that is the confidence issue that should be considered by this House fully, with everyone having read the documents.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier has been clear: Her budget will increase spending; you make a new announcement every day. You've indicated that you're going to

bring in new revenue tools, which—you have used the term euphemistically—does refer to new taxes. I just don't think that more of the same that got us into this mess is going to get us out of this mess.

I want to see Ontario back on its feet. I want to see Ontario strong and proud, creating jobs and leading Canada. Your plan is not going to do so.

What I worry about, Speaker, is that the Liberal government seems to be in the mode to give whatever spending promises the NDP demands. That's going to dig our hole deeper. Any government that's focused strictly on survival is not going to be the kind of government that we need to actually take us on a new and different path.

The bottom line here, Premier: The NDP may prop you up on that vote, but I want an honest question put before all members of the assembly on behalf of all Ontarians. Is the gas scandal—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Does it go so far that the confidence in this government has been badly shaken and we need a new team to lead this province of Ontario—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I really believe I've spoken to the confidence issue. I think that the budget is the confidence issue that the House needs to—

Interjection: Consider.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —consider. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the vision for the province, when the Leader of the Opposition talks about his vision for the province and the province prospering, I believe that we share that, but I also believe that we need a fairer society as well.

I also believe that fiscal responsibility and a fairer society are not mutually exclusive. I think not waiting another 40 years to build transit in the province is a good idea. I believe that investing in youth and making sure that youth have access to employment—I believe youth having the opportunities to find employment—that's an investment in the future. That's going to make Ontario more prosperous.

Those are the investments that we're going to make in the context of fiscal responsibility. I haven't heard those—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, please come to order.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier speaks passionately about a fair society, but I ask the Premier, when you have 600,000 of our friends, our neighbours, our relatives, folks watching the Legislative Assembly at home today who have no job to go to Monday morning—they'll have no job to go to next Monday as well. They're losing hope in the province of Ontario. What is exactly—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak:—about your decision to spend a billion dollars to save Liberal seats, to try to buy the last election campaign, to bail out the Liberal Party ahead of those 600,000 folks who know we can do a lot better in this province, who know we can restore hope. There is nothing fair about your decision to put the Liberal Party's interests ahead of the interests of hard-working Ontario families.

1050

Premier, you know in your heart the right thing to do. The wrong thing is to dodge this vote. The wrong thing is for the Liberals to use their position to block this motion. Let's do right by Ontarians. Do what they want us to do. Call the vote on the gas plant scandal. Let people stand up and decide where they stand. We know where we stand.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am committed to bringing forward a budget that is even-handed, that is going to be fiscally responsible, that is going to make sure that we put in place supports to make Ontario a fairer society.

Mr. Speaker, I think what is right at this moment is that all parties in this Legislature work together. We had a provincial election not that long ago. I believe that the people of Ontario expect us to work together and to avoid an unnecessary election. I believe that working together is exactly what the people of Ontario have asked us to do, and if all parties in this House read the budget and look at what's there, I believe they will find much to support.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. It's clear that people want to see some real, positive change in the upcoming budget. They're worried about their parents and their grandparents who are waiting for home care; kids who are well into their twenties who are still living at home and looking for work; and being stuck with the highest auto insurance rates in the entire country. They're tired of seeing these priorities pushed aside to make way for more corporate tax loopholes, Speaker, and hospital CEO salaries that continue to spike up. Is the Premier prepared to offer real action in this budget, or are we just going to get more of their same conversation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The conversations came first, and the conversations are very important in order to understand not just what the opposition parties were concerned about and were looking for, but what people across the province were looking for, which is why the Minister of Finance talked to hundreds of thousands of people in person and on the phone. We held round tables around the province, talking to businesses, making sure we understood what their concerns were, and their concerns more often than not were about the mismatch between the skills that many of our youth have got and

the jobs that are actually available. So we need to find a way to close that gap.

Mr. Speaker, to the question of the leader of the third party: We intend to take real action. We have laid out a plan. That plan will be before the House on Thursday. I look forward to everyone reading the budget and determining that they can support it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, for young people waiting to start their careers, this is not an abstract issue. Youth unemployment is over 16% in this province. Young people and their parents want to see a real plan that actually rewards the companies who put youth on the path to a good job in a real career. Instead, they see a government that's ready to pour millions upon millions of dollars into tax loopholes that reward companies when they're buying drinks and box seats for their clients and customers. They want to know why their challenges are being ignored by the government. What does the Premier have to say to those people?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that I am very concerned about a 16.5% unemployment rate for young people. It's unacceptable. I completely agree with the leader of the third party. We need to do something about that, but we need to do something that is going to actually address the issue. We need to make sure that business and labour and government are working together, because there isn't one simple solution to this. It's about the skills mismatch. It's about opportunities for young people to have access to placements and co-ops. It's about making sure that as our students go through secondary school, they know what the pathways are when they get to the end of high school, and that we have the right pathways in place not just in our urban centres but in all of our centres, in the rural communities, in the north, because it's not just young people in urban centres who need that access. That's the kind of approach that we are going to take to make sure that there is a real approach and real action for young people.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When I talk to young people, Speaker, they tell me that they have the skills; they have the desire; they have the ambition. They can't get their foot in the door of an employer. That's their problem.

Here's what they see: They're struggling to find work and they're struggling to start their careers. For 10 years, their government has offered tax breaks and opened new loopholes to Ontario's largest corporations while promising that somehow it was going to create jobs. Well, guess what? It didn't.

They're tired of vague promises and they're tired of vague conversations that may get them something 20 years from now, when they're 40 years old. They want to see real change and they want to see it now. Will the Premier take action with a plan that rewards companies when they hire young people and give them some experience on the job, not when they're expensing a dinner for their clients?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: There are two points to deal with here.

The member talks about input tax credits. They're not a loophole. It's not a tax break; it's not a giveaway; and it's not new. It's a value-added system that we brought in place to inspire more investment and more growth. As a result of implementing these tax reforms, we have created more jobs, we have created investment, and over 400,000 net new jobs have come to the province.

The other aspect of the question was on our youth unemployment. We are taking action right now, Mr. Speaker, and we have, in trying to find ways to marry up our youth with our employers. That's why we're implementing, in this budget, initiatives around that very fact.

I appreciate the question, and we are addressing loopholes, which are, in fact, companies that don't pay their fair share. We're dealing with that with the federal government.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, opening up a new tax opportunity for companies, whether it's a tax loophole or a new opportunity, is still giving away \$1.3 billion to the corporations of this province.

My next question is to the Premier, Speaker. People are really tired of feeling that they're actually falling further and further behind. That's the crux of the problem that we have in this province. They're weary of government promises that don't lead to results for them. They've been told that CEO salary hikes in hospitals and corporate tax loopholes and breaks to the insurance industry were going to somehow create jobs, improve health care and make life more affordable for them, but they see that it just has not delivered. Instead, they see a government that's spending millions and millions of dollars on cancelled gas plants and more tax loopholes, while their priorities get little more than lip service.

Is the Premier ready to admit that we need to move beyond the promises and beyond the vague commitments of eventually getting something done and actually delivering to the people of this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just on the issue of our recovery, Mr. Speaker, and how we've been doing in the province: We have regained more than 100% of the jobs that were lost in the depths of the economic downturn. What we have been doing is working. We are seeing success.

On the broader issues of what the people of Ontario have been able to see over the last few years in terms of achievement, we've moved from last to first in terms of wait times in our health care. We have improved the education system to the point where our students are achieving at the very highest ranks internationally. The investments that have been made over the last nine years have produced results.

In terms of changing the way we address issues around young people being prepared to get into the

workforce: I agree; there's more that needs to be done. We need to address that issue, and that's one of the things that you will see addressed in the budget when we deliver it on Thursday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, New Democrats crossed the province when the government shut this place down for their own personal needs. We actually crossed the province and spent that time talking to people and families about how they actually contribute to our province. They told us that what they want to see in this upcoming budget is a very balanced approach. They also told us that they're very tired of a government firing nurses, asking families to pay more, while handing away millions and millions and millions of dollars cancelling private power deals, creating brand new loopholes for Ontario's largest corporations and watching hospital CEO salaries continue to spike.

The Premier can send people a signal today that she's offering more than just conversation and vague promises. Will she commit to cancelling the tax loopholes and capping CEO salaries in hospitals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

1100

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. These aren't tax loopholes. They're not giveaways. They're not tax breaks. They are restricted tax inputs that exist now, that expire in 2015 on to 2018, as part of the value-added tax system. They involve vehicles, they involve telecommunications, and some of them involve meals and entertainment. We get that. We're dealing with the federal government because it also involves them, and in order for us to proceed effectively, we need their co-operation.

But what's happening now as a result of those initiatives and those tax reforms? It's created a greater incentive of investment of those businesses in Ontario. As a result, it has created jobs. Those jobs are what we need to have right now, and this budget will speak about how we can create even more jobs and how we can create a more balanced approach in achieving it.

It's not taking extreme measures; it's taking the proper measures that the people of Ontario expect us to take.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister continues to play up or to defend an HST scheme that didn't create the 600,000 jobs they promised, and now is about to hand corporations another \$1.3 billion to send wherever they want, not necessarily to create jobs.

People have heard a lot of talk from this government, and they know that it's time for action. Over 10 years of Liberal government have gone by, and the government has failed the people of this province. They continue to fall further and further behind while the well-connected few have gotten all of the breaks.

What they want: a five-day home care guarantee, not CEO salary hikes; an actual youth jobs plan, not more corporate tax loopholes; affordable auto insurance, not

higher industry profits and payouts. They want to see a government that puts the needs of the people looking for work and better health care ahead of the needs of their party's election chances in Oakville and Mississauga.

Is the Premier ready to do that, or are we going to see more of the same old status quo?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question and I understand the concerns, because we share them. We all want to see more prosperity in the province of Ontario. We're all working towards that. That's why Ontario now produces more jobs than the rest of Canada combined. In fact, the very issues that the member talks about in regard to the restricted tax credits are the very things that Quebec and the Atlantic provinces are dealing with as well. They too have phased them out as a result of the federal system.

We're working towards the same goal, as is the third party and, I would assume, as is the opposition. The official opposition recognizes that what we're doing is going to have a great benefit to the province of Ontario. They too should be supporting this budget.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This morning, my question is for the Premier.

Week after week, we've had men and women come to the justice committee. They put their hand on a Bible, they swear an oath to tell the whole truth, then they give a sworn testimony that is completely different to what we hear from this Liberal government. The Premier says that the total cost of cancelling Oakville is \$40 million, yet under oath, we hear sworn testimony that there are buckets of costs more than that.

The Liberal gas plant scandal is the last straw for Ontarians. They've lost their confidence in these Liberals. Premier, will you bring our want of confidence motion forward in this Legislature?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let's talk a little bit about the justice committee and the hearings that are taking place tomorrow. Last week, we got to witness the dramatics, the arrogance of the member from Leeds–Grenville when he stood up and asked the Premier the following question: "Next Tuesday you've been invited to appear before the justice committee. Will you confirm to the House today that you will order and instruct your staff to not play calendar or scheduling games?"

The Premier will be there tomorrow. My question is, why did the Leader of the Opposition refuse to appear tomorrow when invited by government members?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Of course, you know that our—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order, please. Please. A third time: Please. The member from Simcoe–Grey, come to order. The member from

Leeds–Grenville, come to order. That's better. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: As everybody in this Legislature knows, our leader will indeed be at the gas plant Liberal scandal hearings shortly.

Premier, no matter what the Liberal staffers hold back from the justice committee, believe it or not, we've now been getting to the truth. The Auditor General's report on the Mississauga cancellation showed us the true story and the depths of this scandal. It was much higher than any of the former—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga will withdraw.

Mr. Michael Harris: I withdraw.

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

Carry on.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Higher than any of the former energy ministers or the current energy minister admitted to, even higher than the Ontario Power Authority admitted to.

Now, Premier, the same thing is happening with the Oakville cancellation. You know exactly how high this cancellation is going to cost. You chaired that cabinet meeting that started the process.

Will you now call our want of confidence motion to the floor of this Legislature? Will you do that—

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

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, we don't know the Leader of the Opposition will be before the committee.

The arrogance of the opposition to stand up and say to the Premier, "Are you going to play calendar or scheduling games?" and then turn around and have the Leader of the Opposition play calendar and scheduling games.

You know what else, Mr. Speaker? We've also heard that Geoff Janoscik, the PC candidate in Mississauga South, is refusing to appear before the committee. Maybe people remember Geoff Janoscik. He's the one who said in the last campaign, "Unlike the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, the only way to guarantee this power plant does not get built is to elect a Tim Hudak Ontario PC government. A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant."

He also paid for thousands of robocalls, saying that the only way to cancel the plant was to vote for the Progressive Conservatives.

Will the honourable member encourage his colleague to appear before the committee and encourage the Leader of the Opposition to appear before the committee?

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. When the Premier was asked about her involvement in the now-infamous Project Vapour minute and how much she thought it would cost to cancel the Oakville gas plant

when she signed that document, the Premier directed every question to her House leader.

When the Premier comes to justice tomorrow, will she tell Ontarians how much she thought it would cost to cancel the Oakville gas plant or is she going to continue to play games and hide behind procedure?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll be at the committee tomorrow. I will answer the questions that the committee asks me.

As I said when I came into this office, it has been my objective from the moment I got into this job to open the process, to allow for all of the questions and to get the answers that the members of the opposition and third party were looking for. That's why I said I would come to the committee. That's why I asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation. That's why we suggested that we open the process, and, in the first instance, the opposition didn't want to open the process. They voted against that.

But we have a more open process now. The questions are being asked. I will be there tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the interaction with the members.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Tomorrow Colin Andersen, the CEO of the Ontario Power Authority, will be giving their latest estimate of the costs for cancelling the Oakville power plant. Judging from testimony we've heard so far, something tells me that it's going to be more than \$40 million.

Has the Premier been kept in the loop about the latest cost of the Oakville gas plant cancellation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, I will be at the committee tomorrow. I will answer all of the questions that are asked of me. I will make a statement at the committee tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. I really believe that is where we should have this conversation: at the committee. That's why I asked that the mandate of the committee be broadened. That's why I asked that the Auditor General look at the Oakville situation. That's why I am appearing tomorrow, so that we can have this conversation in the context of the justice committee.

RURAL EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely: Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister of Rural Affairs. I understand that recently our government announced that our graduation rates have increased for the eighth straight year, and now 115,000 more students have graduated through the investments we've made in education—a complete riding's population of young people with a future. This is fantastic news that shows our student success strategy is working.

1110

But many of my constituents want to know what is being done in rural areas to support their schools. This is an important question because, in order to have a world-class education system, all of our students, no matter where they live, must have access to a great education.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Rural Affairs: Could the minister please inform this House about the investments our government is making to support rural schools?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Orléans for his great question. I can assure him it'll be a short series against the Montreal Canadiens.

Our government is committed to making sure that every student has access to a world-class education, no matter where they live. We also know that our rural schools face unique challenges. That is why we've increased funding to our rural boards by more than 30% since 2003. This year, rural boards will receive over \$3 billion. We also know that our schools in rural areas face higher costs for materials and resources. That's why we're providing over \$50 million to help with the purchase of materials so that our students have the resources they need to succeed.

These are only some of the investments we're making to ensure that our schools, no matter where they may be, provide the best education for all our rural students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I'm glad to hear that the new Ontario government takes the unique needs of rural education seriously. The investments we have made towards rural schools and school boards will ensure that our young students have the opportunities they need to learn in an enriching and fulfilling environment. Now, more than ever, it is vital that our children get the education they need to compete for high-skilled jobs in a global economy. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Rural Affairs: Could the minister please update the House on what this government is doing to provide students with training in skills to succeed in the 21st-century job market?

Hon. Jeff Leal: To the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Ottawa-Orléans for his question. Our government is committed to providing our students with the skills they need so they can be successful in their future. One program that allows students this opportunity is the Specialist High Skills Majors program. The Specialist High Skills Majors program allows our students to learn essential skills in subject areas including agriculture, technology, aviation and a whole host of other options.

For this school year, over 30,000 students are enrolled in over 1,500 Specialist High Skills Majors programs in over 670 schools across Ontario. We've also created Dual Credit Programs that allow students to work on secondary and college credits at the same things. These are the skills that students learn that will help them transition to the workplace.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the Premier: For months now we've been asking you, the members of your new cabinet and countless Liberal minions at committee to

simply come clean on your gas plant scandals in Mississauga and Oakville. It's clear that your only interest is the preservation of the Liberal Party. There is a want of confidence motion ready to be debated. The only thing missing is your willingness to accept your responsibility. The time has come for this Legislature to decide.

Premier, you've continuously talked about an open process that you want to be completely a part of, and completely open with all of the facts. Well, I ask you: Will you do the right thing today, accept your responsibility and agree to bring that motion forward?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, I expected to hear from the honourable member some sort of apology for the fact that the leader of the opposition is refusing to appear in front of committee tomorrow. I think it's important to know why we are calling him. It's not simply a case of wanting to have him before the committee; it's to ask him some very specific questions. For example, this brochure that was given to every house in the riding—where was it? The Etobicoke Centre riding association—says that, “The only party that will stop the Sherway power plant is the Ontario PC party. On October 6, vote Ontario PC.” It has to do with the YouTube video that the Leader of the Opposition starred in, where he went out and said that if he was elected that the local gas plant would be “done, done, done.”

We want to know about the policy analysis that was done, the costing that was done, and we're looking forward to his—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, it seems you people want to turn this into more of a charade. The Leader of the Opposition, Tim Hudak, has made it very clear that he will appear before the committee April 7 or 14, and he wrote the Chair to indicate that.

Premier, the Auditor General indicated in his report that he did not agree at all—

Interjections.

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

To the member.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —with your version of the Mississauga gas plant cancellation costs. Credible witnesses have also said that your numbers are vastly wrong on the Oakville cancellation and relocation.

This scandal has reached the breaking point. If you believe you've handled it well, then let's put it to a vote. Agree to debate this want-of-confidence motion, and let the assembly decide.

Premier, I have to ask you: Are you afraid of the outcome, or is it true that you've actually lost confidence in yourself?

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, I expected, at the minimum, an apology from the opposition: the way they've stood up and challenged the Premier not to “play calendar,” and then the Leader of the Opposition does the same thing.

But you know, what about Geoff Janoscik and the fact that we are informed that he is refusing—he is refusing—to appear in front of the committee? Again, Geoff Janoscik—let me remind people: He was the one who had a candidate robocall in Mississauga South. I'll read it for you; I know it's a favourite: “This is Geoff Janoscik, your Mississauga South Ontario PC candidate. I'm calling about the McGuinty-Sousa power plant that the Liberal government decided to build in your backyard. I am against this power plant, and as your MPP, I will fight to stop the power plant from being built. Unlike the Liberals, our team has been 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.” Mr. Speaker—

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

Interjection.

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

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. On April 15, the head of FSCO, Philip Howell, indicated that he did not have the tools to reduce the auto insurance rates by 15%. In fact, he admitted in committee that he had no way of passing the \$2 billion in savings that the insurance companies are pocketing on to drivers in Ontario. That's why it comes as no surprise that over the past 30 months, our insurance premiums have increased by 5%, despite the \$2 billion of annual savings that insurance companies are enjoying.

This Thursday, will the government table legislation that gives FSCO the legal mandate to actually enact a 15% reduction in auto insurance rates?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question. We've had this discussion many times. We recognize that the premiums in Ontario are much too high. We also recognize that the cost of claims in Ontario is much too high as well—10 times higher than in other provinces—so we have to deal with both of those issues, and we will.

We will, because we want to ensure that the best interests of the public are met. We did that in 2004, we've committed to doing it again, and we gladly will work with the opposition members—on both sides, for that matter—to try to get that done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: FSCO has released its first-quarter 2013 report, and it comes as no surprise that there are no savings and no reductions in premiums for the nine million drivers in Ontario.

This government has a choice coming before it. It can either continue to allow the insurance industry to pocket

billions of dollars in savings, due to our benefits having been slashed in 2010, or this government can enact legislation that provides FSCO with the legal mandate to actually reduce insurance rates by 15%. This Thursday, which will it be?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We have long been discussing how important it is for us to bring forward a budget that speaks to the needs of the people. It is going to be Ontario's budget. It's going to talk a lot, not just about auto insurance but about a lot of things that matter to those people of Ontario.

It would be a disservice for anyone to dismiss that budget without reading it. That's a disservice to all Ontarians. I would hope that the official opposition will read the budget and give it the responsibility that they have to ensure that the needs of the people are met and ensure that we deal with the matters that the member opposite has just asked.

1120

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Minister, many small businesses in my riding are very concerned that they're being stopped from promoting the term "local food." There seems to be a definition that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is using which limits these local food supporters from using that. I've got some of the best local food grocers in Canada in my riding. I've got Pusateri's. I've got Bruno's. I've got Zito's. I've got Lady York. They want to promote local potatoes, local pork, local beef, but because of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, they are being stopped by these bureaucratic rules. What is being done to get rid of the bureaucratic barriers around local food people?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for this important question.

It's very true, Mr. Speaker, that the CFIA's definition of local food is different than the one that we're proposing in our local food bill. Our view is that the scope of the definition is too narrow and it actually could work against support for local food in ridings like Eglinton–Lawrence, but also among all Ontario farmers. The definition that's proposed in our local food bill is purposely broad. It defines local food as having been produced or harvested in Ontario. It includes foods and beverages made in Ontario if they include ingredients that are produced or harvested in the province. The goal, then, is to ensure that producers and processors are supported and not hindered by a definition that is too narrowly constrained.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Minister, a lot of my local grocers and restaurants say they want to bring in potatoes from Melancthon; they want to bring in tomatoes from Leamington. They want that ability to promote these wonderful, beautiful, natural Ontario products. I hope we can get the message across to the Canadian Food Inspec-

tion Agency that we're all supporting local food together, because when local food is eaten, everybody wins. The farmers win, the local restaurants win, the local grocers win, and all Ontarians win with wonderful, local Ontario food.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I love the passion from the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

The member is absolutely correct that this is posing a problem for our local businesses, and it goes—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's bring it down. I think you caught yourself. Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The CFIA definition actually hinders what we're trying to do in the Local Food Act, Mr. Speaker. We've reached out to the federal agriculture and agri-food minister, Minister Ritz. I'm pleased that the CFIA intends to review their definition and work towards being more inclusive and supportive of the local food movement, and I'm very pleased that Minister Ritz has indicated that he's moving to modernize the regulation so that it makes sense and, most importantly, that it supports local food and Ontario farmers. The federal minister has to act on this. It is in his purview. I'm glad that he has indicated that he's willing to take some action.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. Premier, in a recent Toronto Star interview, you were unable to answer a simple question about the current unemployment rate in Ontario. When you were asked, you guessed "about 7%," and then you added a hesitant "Did I pass?" Earlier this month, you said that the death of Ontario's manufacturing sector was a myth.

Clearly, solving the jobs crisis in Ontario is not a priority for you or your Liberal government. Premier, let me help. Ontario currently has nearly 600,000 unemployed men and women, and an unemployment rate of 7.7%. Even worse, Ontario's unemployment rate has been above the national average for 75 straight months.

Premier, can you explain how this House can have confidence in your leadership when you don't even know how many men and women are seeking work in Ontario today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I completely understand the question from the member opposite and that he would want to take me to task. The reality is that there is a range of unemployment rates across the province.

First of all, you're right: A 7.7% average across the province is unacceptable, which is why we are putting measures in place in our budget to address that. Job creation is extremely important. Particularly, youth unemployment is unacceptable, which is at a rate of 16.5%. But the other reality: From March 2012 until now, the unemployment rate in Ottawa, for example, is 6.3%, which is down 0.4%; the unemployment rate in Toronto is 8.3%, which is down from March 2012. There are other parts of the province where the unemployment rate

has gone up, and 7.7% is unacceptable, which is why we will be addressing those concerns when we bring the budget forward on Thursday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Well, Premier, the numbers don't lie. Your government has utterly failed Ontario workers. You've let them down, and you've lost the confidence of the men and women in our communities right across this province. Ontario has now lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. In my riding, Tender Tootsies, who employed over 1,000 people at its peak, just announced it will be closing. Premier, for these constituents, being unemployed is no myth.

The Auditor General's scathing report detailed the costs associated with cancelling the Mississauga power plant and showed that the Liberals' political ploy will cost Ontario taxpayers over \$275 million. Premier, do you think it's right for the 600,000 men and women who are currently out of work to be forced to pay for your political treachery?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I want to say to the 600,000 people who are out of work—if that is the number that the member is putting forward—is that it is unacceptable that they don't have access to work; it is unacceptable that the party opposite would not work with us to address that issue.

The fact is that our budget will bring forward measures that will continue to build on the fundamentals and the conditions that are necessary to bring business to the province. We have put programs in place—for example, the Second Career program, that was designed specifically to deal with the transition of people coming out of the manufacturing sector to help them get into a new career. It has been wildly successful. Thousands of members of this society have had the opportunity to retrain because of that program. That's the kind of solution that people without a job are looking for. That's what we're going to be putting forward.

ACADEMIC STREAMING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. According to People for Education, streaming of high school students in Ontario is alive and well. Students at low-income schools are six times more likely to be placed in applied math classes compared to high-income schools. Students in applied math are half as likely to meet provincial math and literacy standards, and are less likely to graduate.

Does the minister accept the continued streaming of students in Ontario and the barriers to success it presents?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think what's important is that we have options for all students that are appropriate for the individual student. One of the things that we have found extraordinarily successful is the Specialist High Skills Majors courses. I must say that some of the kids in Specialist High Skills Majors are in academic, some are in applied and some are in a combination of both, but what that does is it allows students who have an interest

in more practical courses to actually get credit for that interest on their high school diploma.

What we're seeing with the introduction of courses like Specialist High Skills Majors is, in fact, that the overall graduation rate in Ontario high schools is going up. I think that's what we need to keep our eye on: how many kids are graduating.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, streaming has been discredited. It limits the opportunities of disadvantaged children, yet it continues—and from your response it's clear why. Wealthy children are more likely to take academic courses; low-income, immigrant and aboriginal children are more likely to take applied courses.

Will the minister investigate why low-income children are overrepresented in applied courses and why applied students are less likely to succeed, so that all students have a fair chance for success?

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Hon. Liz Sandals: I think we really need to look at what's happening with the graduation rate in Ontario high schools. When we came in in 2003, the high school graduation rate was sitting at 68% of kids; we're now at 83% of our students. We're up 15 percentage points. Part of that is due to the fact that we are providing a range of options for Ontario students.

I absolutely believe that students have the right to choose whether they want to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Liz Sandals:—focus on academic or focus on more practical skills. We have a responsibility to provide choice to our students, and that choice has—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. When I do say, "Order," I don't have to be specific to one individual, or if I have to, that means that you're not listening at all. So when I say, "Order," you don't just keep right on going; when I say, "Order," you actually have to kind of think that you've heard the Speaker and you bring it down.

New question.

HOME WARRANTY PROGRAM

Mr. Steven Del Duca: My question today is for the Minister of Consumer Services. There are many areas of my riding of Vaughan that are experiencing a great deal of residential development. I am excited to see my riding flourish economically and socially. I certainly welcome all the new residents who are moving to my community; after all, it is one of Ontario's greatest communities. Having said that, I do want to clarify one thing with respect to who exactly is protecting these homebuyers. After all, for most the purchase of a home is the single biggest investment of their lives.

Through you to the minister, how is the government ensuring there is protection for purchasers of new homes?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for asking this very important question, because he's absolutely right. Home purchases are usually the most important investment decision people make, and that comes with some stress and lots of questions.

I want to assure the member and Ontarians that we have the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act to protect homebuyers. It's administered by Tarion, an independent authority with the legislative mandate to oversee the act and provide services to provide protection for new homeowners. In fact, I was just with them last week for their fantastic customer service awards.

Tarion provides better communication, helps resolve conflicts, educates builders and buyers on quality standards, and finally, Tarion administers a guarantee fund which acts as a backstop to ensure consumer protection is maintained when a builder is unable or unwilling to pay the warranty. This is all required by the act, and all the fees are paid for by the builders—

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I thank the minister for her answer and for all of her fine work. I must say that I'm extremely happy to hear that there's an established program, mandated by legislation, to provide warrant protection for new homebuyers across Ontario. It is particularly reassuring to know that there is a guarantee fund that will support a new homebuyer in case of an issue with their new home.

With all of these new home developments spanning across the province—and in my community of Vaughan, as I mentioned—I am definitely pleased to hear that there's a dedicated organization looking out for the well-being of all those new homebuyers.

I'm wondering if the minister could please explain to the House today how Tarion will be working to ensure that they stay ahead of the curve with respect to the most effective consumer protective available for new homebuyers.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: You know, we can always do more to help consumers in Ontario, and Tarion is also looking at new ways to improve their services and offer consumer confidence that they deserve when they're buying a new home.

In fact, I'd like to highlight that just last year, in the annual survey from Tarion, where new homeowners were asked about their level of satisfaction and their impressions of the organization, over 80% of new homebuyers were satisfied with their interactions and had a favourable impression.

Tarion continues to be dedicated to holding builders more accountable and increasing consumer protection. In that light, in 2012, Tarion actually made changes to their major structural defect warranty program in the three- to seven-year category, placing more onus on builders and protecting new homeowners. This highlights Tarion's commitment to enhancing protections for consumers and holding builders more accountable using financial incen-

tives to encourage them to implement better building practices and repair defects.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the Premier, Premier, given your curious funding announcement for small, rural and northern communities on Friday in my riding, the 140,000-person city of Barrie—which is neither small, rural nor northern, and may not even qualify for the funding that you announced—I have to ask: Did you and your finance minister get lost on the campaign trail? How does the Liberal Party exactly define where northern Ontario begins?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm pretty sure that the rural and northern communities of Ontario, and even the rural communities in Simcoe county, think that it's a good idea that we have a roads and bridges fund.

I have heard consistently, since I was the Minister of Transportation—so, for the last three-and-a-bit years, I have heard consistently that municipalities across the province want to be sure that they will have some predictability and some reliability—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The government side makes it difficult for me to ask them to come quiet when the Premier is answering the question and you're provoking. So I'm going to ask the members again to stop provoking—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And the comments that people make when I'm in mid-sentence don't help, either. Please.

Please finish your answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The exuberance on this side of the House has to do with the reality that every single one of my members, the members of the government, has heard delegations from people from small municipalities, from rural municipalities and from northern municipalities asking for some predictability in terms of infrastructure spending for municipal infrastructure.

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's why we're exuberant. We think that having a predictable fund is—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, the member has to show a little bit of understanding of what I'm trying to get at.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary? The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Premier, while you were in Barrie, making your northern Ontario announcement, Tim Hudak and I were actually in the north, unveiling our plan for the north.

Apart from a single token cabinet meeting, there has been little to speak of for the north since you've been Premier, and no movement or progress on the Ring of Fire. Less than a month ago, you voted against a PC plan that would have provided dependable funding while extending the gas tax to these small communities.

Premier, at a time when the province is facing a \$10-billion deficit and we're witnessing cuts to programs in the north, like shutting down provincial parks, closing important visitor information centres and ending the Junior Ranger Program that has been in place for 68 years, my question is simple: Premier, can you explain how you magically came up with \$100 million?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We were up there with nine members of cabinet, meeting with northern mayors. Not only that, we have set a priority for the Ring of Fire. We have put in place a new rural roads and bridges program, thanks to Minister Leal; I want to thank him for doing that.

To the member for Barrie: We like Barrie. We announced together GO Transit, which we invited you to be part of in a non-partisan way. With York-Simcoe, we announced new highways, which we invited you to be in, in a non-partisan way.

Over and over again, Mr. Speaker, we try to work with the opposition—a race to the top, as you put it—and we don't get any co-operation. We get cheap, political—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have, right now, \$2.4 billion in highways, \$600 million in northern highways. We saved the Experimental Lakes, Mr. Speaker. We are investing in—

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

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. Over the last number of days, my office has been inundated by emails from employees of the Hamilton children's aid society. These employees are terrified about what a \$4-million cut to their services will mean to the vulnerable children in our community. These workers are warning you that the children they serve are going to pay the price.

Will the Premier explain how she can be assured that a \$4-million cut will not affect front-line services or the well-being of these children?

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

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you for the question with respect to the Hamilton CAS. First, let me say that the front-line workers and the work that's done at the CAS are really the backbone of our child protection system.

I can't speak to the specific decisions that CAS is making with respect to their staffing. However, we have come up with a new funding formula for the CASs to be

fair to all CASs across the province—in Hamilton, in Windsor and in communities across the province.

It will bring stability to this sector. The overall provincial funding envelope is staying the same. We have not cut funding in this sector.

The new formula is looking at socio-economic factors in addition to service volume and it will better reflect the underlying need for child welfare services in each community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, this year alone the Hamilton CAS is losing 4% of their budget. Staff who are already working overtime and are struggling to meet the growing need in our community are trying to understand how they're going to do more with less. Workers have told me that these cuts will make their jobs impossible, that they are terrified of what this will mean for the already vulnerable children and families they serve.

Is the Premier going to address these concerns or is she just going to ignore this crisis regardless of its impact?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: What I can be clear about is that our ministry is working very closely with the Hamilton CAS and with CASs across the community to ensure that our priority of keeping children safe and keeping our communities safe is our number one priority, and we will ensure that all CASs do that. We will continue to work with them to ensure the sustainability of that system.

The changes that we have made have been all-encompassing with respect to the funding for CASs across the province to ensure that protecting children and youth in our community remains the number one priority. We will continue to work with our communities and with our ministry to ensure that priority is maintained.

VISITORS

Hon. Jeff Leal: Speaker, on a point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to introduce some people with us today. Jim Goetz is the president of the Canadian Beverage Association. Other member representatives include Neil Antymis from PepsiCo Beverages, John Challinor from Nestlé Waters, Wayne Delfino from Canada Dry Mott's, Jenny Gusba from PepsiCo Beverages, Erika Mozes from Coca-Cola Canada and John Wren from Cott Beverages.

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

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JACK BURROWS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The citizens of the city of North Bay and our entire northern Ontario were very saddened

today to learn of the passing of former mayor Jack Burrows.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I see the minister acknowledging. Jack was an old friend to all of us, Minister.

Jack gave tremendously to our community through his service as a councillor and in his nine years as mayor, from 1994 to 2003. During his term as mayor and for the decade that followed, Jack was a true ambassador for North Bay and indeed for all of northern Ontario. After serving in office, he sat on the board of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, and he applied the same wisdom to that fund as he did during his many years in office in North Bay.

Jack was paid a tremendous tribute only two years ago on his 80th birthday by the North Bay and Area Community Foundation, which he founded. They established a new Jack Burrows Fund, named in his honour, with the purpose of reaching out to one local charity organization each year. Coincidentally, the entire philanthropic community came together only nine days ago when Jack presented this year's award. It's a true reminder of how fleeting life really is.

On a personal note, I always appreciated the fact that I could walk into Jack's Country Store and chat about any issue. He'll be missed by all of us. Our condolences go out to Elaine and the entire Burrows family.

HAMILTON HELMET INITIATIVE

Mr. Paul Miller: Head injuries are the leading cause of serious injury and death in children. Activities such as cycling, in-line skating and skateboarding can all be safe and healthy forms of recreation, so long as helmets and other necessary pads are worn.

The Hamilton Helmet Initiative is an organization, formed in November 2012, dedicated to encouraging helmet use. The partnership of McMaster Children's Hospital and the city of Hamilton's public services is making sure that all children in the area have access to helmets at a reasonable cost. If a family is unable to afford a helmet, a community sponsor will provide one free of charge.

The Hamilton Helmet Initiative will be hosting an event to celebrate their achievements with their community partners on the morning of Thursday, May 16, at Lake Avenue Public School in Hamilton.

I commend you for your efforts in tackling such a serious issue and for setting such a positive example for communities across this province. Some 88% of brain injuries can be prevented by wearing properly fitted helmets, and with the help of the Hamilton Helmet Initiative, they will be. Keep up the great work.

ELLIOTT KERR

Ms. Dipika Damerla: It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize Elliott Kerr, who will be duly inducted into the Mississauga Sports Hall of Fame this June.

Kerr has left a long-lasting legacy as a leader within Mississauga and beyond. As founder of Landmark Sport Group, his sports event marketing firm has been a part of the Mississauga community since 1987.

But Kerr's contribution to sports goes beyond his business. He has done a lot to promote sport within Mississauga. For instance, his organization spearheaded the Mississauga Marathon, an event that has raised much-needed funding for both regional and national charities and is proudly celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

Some of you may also know him as the owner of the Mississauga Steelheads, formerly known as the Mississauga St. Michael's Majors, which he recently rebranded. He's also the former part-owner of the Mississauga IceDogs. It's no easy task to own a local hockey league in a city like Mississauga, which is just a stone's throw away from the big Toronto market, but Elliott does this because he truly believes that a community needs local sports teams, and for that we are very thankful.

He's also organized the Jane Rogers Championship golf tournament for three years, when the event was held in Mississauga and Halton Hills.

He will be inducted at the sports council's 39th annual sports dinner, taking place this year at the Capitol banquet hall. Please join me in congratulating Elliott Kerr.

HARDY SINGH

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Progress through participation—that's the motto of the Halton Regional Police Service. The words have been taken to heart by Burlington resident and Halton police constable Hardy Singh. Constable Singh's outreach work in race relations across the Hamilton-Halton area has earned him community appreciation and special recognition from Toronto's Human Rights and Race Relations Centre. Constable Singh was recently given a gold medal and commemorative certificate for "outstanding contribution to the promotion of race relations."

Constable Singh routinely fields questions from members of the Sikh community, spending countless volunteer hours educating the Sikh community about issues such as domestic violence, community safety and crime prevention, acting as an interpreter at police presentations, and fostering awareness about policing among Sikh children and youth.

Amazingly, all of this has happened in the two years that Constable Singh has been with the Halton police, Speaker. His devotion to the force is rivaled only by his vital service to the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Constable Singh both on the awarding of this honour and his outstanding commitment to doing the work that makes our region such a fantastic place to live.

HEALTHY EATING

M^{me} France Gélinas: In a few minutes I will be introducing for the third time—lucky third time—Healthy

Decisions for Healthy Eating. This is a bill that will mandate restaurants to post calories and high sodium right on their menu boards if they have more than five locations and make over \$5 million in profits.

The Toronto Board of Health, just down the street at city hall, is debating the exact same issue at the exact same time. There is no coincidence here, Mr. Speaker. I bring this bill forward today because the Toronto Board of Health is making it clear that if the province does not show leadership on this issue, they will, and they have given us a time frame to do this, which is by September 1.

What will the bill do? Well, not much that isn't already being done. Those restaurants already know the number of calories in their menu items; they already know which ones are high sodium. They have this information on posters on the way to the bathroom, on a brochure underneath the counter that nobody can find. Now, with Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating, if this bill passes, this information will be on the menu board. You will see Big Mac: \$4.59, 450 calories. It's already happening throughout the United States. It's time Ontario follows suit.

ROTARY CLUBS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise today in the House to recognize the outstanding efforts of the Rotary Clubs of Oakville. The objective of each Rotary Club is to foster the ideal of service. In Oakville, the Rotary Clubs are doing that by continuing to develop the very solid foundation of serving the local community.

The Rotary Club of Oakville is involved in many major local projects, including Easter Seals, Ian Anderson House, the Salvation Army and many others. They also support several international projects, such as Water for Humanity, Sleeping Children Around the World and, of course, polio eradication.

The Rotary Club of Oakville-Trafalgar helps with the development of our community's youth through programs such as the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, bursary programs and the Oakville Youth Development Centre.

The Rotary Club of Oakville West has showcased itself as being one of the most active and progressive clubs. The club has spearheaded important projects both locally and internationally, including the Oakville Awards for Business Excellence, which was recently held for the 18th year.

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On behalf of the citizens of Oakville, I'd like to thank all the Rotary Clubs in Oakville for what they do, and thank their members personally for setting an example through their contributions to community service that should be emulated by us all.

FOOD LITERACY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the Canadian Beverage Association. Their

members directly employ almost 5,000 people here in Ontario at their 40 plants, distributions centres and offices, as well as thousands more indirectly. They are an important part of our provincial economy.

Today, the Canadian Beverage Association is here to share the steps they are taking to increase nutritional knowledge and to make nutritional information easier to understand through their Clear on Calories initiative. Just this weekend I saw a new Coca-Cola commercial raising awareness about the need to address obesity and to improve the health of our families. I want to commend them for the steps that they are taking.

We believe that increasing food literacy is an important part of helping our children understand food choices so they can create a healthy and balanced diet. It teaches them where our food comes from, what goes into it, and it helps them become healthy adults. That's why we included a commitment to food literacy in our agriculture, food and rural affairs white paper, Paths to Prosperity: Respect for Rural Ontario, and it is why we were disappointed that it wasn't in the Local Food Act.

Our PC education critic will be talking more about food literacy later this afternoon. I hope that all members of the Legislature will support our efforts on food literacy and that they will take some time to meet with the Canadian Beverage Association today or drop in and talk to them this evening and learn more about the jobs they create and the good work they do to increase nutrition awareness.

IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM

Mr. Steven Del Duca: April 20 to 27 marked Immunization Awareness Week in Canada, which is designed to raise awareness of one of the most important and cost-effective public health innovations. Immunization Awareness Week in Canada coincides with World Immunization Week and Vaccination Week in the Americas.

This is a very good time for the people of Ontario to talk to their primary care provider about making sure their vaccinations are up to date. Now that effective vaccines are widely available, children in Ontario no longer suffer from many vaccine-preventable diseases like they did in the past.

I'm proud to say that we have a comprehensive, publicly funded immunization program that is the envy of many jurisdictions. Since 2003, for example, we have made continuous improvements to Ontario's immunization programs by adding new vaccines; our government has expanded the province's immunization program to include 21 vaccines protecting against 16 diseases; and for many years now we have provided the seasonal influenza vaccine free of charge under the Universal Influenza Immunization Program.

This year, we introduced another innovation by giving the people of Ontario even easier access to the flu shot by authorizing pharmacists to administer the flu shot to

increase access to the vaccine, improve people's health and save money for the health care system.

Because immunization prevents illnesses, it reduces the need for physician's visits, hospitalizations, drug treatments and public health efforts to manage disease outbreaks. As we know, one of the best and most proven ways to avoid many serious illnesses is with a simple vaccination.

So, Speaker, let's be reminded of the remarkable benefits of immunization for helping to keep the people of Ontario healthy.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Peter Shurman: The Canadian Automobile Association, or as we know it, the CAA, is the leading advocate for overall road safety in Ontario. As CAA's South Central Ontario branch is located in the heart of Thornhill, I wish to acknowledge the launch of their 10th annual Worst Roads campaign—it'd be a lot of fun, but it actually works and it's quite serious and gets a lot of attention, as we all know.

Our province faces drastic changes in weather, temperature, sometimes even within the very same day. Drivers, cyclists and pedestrians alike know all too well that our climate is the prime culprit for creating potholes and deteriorating our roads. CAA's campaign provides Ontarians with an opportunity to vote on their choice of the worst road title.

Last year, six out of the 10 worst roads were in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, or GTHA, all within about 60 kilometres of where I'm standing right now. The results of the vote are instrumental in assisting elected representatives at the municipal and provincial levels to understand which areas of Ontario need to be prioritized and targeted. Improvements have been made because of CAA's efforts. Also informative in nature, the campaign provides information for drivers about how they can report a pothole or submit a damage claim.

CAA is an excellent example of how organizations can work together with people to assist and inform government. I thank them for their leadership.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That ends the member statements.

DOUG ROLLINS

Hon. John Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent so that the House and all parties may make a tribute to Doug Rollins, who was an MPP in this House from 1995 to 1999.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General is seeking unanimous consent to do this. Do we have an agreement for consent? Agreed.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm glad to rise today on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the New Democrats to talk about

the time that Doug Rollins was amongst us here in the Legislature.

Listen, I remember that time well. I went from being a very comfortable member in government with plenty of us on that side of the House to being usurped by the Conservatives who came in with Mike Harris to oust us out.

Applause.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would not applaud to that.

Doug was one of the guys who came in at the time of Mike Harris's election victory in 1995, and he came to this Legislature and served with us for that first term of the Harris government.

What I remember of Doug is that he was a pretty easy guy to get along with. He was not the type of guy to get in your face as far as sometimes being the confrontational type of politician that you see here at times, not always, but at times. He was one of those fellas that liked to try to find a way to be able to talk to people straight but at the same time not do it in a way that, quite frankly, ran that negative kind of politics thing. He was that type of fellow. Just in my time that he was here, I remember him for that. I sat with him on committee on a couple of occasions and obviously sat with him in the House. He leaves me with good impressions, not a bad impression, of the time that he was here. Anybody who can serve in this place for one term and leave and other members say, "You know what? I can't think of one bad thing that person did"—that is a testament to the individual themselves. For that, I thank him.

I also note that Doug, like I, is a grandfather. I didn't understand back then because I wasn't a granddad and didn't understand what being a granddad was all about. He obviously cared a lot for his family. I was not at the funeral, but I had a chance—I heard about it and read about it. It was very well attended by people of the community. What was really of note was the connection to the family. Doug was one of those guys who understood you may be all mighty, get elected and be one of those highfalutin politicians, but at the end of the day it's about what happens back home and what happens to your family because, unfortunately, as Doug found out at age 74, when you go the only people there are your family. Obviously, Doug understood that way before he got to this place and remembered it when he got here. It was important that he never forget where he came from, not only when it came to his constituents, but most importantly, that he didn't forget his family. That's something that all of us strive very hard to do, and with the hustle and bustle of what we do it is sometimes difficult to do, but Doug always managed to find that.

He comes from a part of the province where being a Tory was not all that difficult. I will only put it that way. But in conversations with other members that I talked to earlier today to get a sense of the local politics, he was known as the Tory riding association. He was the guy in the community, if you wanted to know what was going on with PCs in that part of the world, in the Quinte part of the world, Doug was the guy who had been involved

for a long time. Not surprisingly, he finally decided that he wanted to run for the nomination and got elected in that big sweep of 1995 when Mike Harris came in.

Now, I'm sure he had to be upset with redistribution, as I was, because redistribution wasn't exactly fair to Doug. Doug was in a situation, unfortunately, that the riding boundaries changed in such a way that made it difficult for him, within the process, to be able to get the nomination when he tried to run again. I guess we share that, Doug and I. I was never a fan of redistribution. I always thought that having more members in the Legislature is a good thing. Why? Because it does allow our committee structure to work more properly. The least amount of members we have here, I think, the harder it is for us to do our work collectively as members on committee. Our responsibilities there, I think, are paramount to what we do in this Legislature.

I just want to say to the family who is here today, thank you for sharing your father, your grandfather, your husband with us. To the people that knew Doug well, I'm sure it is never, never an easy thing to go through, but you were lucky to have had him in your lives. We are lucky to have shared him, and we say to you, your family: Congratulations and thank you. He was a great man, and we grieve for your loss.

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Hon. John Gerretsen: I, too, would, first of all, like to welcome his widow, Cheryl, and his daughters Michele and Melissa, as well as their grandchildren. I'm not sure how many grandchildren are here today, but I know that he had four grandchildren: Avery, Paige, Reese and Ayden.

Yes, I, too, remember June 1995, when the Harris sweep took place, because I was elected at the same time as Doug Rollins. Of course, he represented the Quinte and Belleville area basically, and I represented the Kingston area. There's something about politics in eastern Ontario. You're quite correct; it tends to be Tory politics—not everywhere, but in most parts of eastern Ontario. But we also play our politics, I think, a little bit more subdued than many other parts of the province. I think there's a respect amongst politicians. We may not always see the world the same way, but we certainly always acknowledge politicians and work with them, no matter what political stripe, once the election is over and done with.

I was very much taken by some of the comments that were made about Doug in the Belleville Intelligencer at the time of his death last November, because this is the way I knew Doug as well. It states, for example, that, "Doug Rollins was a straight shooter. What you saw was what you got." That was said by Todd Smith, who will be speaking a little bit later on today.

Also, someone else said, "I remembered him as a truth teller. He always had an opinion. We agreed to disagree, always with respect for each other."

"He'd always say it like it is, and you like that in a person, especially someone in politics. He was never afraid to say how he felt." That was said by John

Williams, who is now the mayor of Quinte West but against whom Doug actually ran for the nomination—I guess it would have been in about 2003. But that's the kind of respect that he had in the community, even from his opponents from within or other parties as well, and that's the way I remember Doug here.

I can remember that we didn't always agree with one another. I sat over there and he sat on this side. As a matter of fact, I think he sat in the rump most of the time. There were so many Tories at the time, they couldn't all sit on one side; they had to bend over to the other side there. But we'd chat with one another during receptions. Of course, there's always this healthy tension between Kingston and Belleville anyway, whether you're talking about the sports scene, economic development or whatever, and that's good for our part of the province. He spoke passionately about the Belleville area and eastern Ontario in general.

The other thing that's interesting about Doug, and what I remember of him as well, is that we all have careers before we come to this place. Doug, for many, many years, ran a service station on Bridge Street in Belleville. As a matter of fact—now, I was able to pick this up, and I'm not sure whether I got this out of his maiden speech that he gave during the 1995 fall season, but this was what he said about himself, Speaker.

He said, "I started with Shell Oil back in 1962. I'm one of the first persons to have driven a pup truck in Ontario. It was in 1963 or 1964 that this Legislature passed legislation to allow vehicles of over 47 feet in length." They were big trucks in those days. "Shell had bought a truck from British Columbia and parked it at the Lakehead. It was the first pup truck. When that legislation was passed and became law, they put the licence plates in my suitcase, flew me up to the Lakehead, and I brought back that truck. That was the very first one to my knowledge that was driven in the province of Ontario, particularly with licence plates on it."

That's the kind of person Doug was. He was an individual—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Legal plates.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Legal plates, yes.

He was an individual you could share a laugh with, share a serious discussion with, who truly felt very strongly about his community. After he was no longer in this place, he twice tried to represent the riding again. I think he ran against the current mayor of Belleville in 2006 and lost to Neil Ellis, but then I understand that in the 2010 election he became a strong supporter of Neil Ellis. That really tells me a lot about a person: that you could want the same position as someone else, recognize the good qualities of the other person once that person is in that position, and then support that person.

Doug Rollins was a guy who was meant for this place. He spoke passionately. I believe that during one of the situations when gas prices were going up—he may have even been one of the three gas commissioners; I can remember the guys in trench coats; some of my Tory friends will remember this. Doug was very proud of that,

because he had been in the gasoline business and the service station business his entire life.

The fact that so many folks came out to his funeral at the Bridge Street United Church in November of this year truly shows you that he meant a lot to the community; he meant a lot to his family. We're all the better for the fact he was here. I'd like to thank his family very much on behalf of the Premier, Kathleen Wynne, and the government of Ontario, for Doug's service to this place, and we offer to you our sincerest condolences. We will all have fond remembrances of Doug Rollins.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you as well to the member from Timmins–James Bay and also the Attorney General for your comments about my dear friend Doug Rollins. You're very accurate in the fact he was very proud of his role as one of those gas commissioners. They were affectionately known as the "gas busters." We actually used to, when I was in my radio career, have Doug on from time to time talking about the gas prices, playing the Ghost Busters theme song behind. Doug was very proud of that. Usually we would ring him up here at 6:05 in the morning, just after I read the 6 o'clock news. Doug would be on the air and he would be talking about how much gas prices were going to go up that day and how they shouldn't be going up that much. We should actually think about bringing the gas busters back here at this time, because I think back then prices were well under \$1. Now, of course, they're a lot more than that, that's for sure.

I would also really like to welcome Cheryl, who's become a friend of mine, and Cheryl, of course, is Doug's wife. She's been a great friend and a great supporter, not just here in this place or in my endeavours to come to this place, but back when I used to play first base for the Belleville Labatt Nationals, the senior A baseball team in Belleville. Cheryl and Doug would always be behind the backstop at Rotary Park in Belleville. You could always hear Doug Rollins, and every pitcher that came to town from another city knew who Doug Rollins was because he was all over them.

I'd also really like to welcome Michele as well, and her husband Trevor Clarke. They came in from Belleville today, and Melissa and Craig MacIntyre, who live here in Toronto, and of course the grandkids as well, Avery and Paige are here. It's so nice to see you. I know that Rusty, Doug's brother, also wishes that he could be here today. Rusty and Gail are watching down in the Hamilton area, I'm sure, and wishing that they could be here today, but health reasons are keeping Rusty from being here at Queen's Park today.

The first picture I have on record of ever being involved on this side of the political landscape, not holding the microphone and interviewing one of you guys, was actually the day that I decided that I was going to run for the Progressive Conservative Party in the last election. It was a warm, sunny day, June 16, 2011, down at Meyers

Pier in Belleville. The picture that appeared in the Belleville Intelligencer the next day was me standing by the Bay of Quinte and talking to Doug Rollins.

Doug really was the Progressive Conservative Association, or the face of the Progressive Conservative Party in the Quinte region. As the Attorney General points out, there was no question about that. If you wanted to talk to an influential Tory, Doug was going to make it happen. He was just an outstanding guy, and we spent a lot of time together during that campaign. Doug was the former member of the old riding of Quinte, which unfortunately no longer exists anymore, but after redistribution it could be back, known as the Bay of Quinte. I don't stand here particularly to talk as much about his political career but the Doug Rollins who was my friend, who I got to know over the last 20 years extremely well.

It really is, as the Attorney General pointed out, hard to think that this chamber has ever known anybody that was as straight a shooter as Doug Rollins was, and that was my comment to the Intelligencer as well. He never hesitated to speak his mind. He often would use blunt and very colourful language when he was speaking about his beliefs as well, so he left no question as to where he stood on any issue. You always knew what he believed in, and he would look you square in the eye and tell you what he believed while he was doing it. I think a lot of people had a lot of trust in Doug Rollins because he would do just that.

Doug was one of those common sense revolutionaries, as we've heard, who came in here in 1995. He always spoke proudly about serving here at Queen's Park and being a member of the Mike Harris team here at Queen's Park. When he talked about Queen's Park, Doug always did the same thing. He would say, "When we came here in 1995, we did exactly what we said we were going to do." He was very proud of that because that's the kind of character that he had as a person as well.

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Everyone out there has their favourite Doug Rollins stories; I have many, but it happens to be true here—for those of you who have served at Queen's Park, as well, everybody has memories of Doug walking the halls here at Queen's Park or down at a reception in the legislative dining room. When Doug passed away suddenly, my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk, Toby Barrett, told me his favourite Doug Rollins story. It was actually during one of those famous teacher protests from the 1990s on the south lawn here.

Doug, our neighbouring MPP Gary Fox and a number of members of the PC caucus were out there on a bus. They had been bused in that day from wherever they were, and there was a large mob of teachers that were out there protesting, not dissimilar to the ones that we saw in September of this past year. Anyone who knew Doug knew how big a man he was; he was actually a pretty good football player in his day, too. He actually won, in 1959, the Ontario and Canadian championships for football with the University of Guelph, so he was a big, strong boy. Doug just said to Toby Barrett and the others

that were on the bus that day, “Don’t worry, boys. I’ll get you in the building.” He took his briefcase, he put it in front of him and he cleared a path right through to the front doors at Queen’s Park. It was almost as if he was a wedge that was driving his way through the mob so that all of his other colleagues could get through safely.

I’ll personally never forget, during the election campaign, bombing down the Shannonville gravel road. We were driving along in my change car at the time, and Doug was driving, because nobody knew his way around Hastings county as well as Doug Rollins did. Often Doug would be doing well in excess of the speed limit, and he would be telling you stories about all of the different businesses, the different houses and those who occupied them, the fact that there used to be a rail line that used to go from Thurlow to Havelock on Friday nights, and all of the great stories about his childhood growing up in Hastings county.

The only thing really bigger than Doug’s personality was his heart. Anyone who knew him knew that, too. In 1995, Doug fought a real battle, as the Attorney General says, with Belleville’s mayor at the time, George Zegouras, to win his seat here in the Legislature. It was a highly contested battle in 1995, and I can tell you that last year George Zegouras fell ill. He was nearing the end of his life, and the first person to call me and tell me about that was Doug Rollins. Doug was wondering if there was anything that I could do in my position as the new MPP to ensure that Mr. Zegouras was moved from a hospital bed in Kingston so that he could be close to his family in Belleville.

He really did care. He was a very caring individual, and I think that story there says a lot about Doug Rollins as well. They were two of the giants of 1995; Zegouras made a comeback later and became mayor of Belleville again. But unfortunately, we lost those two influential people in Belleville and our greater Quinte area last year as both of them passed away. The community really is poorer for it, because both of them were characters and both of them had so much integrity. It was a great loss for our area.

The spirit does live on, though, in the Quinte region. It’s great to have Cheryl and his daughters, who are here today. Every time I tell a Doug Rollins story, and there are many of them out there to tell, you kind of have to smile and laugh, because there are some real funny stories about Doug; many of them are probably not appropriate to tell in this place, but he was a real character.

He really did love the time that he spent here. Sometimes when I look into the back rows or in the rump here, I think about the conversations that must have gone on with people like Doug Rollins, Gary Fox and Doug Galt, and how they would be spending time heckling Dalton McGuinty and other members—

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: —and quite possibly the Attorney General as well, and how Gary Stewart was probably chiming in there from time to time too. But from the day

he walked onto this floor for the first time and then the last time he walked off, Doug definitely was a servant of the people of Quinte, and he loved every minute of it. Our area is poorer for his loss. He will be missed.

Thank you all for your comments here this afternoon, and thank you, Speaker, for allowing us the time to do that. All the best to the Rollins family.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to thank all members for their very kind and heartfelt comments, and I would like to offer the family, on behalf of all elected members and the entire staff of the Legislature here at Queen’s Park, our heartfelt prayers and our deepest sympathies. As is the tradition, the family will receive a copy of Hansard and a DVD of what was said today on behalf of Doug.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HEALTHY DECISIONS FOR HEALTHY EATING ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 FAVORISANT DES CHOIX SAINS POUR UNE ALIMENTATION SAINE

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 59, An Act to amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act to require food service premises to provide nutritional information / Projet de loi 59, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé pour obliger les lieux de restauration à indiquer l’information nutritionnelle.

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, please.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating is a bill that amends the Health Promotion and Protection Act to require all persons who own or operate a food service premise that is part of a chain of food service premises with a minimum of five locations in Ontario and a gross annual revenue of over \$5 million to do the following three things:

(1) to display the number of calories contained in the food or drinks that are sold or served;

(2) to make available brochures that provide nutritional information for the food and drink items sold or served;

(3) to indicate the high and very high sodium content food or drinks that are sold or served.

The bill makes it an offence to contravene these requirements and imposes a fine for the first, second and subsequent offences.

WIRELESS SERVICES
AGREEMENTS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LES CONVENTIONS
DE SERVICES SANS FIL

Ms. MacCharles moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device / *Projet de loi 60, Loi visant à mieux protéger les consommateurs en ce qui concerne les conventions de consommation portant sur les services sans fil accessibles au moyen d'un téléphone cellulaire, d'un téléphone intelligent ou de tout autre appareil mobile semblable.*

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: On April 18, I rose in this House to announce how our government, in keeping with the commitments made in the throne speech, would continue to pursue reforms that would provide stronger consumer protection for the people of Ontario. At that time, I introduced legislation that would protect consumers against the aggressive tactics of door-to-door water heater salespersons and the abusive practices of some companies offering debt settlement services. The same legislation would provide consumers with more transparency and stronger protections in real estate transactions, and also provide them with more choice in the services they pay for when buying or selling a home.

I rise in the House again today to announce our latest commitment to strengthen consumer protection for the people of Ontario. Today, we are introducing the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013. This bill would protect consumers who enter into agreements with suppliers of wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, a smart phone, or any other similar mobile device. This bill, if passed, would have a direct impact on the daily lives of more than three quarters of the people of Ontario. That's because approximately eight out of 10 families subscribe to wireless services.

The spectrum of users is wide and covers literally everyone: parents, children, grandparents, students, commuters and workers. Many of us use wireless services daily in many ways: for work, talking, texting, playing games, making plans, responding to emergencies, watch-

ing videos, sending email, or sharing information with friends through social media.

Almost everyone uses cellphones; some, I would say, use more than one. Very few of us, though, understand the user agreements that come with them—the contracts that everybody signs. Many of us have opened our cellphone bills and simply do not understand the details related to costs and the other provisions that are contained in these contracts. We are introducing this bill to help make things clear—clear about cellphone contracts and the services consumers sign up for, and what those services cost.

We know that complaints about wireless billing are increasing year after year. When the federal Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services recently appeared before a hearing of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or the CRTC, to discuss the possibility of a national code for wireless services providers, he noted a 250% rise in complaints over the past four years, with wireless sector complaints accounting for more and more of the CRTC's workload.

A recent survey by a social advocacy group called OpenMedia.ca compiled the opinions and complaints of 2,800 cellphone users across Canada and called for an overhaul of the Canadian cellphone market. The survey showed that consumers are unhappy about what they view as restrictive contracts and price gouging.

For our government, what this means is very simple: When it comes to contracts with wireless service providers, we need to protect consumers and increase that protection for the people of Ontario. This bill will give Ontario consumers those protections.

Let me say upfront that this proposed legislation is an improvement on Bill 82, which was introduced last session. The strong consumer protections that were included in Bill 82 are being carried forward in this legislation, and we've added additional protections.

At this point, Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge my colleague the honourable Minister of Natural Resources and MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, David Oraziotti, who has been a very early, persistent and effective champion for consumers on this file. Thank you.

If passed, our bill would help consumers get the services they pay for, and understand what they're getting. It would ensure that consumers receive the following things from their wireless service providers: First, there would be clear, written contracts that spell out which services come with the basic fee and which would result in a higher bill. Second, it would provide for the ability to walk away from a contract any time, with limits on cancellation fees, a hard cap of \$50. Third, there would be the right to sue the provider for three times the amount that the consumer is owed, if the consumer is owed a refund under the legislation and the company refuses to pay for that. And finally, this legislation will provide for all-inclusive pricing.

This legislation is about making sure agreements are clear—clear when it comes to the cost to operate your cellphone every month. Under our proposed legislation,

consumers would receive one contract that spells out the key terms and costs that they've agreed to. It would be clear when it comes to the services you are getting. Companies would have to provide clear information on things such as roaming costs and when they would be incurred, and whether a cellphone is locked and if there's any cost to unlocking it. Service providers would also have to stop billing a customer immediately for a phone once it has been reported lost or stolen, and suppliers would be obligated to disclose the manufacturer's warranty on a phone if the consumer is purchasing supplementary warranty coverage, and to be clear when it comes to renewing, amending or extending the contract you have.

Companies would have to be clear about renewing fixed-term contracts, and they would have to provide detailed information to consumers about that contract. Fixed-term contracts would also be automatically extended on a month-to-month basis once the term is finished so people don't lose their phone number.

Above all, this legislation is about empowering consumers to know their rights when service providers do not follow the rules. This clarity extends to the strong enforcement measures that are included in our proposed legislation.

This proposed cellphone and wireless service legislation is, as I have mentioned, Speaker, part of the larger series of consumer protection measures that we have introduced recently. We believe they all strengthen consumer protection measures, help to build a strong economy, and ensure a fair, safe and informed marketplace.

This government has a responsibility to Ontario consumers and to their families to ensure that the cellphone agreements signed by Ontario individuals and families each year are clear, comprehensive and easy to understand. The approximately 80% of Ontario families who rely on wireless communication in their day-to-day lives are counting on us to get this right.

I call on this House, Speaker, to pass this bill quickly so Ontario residents can get the protection they want and deserve. In the end, we want to help make Ontario families and individuals self-assured when making decisions on their wireless use and, indeed, everything they buy. We want to help them make informed choices, spend wisely and protect their hard-earned money. Confident consumers help build a confident and strong economy, and a stronger economy is definitely something we can all agree on and I believe everyone in this province can support.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House to speak on consumer protection. It's also an opportunity to express our concern that this government puts politics and its own internal Liberal squabbles ahead of the interests of Ontario consumers.

Speaker, last session Bill 5 received second reading with all-party support and was referred to the Standing Committee on General Government on December 1, 2011. Had the Liberals not engaged in delaying tactics

and formed committees, the bill could have been examined and enacted by the spring of 2012. Instead, the government is still making media in mid-2013 about an issue that could have been settled 18 months ago.

When Bill 82 had a chance of becoming law, the Liberals chose to prorogue the Legislature and kill an important piece of consumer legislation in order to escape accountability for the scandals.

Context, Speaker, is very important, and when it comes to consumer protection, the Liberals choose to protect their skins first. The Ontario PCs enacted the original Consumer Protection Act, and we remain staunch advocates of the interests of Ontarians.

Most developed countries can be considered today as consumption economies, and one aspect of the transition to a consumption economy is that we stop earning to survive and begin earning in order to enjoy ourselves and provide for ourselves the things and services that were once considered luxuries.

Mobile phones have defined a generation, and smartphones may very well define the next. Data usage is doubling every few months. As smartphones become more advanced, the content designed for them becomes more interactive and heavier, which leads to and sometimes exceeds our limits.

Last year, the minister's predecessor focused on the notion of cell shock, the cold chill running down your spine once you realize your smartphone has exchanged massive amounts of data while you were in the United States or elsewhere abroad. To this minister's credit, the media announcements last week focused less on catchy sound bites but on the real issue of creating an educated and protected consumer in the wireless market.

We need to remain mindful of the upcoming CRTC mandatory code of conduct, which will create a national regulation framework. It's likely this bill will be made redundant by a national regulation even before exiting the committee stage.

1350

As I said last year during the debate on the bill's predecessor, Bill 82, the wireless market in Ontario relies on self-regulation by the Canadian Wireless Telecom Association. Other provinces, such as Quebec and Manitoba, have passed legislation imposing certain obligations upon carriers. The most important development in wireless communication legislation is the limit on cancellation charges, with which we wholeheartedly agree. If a company is free to charge the consumer the whole cost of a contract upon cancellation, it becomes an income-guarantee scheme. Some companies have abandoned this approach, such as Rogers in 2011. However, a comprehensive limit is in the consumer's and the industry's best interests.

I look forward to seeing the details of this bill, and I will attend the briefing later this afternoon. As last year, the Ontario PCs will focus on the need for clear language in the legislation as well as in the contract itself. Furthermore, we will ensure that this House is fully informed about the consequences of this bill's provisions and how these may be mitigated if undesirable.

Our greatest concerns last year included the imposition of a mandatory cut-off at the end of a fixed contract, resulting in the consumer's phone number and contract being cancelled overnight. Once the number is deactivated, there is almost no way of recovering its use. We must ensure that no Ontarian is put through this needless aggravation. We are glad to see this change. Contracts that expire must be extendable on a month-to-month basis on the same terms.

I wish the minister the best of luck in having this bill scheduled for second reading during a time as intense as the budget. For the sake of Ontario's consumers, I hope this fourth issue of this wireless bill finally makes it to royal assent and is not just another publicity stunt by the Liberal government. With the parliamentary schedule as it is, I am doubtful that this bill can clear the House before the summer recess—another wasted opportunity. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Responses? The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the NDP caucus, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this government bill. I think it addresses an issue that has come up in my constituency office and a number of members' offices across this province. It's a live issue that many folks, when dealing with their wireless agreements on their cellphones, are hit with a number of issues they are unaware of due to lack of disclosure and transparency. So I am supportive of the initiative to provide more transparency, more clarity and more protection for consumers. I think that's a good initiative. This is similar to the bill that was introduced before, which we also indicated our support for.

Consumers certainly need protection, and there are certain areas that this bill is addressing that are important to address, particularly when it comes to contracts and the way they are cancelled. Often, constituents and members of the community indicate that they feel trapped by their cellphone bills; they feel trapped by their agreement. They don't know how to get out of it. They feel that it's unfair that to cancel a cellphone agreement, you often have to pay for more than the phone you were given as an inducement in the first place, and that seems absolutely unfair. This bill works toward addressing that.

Also, I think it's quite important to acknowledge that the bill provides a remedy. I think that people need to have a way that they can hold their wireless provider to account, so that they can actually say, "If you don't follow through in providing what the legislation indicates you have to provide, there's a way for me to get some remedy." They can actually take the provider to court.

But there are some difficulties on that point. One is that accessing court to initiate a legal claim is something that's quite difficult, and many people are uncomfortable with that. So I suggest perhaps looking at an alternative mechanism besides having to go to court. That could be difficult, costly and inefficient for some folks, but I do acknowledge that it is a remedy that's available. I acknowledge that.

Another area, though, if we look beyond specifically consumer protection when it comes to transparency in agreements, is that in Canada we are actually paying some of the highest cellphone prices in the world. We are among the highest costs where it comes to cellphones, and I think what we need to do is look at ways to bring those costs down.

More and more we're seeing people transitioning away from land lines to cellphones. That's the reality: that people use their cellphones not only to communicate with one another in terms of placing phone calls and texts but also as a way of accessing the Internet. Internet usage among wireless users is increasing, so we're seeing a trend that more and more people are accessing the Internet with their cellphones.

If that's the case, there's a real access to an important service, which we're seeing in our global age: People who are able to connect to the Internet, who are able to obtain information and resources from the Internet—that's their way of moving ahead with the times, of connecting with this new global age. If our way of connecting with the Internet is through wireless providers and we're paying some of the highest costs in the world, we're creating a barrier that those who are less fortunate, those who are facing socio-economic problems, are having a barrier in their access to the Internet. The Internet is integral in this day and age. It's something that we learn in schools; we have jobs that are integral—their use of the Internet is integral for their employment. So if we create a barrier that for cellphones we're paying the highest prices in the world and the global age is about information and technology, and there's this barrier, we're doing a disservice to people who are less well off in this society.

I think that if we are serious about providing consumer protection, we really have to answer this question of: Why are our fees, our prices for cellphones and cellphone plans, the highest in the world, and what can we do to bring that down? That would be a really meaningful way of looking at this issue and addressing it in a meaningful way so that people can actually afford to pay their bills and can afford to have access to, whether it's communication directly on a telephone, or whether it's access to the Internet.

I look forward to learning more about this bill; I understand there's a briefing this afternoon, which I'll be attending to find out more details about it. We're supportive of any initiative that protects consumers, and I think it's an important initiative, but we also have to get to the heart of what we can do to make life more affordable and bring costs down so that families that are already hard hit aren't in a difficult situation.

PETITIONS

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I have a petition that relates to a private member's bill that I tabled here,

proposing an amendment to the Places to Grow Act and specifically related to the town of Newmarket, but it has application across the province. It reads as follows:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Preserving Existing Communities Act, 2013 proposed by Newmarket–Aurora MPP Frank Klees, that amends the Places to Grow Act, 2005 to provide that a decision made by a municipal council is final and may not be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board if the following conditions are satisfied:

“The decision is to refuse a request to amend the municipality’s official plan with respect to land that is designated for one or more of the following: residential uses, mixed uses including residential and parks and open space;

“The requested official plan amendment, if it were approved, would permit an increase in the number of housing units on the land;

“The municipal council has passed a resolution stating that the requested official plan amendment would not be in the best interests of the municipality.”

I affix my signature to this petition in support.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Miss Monique Taylor: I’m happy to stand in this House again to bring forward a petition that I’ve read many times in this House. It’s a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate complaints against children’s aid societies; and

“Whereas people who feel they have been wronged by the actions of children’s aid societies are left feeling helpless, with nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate children’s aid societies.”

I couldn’t agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Victoria to take to the Clerks.

1400

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition from the community of York South–Weston. They’re petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas there have been several incidents of violence and crime related to the illegal sale and service of alcohol in our community; and

“Whereas we, as a community, want safety and peace of mind and know that giving law enforcement better tools to combat criminal actions will help meet this goal;

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

“We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 8, the Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places), 2013, into law.”

I agree with this petition, I will sign it and hand it to page Jack.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas, beginning January 1, 2013, the WSIB was expanded to include groups of employers and principals who had previously been exempt from the WSIB and had private insurance; and

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

“Whereas the economy of Ontario is struggling and government must assist businesses in every way possible;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to repeal the statutory obligations created by Bill 119.”

I affix my signature in support.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

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

“Whereas social assistance benefits in Ontario leave recipients far below the poverty line, struggling to meet the basic costs of living, and without any resources to handle emergencies;

“Whereas the provincial government has announced deep cuts to the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit;

“Whereas this program provides emergency support to help families pay for basic utilities;

“Whereas this program provides options for vulnerable people including women, children and people with disabilities to escape domestic violence and transition to safer housing;

“Whereas the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit is a critical emergency program that helps to prevent homelessness;

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

“That the province of Ontario restore full funding for the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit and ensure that it continues to go directly to those who need it.”

I support this, I’ll sign my name to it and give it to page Simon.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the tire fee increases.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship's eco fees for agricultural tires, increasing some fees from \$15.29 to \$352.80, \$546.84 or \$1,311.24;

"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 these new fees will result in increased costs for our farmers and lost sales for our farm equipment dealerships;

"Whereas the PC caucus has proposed a new plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling, but gives them the freedom to work with other businesses to find the best way possible to carry out that responsibility;

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

"Please suspend the decision to significantly increase Ontario Tire Stewardship's fees on agricultural and off-the-road tires pending a thorough impact study and implementation of proposals to lower costs."

I support this petition, affix my signature and send it down with page Ethan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? The member for Durham.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be noticed once in a while.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That the Minister of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process. Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

I'm pleased to sign and support it on behalf of my constituents.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Toby Barrett: Petitions have come in; there are 1,351 signatures.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the town of Dunnville has a severe drug problem amongst the youth. The local drug dealers are selling drugs to the teenagers with little or no fear of being arrested;

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

"To instruct the Ontario Provincial Police to actively pursue and arrest the local drug dealers;

"To lobby the federal government for stiffer penalties and mandatory jail terms for anyone dealing drugs with no leniency for first offenders."

I agree with these sentiments and affix my signature.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

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

"Whereas a want of confidence motion has been tabled before the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario remains in power only while it has the confidence of the assembly; and

"Whereas the debate of a want of confidence motion requires the consent of all three parties' House leaders; and

"Whereas the recent scandals, including the Ornge air ambulance fiasco, the Mississauga and Oakville power plant cancellation and eHealth have shown Ontarians that the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government cannot be trusted with the administration of our province; and

"Whereas it is evident that the McGuinty-Wynne government has lost the confidence of Ontarians;

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

"To immediately exercise its prime duty of holding the government accountable and bring a want of confidence motion to debate at the earliest" possible moment.

I agree with this and will be signing it and passing it off to page Anjali.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas a want of confidence motion has been tabled before the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario remains in power only while it has the confidence of the assembly; and

“Whereas the debate of a want of confidence motion requires the consent of all three parties’ House leaders; and

“Whereas the recent scandals, including the Ornge air ambulance fiasco, the Mississauga and Oakville power plant cancellation and eHealth have shown Ontarians that the ... Wynne Liberal government cannot be trusted with the administration of our province; and

“Whereas it is evident that the ... Wynne government has lost the confidence of Ontarians;

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

“To immediately exercise its prime duty of holding the government accountable and bring a want of confidence motion to debate at the earliest opportunity.”

I agree with this. I’m going to sign my name to it and pass it to my page, Ethan.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which I will read.

“Whereas agencies that support individuals with a developmental disability and their families have for several years (beginning in 2010) faced a decline in provincial funding for programs that support people with developmental and other related disabilities; and

“Whereas because this level of provincial funding is far less than the rate of inflation and operational costs, and does not account for providing services to a growing and aging number of individuals with complex needs, developmental service agencies are being forced into deficit; and

“Whereas today over 30% of developmental service agencies are in deficit; and

“Whereas lowered provincial funding has resulted in agencies being forced to cut programs and services that enable people with a developmental disability to participate in their community and enjoy the best quality of life possible; and

“Whereas in some cases services once focused on community inclusion and quality of life for individuals have been reduced to a ‘custodial’ care arrangement; and

“Whereas lower provincial funding means a poorer quality of life for people with a developmental disability and their families and increasingly difficult working conditions for the direct care staff who support them; and

“Whereas there are thousands of people waiting for residential supports, day program supports and other programs province-wide;

1410

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

“(1) To eliminate the deficits of developmental service agencies and provide adequate new funding to restore services and programs that have in effect been cut;

“(2) To protect existing services and supports by providing an overall increase in funding for agencies that

is at least equal to inflationary costs that include among other operational costs, utilities, food and compensation increases to ensure staff retention;

“(3) To fund pay equity obligations for a predominantly female workforce;

“(4) To provide adequate new funding to agencies to ensure that the growing number of families on wait lists have access to accommodation supports and day supports and services.”

I agree with this petition, I will affix my signature and give it to page Shruti to deliver to the Clerks’ desk.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Bill Walker: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

“Whereas the current policies of the McGuinty/Wynne Liberal government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

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

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

I support this, will affix my name and send it with page Victoria to the Clerks’ desk.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Michael Harris: I have a petition on Drive Clean, and it says:

“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 were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions 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 less reliable and prone to error; and

“Whereas the new Drive Clean test no longer assesses tailpipe emissions, but instead scans the on-board diagnostics systems of vehicles, which already perform a series of continuous and periodic emissions checks; 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 must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

I agree with this petition, sign it, and I will send it down with Brigid to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have available this afternoon for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LOCAL FOOD ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR LES ALIMENTS LOCAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 25, 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 (Mr. Ted Arnott): When this House last debated Bill 36, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound had just given his presentation. The standing orders now require me to ask for questions and comments with respect to the presentation, the speech that was given by the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole: Yes, it’s a pleasure to respond to the assistant parliamentary critic of this bill on food safety, the Local Food Act, Bill 36.

I’m sure there will be further debates this afternoon, because all of us here respect the work that agriculture does. Certainly in my riding of Durham, agriculture would be the first, if you will, business within the riding. I know many farm and agricultural leadership individuals and I hope to be able to speak this afternoon and recognize some of the contributors.

But really, if you look at the bill—and from what I’ve heard in the debate, more is being said than is actually being done, and that troubles me. When you have a government that’s in such trouble here, that they’re

almost—there is a motion that’s been tabled. They’d been found earlier this year in contempt and there’s a committee dealing with that. Now there’s one that there’s a lack of confidence as a motion. So, this bill is one more example of more talk than action.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who is, I believe, the critic of agriculture, in his remarks really focused on what was missing in this bill. Again, I hope to have a chance—and hopefully other members will be talking—to put a couple of things on the record.

First, the tire tax has been one of the areas—more red tape. The tire tax on agriculture products is one thing that I know I hear about fairly regularly. I know other members must, or they’re just being silent about it. That is another reason to be somewhat cynical or suspicious of the Liberal members who are failing to represent their constituents. I can say that there’s more red tape in agriculture today—in the last 10 years, ever since the—the new government is really just the old government. It’s unfortunate.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I believe that this bill should pass. Everybody is waiting for it. So, in order for the bill to pass, it should go to second reading—there has been much consultation across the province about this bill, and the wonderful Minister of Agriculture is very adamant that she wants this bill to pass. If there is concern, the best way to improve the bill is at committee. So we should bring this bill to committee because, otherwise—it’s not in the House debating this and debating other topics than this bill, Bill 36, the Local Food Act.

I would ask the opposition members not to continue to delay this bill and move it to committee. There are people who may want to continue to speak about that bill and we would like to make sure that everybody has their say. Again, if there is a need to improve the bill, let’s do it where we can improve the bill, not by debating other matters than the bill that are before the House today.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It’s an honour to get up and respond to our honourable member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who spoke very eloquently about the issues of the Local Food Act and some of the issues that this government—I guess the wonderful wizard of agriculture here talked about listening to the people, listening to the agriculture world; introduced this at a time during Agriculture Week that was already a main week for the agriculture industry—did no consultation, it’s obvious, or they would have known that; introduced a tire tax that we heard of just a few weeks ago without any mention to the industry—a huge issue in this province that no other province has to pay. We’re talking about fees up over or approaching \$1,000 per tire.

I’ve already had one supplier in my area who says he’ll have to move across the border into Quebec a mile or two miles down the road just because he won’t be able to stay in business. I think we need to look at what’s good for the industry, and I don’t see how some of these

rules that they've put in place or regulations are going to do that.

We talk about the lack of confidence and this want of confidence motion we've put on the floor. I think that just speaks to where we feel this government has got to go. I think it's got to go back and debate in this House whether it really has the confidence of the people of Ontario. We don't see that—and I don't think the members in the NDP—we'll wait to see what they say to that, and whether they have confidence in the leadership on the other side.

1420

So the Local Food Act, or week, is a great initiative, but poor timing and lack of consultation derail the bill that really had some potential. I think if they had talked to the people it's supposed to help, it might have been the first step.

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's a pleasure for me to stand in the House this afternoon to have a little bit of a chance to speak to this particular bill, Bill 36. I've heard some of the debate here today in the Legislature. I think it's extremely important that we move forward with this particular bill and do our best to get this to committee as soon as possible, so that we can have a better opportunity to examine some of the key elements.

I think about the importance of this legislation and how important it is to make sure we have provisions and systems in place to lend support to make sure we can provide as much support to this particular industry here in the province of Ontario. It's certainly important to the people in my community. Although I do represent the suburban riding of Vaughan, and I'm proud to do so, there is a long and proud history in my community of individuals who want to support local food, people who historically—whether it's from where they happen to hail originally, whatever country from around the world they might have come from—recognize the importance of food, the importance of supporting the industry, so that we have access, as we do, to top-quality foods; local foods here in the province of Ontario.

By moving forward with this particular legislation and getting it to committee, where it can be examined in greater detail, we are going to make sure we help underpin and strengthen this particular industry here in the province of Ontario. Under the leadership of our Minister of Agriculture, who also happens to be our Premier, it's really important, as the member from our side just before me said, that we get this bill moved through this House, get it to committee so we can actually take a look at it and, from there, get it implemented, so this particular industry has the kind of support it needs from this Legislature. It's extremely important. It's why I'm proud stand today in this House to lend my support to this legislation in the hope that it will move forward as expeditiously as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you to the member from Durham, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and the members from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Vaughan.

I have taken copious notes on my little yellow pad that my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings really likes. I think the biggest concern I have with this bill, and tried to articulate in my original speech, is that there's nothing concrete here. This is another fluff, and perhaps that's because we have a part-time agriculture minister who's trying to run through policy to do this.

Speaker, I come from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, which is the beef capital of Ontario and Canada. We're very proud, and, as I said in this House the last time, if agriculture in our province is doing well, the rest of the economy is doing well. If this bill had addressed things like cutting red tape and lowering electricity costs, which have tripled under this government in nine years; if they'd reduced the debt so there was actually money going into programs and services for people; if they'd stop wasting money on the gas plants; if they had actually set some concrete goals—if they had said, “You shall,” and, “You will,” as opposed to, “We may,” and, “We might”—we could have definitely got more excited about this.

One of my colleagues talked about the Ontario Tire Stewardship. It's interesting that they want to have this fluff bill and say, “We may do this,” and it all sounds good in a sound bite. But they raised fees for some of these farmers from \$59 a tractor tire to above \$1,000 per tractor. Well, how is that helping that farmer produce more food for all the great citizens of Ontario?

Speaker, agriculture is absolutely critical to our economy. I talked in this House—they could put \$25 million to totally rejuvenate the apple industry that could provide every single apple we need in this province over a seven-year period. But I didn't hear any of that in there. I haven't heard them doing anything in a productive manner. If they had had some of those types of things, we as a caucus would probably step up and say, “Absolutely, we'll support this.”

At the end of the day, more fluff, more red tape, more hot air. What we need is action from this government, particularly in the area of agriculture. How about a full-time minister to really drive this home?

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I find it interesting that we're just now putting into legislation the importance of supporting and promoting local food. The designation of a Local Food Week in October is a start, but there's a long way to go. We need to find, create and promote “grow local” right from the start, right from the seeds and from the seedlings which should be locally sourced. The fertilizers and other growing materials must be locally sourced. The farmers should be able to certify on their products that they are 100% local. They should be able to put on the labels that the produce is 100% Ontario grown.

In my riding, we have E.D. Smith jams, but with the fall of the soft-fruit market and the closure of our local

processing plants, not all the ingredients are locally grown. Not only is E.D. Smith a local business in my riding, but it was the place where I began my adult working life. It provided work for the growers, processors, transportation sector and local guys like me. Some employees were even able to ride their bikes to work. It was a win-win situation for everyone. But many of our local Niagara growers have gone, and I would like to see an active program to bring back those agricultural businesses, those jobs and that good, locally grown food.

Also in my riding, we're lucky that we still have a good grower of soft fruit and great grapes that produce terrific wines, and that would be Puddicombe farms. We also get excellent homemade bakery products at Puddicombe. How many Ontarians can still do that and say that? Not many.

In my annual newsletter and calendar, I encourage my constituents to buy local and support our local businesses, but we all need to do more; for example, making our publicly owned spaces freely available to farmers to sell their locally grown produce, and partnering with even more farmers to come even more frequently into the cities to sell their produce directly to the public.

But we really have to start where we can have the greatest long-term impact, and that's in our schools, right from the food available in the cafeteria—yes, in the cafeteria—not food vending machines. Good grief, we should have started that a long time ago with our elementary school kids, who we should be teaching where good food comes from and what can grow in their province. Kids today are very aware and starting school even earlier, so we have a terrific opportunity to get the local food language and knowledge to them much sooner than we do now. Not only will they understand the value of locally produced food, but they'll also learn about their environmental footprint and how locally grown foods can reduce that. We'll have a great learning tool to teach the negative impact the importation of foreign food has on our environment. But sadly, all of this is way far ahead of this bill before us this afternoon.

This bill establishes a Local Food Week. It signals that local food is a provincial priority, and it provides the first step in what is intended to be an ongoing action to support local food. The legislation is intended to raise awareness and to support collaboration with the sector, encouraging the development of new markets for local food. But why do that only in the fall? They can do it in the spring as well—in growing season—to bring awareness of the spring harvests like strawberries and of what we plant in the spring and how much of that local food is within the Ontario lineage.

I'd like to make a suggestion on how we can get a good start on helping with new markets. During a visit to my riding in September, a person stayed at a local hotel which provided breakfast each morning. The guest noticed that the fruit of choice was bananas and spoke to the manager about replacing it with locally grown, in-season soft fruit. The response was a bit of a tongue-lashing about how that chain supports local businesses.

Realizing that this was a lost cause at the local level, the guest contacted the Canadian head office in Oakville to explain the problem and ask how the request for local fruit could be heard and possibly result in some changes with this chain. It was a bit of a struggle to say the least, but with perseverance, they got a commitment to move the request up the line to a decision-maker in the organization. This should have been done through an active marketing program of this government, encouraging local produce in all settings, especially those in my riding and the Niagara region—hotbeds of local fruit production. But it should even be more proactive than that.

A woman who is a strong advocate of local produce tells me that she heads into the grocery stores—Canadian-owned ones and her favourite ones—and demands to know where the locally grown produce is located. Inevitably, it results in head-scratching and her pushing to speak to someone who can answer her questions. She often gets referred up the chain and occasionally finds tables and bins with signs indicating they are Ontario produce. But that's not good enough for her. She pushes further, saying that she wants our local produce to be at the front of the store, the first food bins available to customers and clearly labelled as local, Ontario-grown produce.

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Even at that, it's not enough to just have it in the store; it needs to be front and centre, highlighted to be sure that customers have a choice but that they see our local produce first.

This bill will establish consultations with stakeholders, develop voluntary local food goals and targets, and provide ministerial ability to establish goals for the sector and targets for specific public sector partners. It establishes ministerial responsibility for stakeholder consultation and the assembling of information to help create the goals and targets and to determine the success of the program. The bill will require the ministry to publish a summary of provincial local food initiatives and the successes and innovations in the broader public sector.

While this is all under way, I'd like to see something more proactive and immediate, like the continuation of the program that Speaker Peters implemented here at the Legislative Assembly. We have annual tastings to determine which local craft brew and local wine will be served at this assembly, and food in the dining room is, to the greatest degree possible, locally sourced. This should be expanded across the public sector, requiring that any food outlet must first find locally grown food to be sold or served, and then requiring their suppliers searching out and buying Ontario products to be the major items in their stock. But without a strong piece of legislation that requires a focus on buying locally produced foods, we can only hope for the benevolence of our suppliers and sellers.

Last Friday I read our e-copy of the Greenbelt Fund Green Papers, which directly addresses the issue of how to get buy-in on ensuring that we source local food. It doesn't go to our stakeholders; it goes to our staff. The

focus of this edition was on engaging the staff who will be responsible for implementing any local food programs. The assumption is, of course, that a well-planned local food program has already been implemented.

Let me quote from the green papers, April 2013, volume 6: "People: Attitudes and Beliefs.

"The majority of broader public sector ... institutions are large organizations, and making organizational change in one area can affect the jobs of many people. As such, moving forward on changes without broad support from relevant staff members can lead to a myriad of setbacks. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to the attitudes and beliefs of all involved staff.

"When making changes to the food purchasing process, the challenge public institutions face is that they tend to involve a long list of staff members that play a role in this process: There are those that are directly involved such as line staff, chefs, purchasers, food service managers, directors, and other senior level staff, and there are also those staff members that are indirectly involved such as procurement managers, finance staff, administrative support staff, other departmental heads and senior management, and, of course, the board of directors. Any one person on this long line of those directly and indirectly affected can stymie institutional change. It is therefore of utmost importance that relevant staff is engaged when initiating change."

In the public service, we need to have firm legislation, regulations, guidelines and practices to ensure that we are leading the way by example. To do this, we need to rework this legislation to be prescriptive about local food, not just about Local Food Week.

Some of the things that we must do to ensure that we are actually leading the way in supporting local food are to define what is "local," and that should be that the majority of local products must be processed in Ontario and that at least 80% of the direct costs of production are returned to the Ontario economy. No growing here for processing in another province or country; keep jobs related to Ontario produce right here in Ontario.

There should be goals for every ministry to meet in food procurement. Each ministry should be required to report annually on their successes and failures in this area.

Establish a definition for "local organic" and "local sustainable" food. This would give the advantage to large and small producers, who are most likely to produce local organic or local food.

Speaker, I could go on for quite a while here, but this is certainly a win-win: buying local. It keeps our people employed, it gives initiative to our younger people to get involved in the agricultural business as well as the food business, and it certainly helps to stimulate our economy. It helps put people back to eating good food. We're not quite sure sometimes of what we import, where it has been, how long it has been there and how long it takes to get there. But when you're buying from the farmer down the road, you know you're getting a good product and a safe product.

I encourage this government to go a lot deeper into this than just having a food week.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to rise and to compliment my Hamilton colleague, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. It was a wonderful presentation. He touched on many very important points that we agree with, and that's why we want to get this bill to committee so we can do what's right.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise and I'm happy to rise to speak to the comments made by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the short and brief comments from our minister across.

The local wine and food initiatives that this House has taken are very important—more than the food that we have access to here, but to the principle of what we're trying to do. In the previous session, that was done, where we of the Legislature had access to food that we normally wouldn't have. We'd like to see more of this go on.

There's an opportunity with this bill to do consultation with the local stakeholders. We see that that wasn't done. We're hoping that during committee we could maybe have some of that done. We have many issues where the farmers in my area are talking about some of the issues that their neighbours in Quebec don't have. We're very close to Quebec—we have a lot of friends and relatives in Quebec—and we see some of the benefits they have. They have a strong agriculture voice that the province listens to down there. Things like energy are not a problem down there; they have some of the lowest rates. They used to be higher than ours, but we've overcome them in the scale, for sure. Things like quality of programs for them—they're very involved with the stakeholders before they pass legislation, something we don't see here.

I think we're going to have to start moving towards having discussions and trying to get the best legislation we can, having legislation that means something other than a feel-good bill here that really just replaces a week we already had dedicated to the ministry.

It's interesting to hear the honourable member from Hamilton speak up on this issue, and I commend him for his initiative.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to join the debate and follow the comments of my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I hope the government side is listening, because we've said quite clearly on this side of the House that this is an issue that's extremely important: the issue of local food, of a more sustainable food system. Those are points that the member was making.

In addition, the issue of food generally has to come to the forefront here. But some of the things that my colleague was saying here—I think they should be in-

cluded in a bill, because right now, this bill is very empty. It just has the week designated, but it doesn't really put anything in the bill that will actually help meet the goals of the bill. If we're going to actually educate the province about the importance of a more sustainable food system, how are we going to do that?

I think your suggestion about bringing this education into our public school system makes very good sense to me. I spend a lot of time speaking to students in my riding of Davenport, and they get it. They get it far more, I think, than the older generation when it comes to the environment, and they actually get quite excited when we talk about food and about growing food on the school grounds. It's something that they want to do, and they want support from the government to be able to do that, but right now they don't have that support. I think that's something we should consider.

Another positive suggestion, I think, which is very obvious—it's something we've said repeatedly—is around actually putting a local procurement policy into our public service so that public agencies are actually supporting local farmers.

There is so much here that's missing from this bill. It doesn't mention anything about different kinds of farming around organic farming or around sustainable farming. If you asked people, if you spent the time to go out to speak to people, people in Kitchener–Waterloo and in Davenport want to talk about backyard farming, about backyard chickens. I hope that this government will listen to the people of Ontario when it comes to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

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Interjection: Oh, no.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Speaker. I hear a lot of “oh no”s on the other side.

I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton–Stoney Creek for his always-positive remarks in the House here, and the members from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Davenport.

The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry just mentioned the principle about what they're trying to do. Mr. Speaker, what they're trying to do is filibuster. They're trying to delay another good piece of legislation, like every other good piece of legislation in this House. That party—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I thought I heard an unparliamentary remark. I would ask the member for Leeds–Grenville to withdraw.

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

I return to the member for his response.

Mr. Grant Crack: It's a good thing I don't listen to their heckling, Mr. Speaker. But that party is all talk, no action. Let's take some action. Let's get this to committee and let's move this bill forward like the stakeholders want.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I now return to the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his reply.

Mr. Paul Miller: I thank the members for their comments. They didn't use all their time—maybe half their time—so I guess the content of what I said may or may not have sunk in. They were very limited on their responses, I might add, but I certainly hope they were listening. If they'd like a copy of this, I'd be happy to supply them with a copy so they can get the real content here and maybe absorb it. It would be good.

I really believe that it's great to have a designated food week, and that's good, but there certainly has to be content; there has to be substance behind it. There actually has to be something done to make it worthwhile calling it “food week.” I'm sure the food producers and all the agricultural people would like to see some content in here that would promote their products, would give them access to more markets, would allow them to have a better position in the grocery stores so that people can recognize homegrown food as opposed to imported food. I certainly think that these things could easily be done—the same as the wine producers, who want better recognition in the LCBO stores. They would like to see bigger areas dedicated to Ontario-grown wine, which, by the way, is another product that has got world recognition for its quality and its availability, which we are not using to the full—how would I put it?—the full extent we could.

I certainly would encourage more and more people around the Legislature to get involved in their local food groups and producers in agriculture, because I'm sure they could put their heads together with their local growers and producers to come up with some good initiatives that could bring good things to Ontario.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm interested that the government keeps talking about taking this bill to committee. I'd like to point out to the government—I'm sure you're aware of it; perhaps the people listening would be interested—that when a bill goes to committee, they talk about amending the bill and getting it changed and making it better. About 80% of the bills that have gone to committee under this government have no amendments allowed to them. They passed the bill through without amendment, and getting amendments passed in committee is almost impossible. That's why this debate has to continue. That's why we have to point out to the government that this bill is badly, badly flawed.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's defective.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's defective and flawed. This is the bill we're talking about. “The Minister of Agriculture and Food may establish goals or targets”—certain targets—“to aspire to in respect of local food.” We're going to aspire. Talk about a hard-hitting piece of legislation. This is going to turn the world around. We're going to aspire. We could aspire to much greater things than this local food bill.

It's a bill with a really nice title. Let's promote local food. Who wouldn't want to do that? It's like picking up a little pussycat; they're lovely things. It's like motherhood; it's a wonderful thing. Local food: It's a wonderful thing. It's like apple pie; that's a wonderful thing, too.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You know a thing or two about apple pie.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I know a thing or two about apple pie. Of course, the consultation that this government says they've done on this issue—they've listened to a lot of local food groups and a lot of local farming communities. None of what those local groups have said are in this bill, and that's a shame.

The consultation—and of course in the horse racing business, which also affected agriculture, you didn't do any consultation. Of course, in not doing any, you didn't know anything about the horse racing industry, and you've destroyed that industry. It's going to last for another two or three years, but the breeding industry almost collapsed this year. It probably will collapse next year. Without an active breeding industry, there won't be a horse racing industry in Ontario in three or four years. You have brought that destruction because of your lack of understanding and your lack of consultation and your lack of listening to that consultation, which is exactly what you've done in this bill yet again. We see this constantly in the agricultural community.

I want to say this government seems to have a hate on for the agricultural industry, but that's not true. We know that's not true. It's just that you don't understand it, and you won't go out and ask people who do understand it. And if you do that, you won't believe what they tell you. You can't, because nothing you do helps the agricultural industry.

If you are a fruit and vegetable business, it's a highly intensive management business. One of the things that fruit and vegetable absolutely need is the ability to irrigate crops, especially during drought conditions. Yet if you're on a farm and you would like to put in an irrigation pond, you will probably sell your farm before you will complete that mission. There are regulations and red tape that are yards long and take you years to complete before you can put a pond on your farm. And if you are taking the water from a riverbed that runs through your farm, you can't use the water during a drought, because the Ministry of the Environment says the stream needs the water during a drought and you can't use it to water your crop during a drought. Well, when do you need to irrigate? When it's raining? Not really. That's the kind of thing this government, in its myriads of red tape that it puts up in front of the farming community, doesn't seem to understand.

You have to understand that the people count on you as the government of this province to do the right thing so that they can create an industry that can thrive and survive. That ability is right here in Ontario. We have a tremendous ability in our farming community to thrive, to be prosperous, to create great wealth and hire a lot of people, but you keep getting in the way of that prosperity, and that's a shame.

We see it in the cost of hydro. A lot of electricity is used in agriculture. We see it in tire taxes that come along out of the blue. All of a sudden we're paying \$1,000 for one of those big farm tractor tires, of which some of the largest tractors have four of them. That's \$4,000 in taxes on tractor tires. It's an added cost to people who don't have those kinds of margins in their business to survive. You're throwing up roadblock after roadblock.

We're seeing it in the local abattoirs, of which at one time there used to be one in almost every community. Certainly every riding or county would have had one or two local abattoirs. Well, the red tape and regulation that you've thrown up in their faces over the last 10 years has driven well over 60% of them out of business. That almost makes it impossible for someone to market an animal, or meat, from the farm to the public. You have to go through a major abattoir. When you do that, you know which animal is going in; you just don't know which one's coming back out again. So there's a very high possibility that you're not going to get your animal back out the other end, and that's a shame, because there were some good opportunities in that area.

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We see what's happening at MPAC today and how that's impacting local farmers. We're not talking about a 10% increase or a 15% increase in land assessments; we're talking about an 80% increase or a 90% increase in assessments, and this government is doing nothing to mitigate that over a period of time. Who can absorb those kinds of increases on an immediate basis? This government is doing nothing about helping farmers survive those 90% increases in land taxes.

Mr. Steve Clark: Shame. Shame on you.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a shame. It's absolutely a shame.

The fruit and vegetable business in Ontario in the Niagara Escarpment, in the marshlands—Bradford Marsh, Holland Marsh north of the city—Norfolk county, down through Leamington and southwestern Ontario: The economic opportunities in those areas are huge; absolutely huge.

Leamington still has a factory. The Heinz factory in Leamington handles more tomatoes per hour than any other plant in North America during the summer. That includes the paste processing plants in California. There's one in Tracy, California, that's almost as big but not quite. It produces 300,000 or 400,000 tonnes of tomatoes that come from the farms of farmers in that area and are processed through eight or 10 tomato-processing plants down there.

Frozen sweet corn: a huge industry. Probably 12,000 or 15,000 acres of land are used in order to produce sweet corn to go into those plants. Probably 4,000 or 5,000 acres of peas that go into frozen peas that we see—all done in Ontario, all marketed across Canada and into the United States. At one time, we used to go to Europe. Those days are pretty well over now, but on occasion we still send product to Europe.

The opportunity in Ontario to produce those crops in great abundance still exists today, and yet this government keeps getting in the way of that advancement. It's a huge shame. It's a huge lost opportunity. You've got to take the red tape out of the way of farmers so that they can do their job and provide a product that a processor can turn a profit on. That will create economic opportunity in this province beyond your dreams. But you've got to get out of the way, and until you get out of the way, this province is going to continue to struggle in what is one of the most important industries in this province, that being agriculture.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I concur with the member from Halton on many of the things he had concerns about. In the last five and a half years around here, I've seen many bills come forward from the government side that would be one or two pages. What could you possibly put in one or two pages that's going to have a positive impact on this province or the businesses that are affected by that bill?

People want legislation with teeth in it. They want legislation that is really going to have a positive impact on their businesses, on their community, on the jobs in their community and on the businesses in their community. They want real change. They don't want photo ops, lip service to the organization that really wants change and all they're doing is trying to satisfy them for election purposes or for a good media hit. That doesn't make change.

People are looking for legislation with content. They're looking for legislation that really is going to do something. So many times in the last five and a half years I've been frustrated, Speaker, standing up to talk to something that has nothing in it. In fact, we create things to put into it, and usually the government picks up on very little of it. They pretend they're listening. They pretend they care, and they'll say, "Oh, the member's doing a great job. I like what he said," but it never goes anywhere. It dies at committee; it dies on the floor; or the House gets prorogued and it never happens. Then you've got to go all over again and start the whole process again from number one reading, number two reading, debate, and all that time wasted—resources, time and effort, because of fluff bills that really have no content. That has to change, Speaker.

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I'm happy to be up again. I listened to the member from Halton; I listened to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. The only thing I can stress is, as I said when I spoke about this bill not that long ago, it is extremely important. They've expressed concerns. It's extremely important this bill gets to committee as soon as possible so those concerns and many other concerns, if there are other concerns, can be addressed at committee.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a pleasure to rise to support my colleague from Halton. Of any of us in this assembly, I think most people recognize the name of Chudleigh with good, local food quality. Of course, he has spent an awful lot of time in this chamber, as have other members of his family, notably his grandfather, and I think he brings two perspectives to the assembly that might be missing elsewhere. One is his extensive experience in agriculture, and, secondly, he has a real great deal of insight into how it impacts the economy. I want to commend him for his 10-minute debate.

I understand the difficulty for the government that they don't want to continue to debate this, but I think, because many of us have experience in rural communities, we want to offer our ideas onto the floor of this assembly, and I think that's the responsible thing to do. This is a government that talks an awful lot about discussion and conversation and process, yet when we want to use the process to have that conversation and discussion, they choose to berate that notion.

My colleague from Halton talked eloquently about a number of things. One, he talked about the economy, the burdens that are in the way of our farmers in order to produce local food. That's very important. Secondly, he talked about examples in other parts of the world. I think that is very relevant. Third, he talked actually about the horse racing community. I must say that it is important that we do talk about the horse racing community because those are farmers too, and they're actually helping the sustainability of our family farms because they're buying feed from those farms, or buying hay from those farms. They're actually supporting our other farm communities. I think that's really relevant and very much a part of this debate.

I want to congratulate my colleague once again for a very value-added speech on the floor of this assembly. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? That is no surprise to me or any of our Progressive Conservative colleagues because we do know him to have the opportunity to speak, to speak with truth and conviction, and I applaud him.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up once again and talk about this piece of legislation. The member from Halton has pointed out that, often, once pieces of legislation like this get to committee, you don't often get a chance to change a lot of it, but I think in a minority setting perhaps we can actually force some change.

I guess my question is, why wouldn't you do it right the first time? Why wouldn't you do the consultation with the stakeholders? Because people in this province are ready for real change around local food. They see the connection with the economy and with the environment and with their health and with their nutrition. They see it. They're ready for it. I guess the government wasn't ready for it, which is really unfortunate because it's a lost opportunity.

I want to tell you, people are so interested in local food that they're going to be walking around Kitchener-Waterloo with me on Saturday for the Jane Jacobs Walk, and we're going to visit an urban farm, a city farm. We're going to go visit some urban chickens. I don't know. It's going to be very interesting. But people are willing to walk around town with me and talk about food and talk about the economy and how to support sustainability within their own lives.

It's too bad that the Liberals didn't have the courage that it takes to create some legislation with some teeth, that would actually make a difference to local farmers and to the health of our communities.

We're going to end the tour at Seven Shores. It's a wonderful local business in Kitchener-Waterloo and they're committed, 100%, to local produce and local foods. They have a loyal group of people that come there every day because they know that they're supporting the farmers. They know they're supporting a business and they care about that business.

We on this side care enough to make this piece of legislation stronger, and I support it. If this debate ever ends, I look forward to making this piece of legislation a little bit stronger.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question and comment time. I'll return to the member for Halton for his reply.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I appreciate the comments of the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. The member for Vaughan wants to take it to committee, because as soon as we get to committee, this bill will have moved into the next stage. They want to move it on, and they haven't listened yet. None of the comments that party has made—they're not even debating the bill anymore—convince me that they've listened, that they've listened to their consultations, that they would like to move beyond aspiring to something. We all want to aspire, but this government seems to think it's an end in itself.

I'd like to thank the member for Nepean–Carleton for her very kind words. Yes, after 40 years in the fruit and vegetable business, I learned a thing or two. Unlike this government, I listened when I was there, and when you listen, you do tend to learn. That's why God gave you two ears and only one mouth: You should do twice as much listening as you do—and I thank the member for Kitchener–Waterloo very much for her comments.

Yes, we have a lot of opportunity in this province regarding fruits and vegetables. Many of you drive through the Holland Marsh up there. That's one of the fruit and vegetable areas that people in Toronto do know about. That area, about 12,000 acres of organic soil—there's probably another 1,000 or 1,500 acres that could be developed there—is interesting. That organic soil is a living thing. It's made up of decaying plant pieces, and it evaporates. Every year, about half an inch of that soil evaporates, so it's a finite resource and eventually—there's about 36 feet, 40 feet of organic soil over most of that area, so in about 80 years, that resource will have

disappeared. It would be a great shame if this government doesn't do what it can to make that resource as profitable as it can be for the people of Ontario during this period of time.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm happy to stand in support of this bill, as other members of my caucus have done before me.

We definitely need more substance to this bill. There isn't a lot of—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Substance.

Miss Monique Taylor:—substance, right? There's no weight. There's no meat to this.

It doesn't speak to increasing our local food consumption, which we all know is very important to us. It doesn't speak to the need to help farmers get their products to market.

In my riding, we have a lovely local market right on the brow. There's pie and there's jams and there's vegetables, and there's people coming together weekly in our community who are supporting that local market.

We have restaurants on Concession Street that shop there on a regular basis. Papa Leo's is the name of the restaurant. I see Leo there early in the morning, checking to see what's going on at the market that day. He builds his menu according to what's happening at the market and the time of year that the produce is being picked. It's absolutely lovely, and Leo does a great job, making sure that people in our area are able to have local food.

It doesn't speak to goals or targets in the ministry to meet local food procurement. That's a big issue. We know that within this bill, it says that in three years they're going to put some targets together. Well, what about having targets before three years; building in targets now, so that in three years we can look and see if we have met those targets? I think that's a really important piece.

This bill doesn't speak to how we're going to engage our next generation, our youth, and make sure they're continuing in the farm industry. And it's lacking transparency, Speaker. When you first read it, it appears that the only tangible achievement of this act would be to establish a Local Food Week.

However, I'm hopeful that this bill will receive further debate and amendment at committee. We've heard previously just from speakers in this House today that they have concerns about that. I'm hopeful also, with a minority government, that the government will be listening to our ideas here in the NDP caucus and putting those ideas into this bill to make it stronger.

In my riding of Hamilton Mountain, I have had the great pleasure of being part of the planning stages of an aquaponics greenhouse that we're looking forward to coming to our city. It's not a conventional method of farming: It uses tilapia fish to grow produce in an amazing concept. I encourage all members of the House to look at these establishments that are starting to get recognition. I know there's one in the Hamilton East–

Stoney Creek riding that has started, and they're just actually starting to get their products to the market now. You know, it's urban farming that we need to look at seriously, making sure that we're considering it. Something like that should be talked about further and in more detail in this bill.

The not-for-profit group that I've been working with is looking at supplying families in our community with more fresh, local produce, and that would happen all year round. By building greenhouses and having community participation in it, it's not just growing fresh vegetables but it's also growing a community and making sure that we have respect for the food that we're eating and that's getting to our tables. It's produce that's grown without the use of hormones, antibiotics or genetic engineering. It's a significant step forward for our communities, and I'm so proud to be able to be part of that group and in planning in those meetings and with those people.

I'm optimistic that by working together with all levels of government, Ontario will become a leader in local food production. However, the statistics show that the number of individuals entering the farming industry is on a decline. If we're going to talk about a sustainable food production industry, we need to make the sector more viable, especially for our youth. This includes creating opportunities for the next generation.

The aquaponics initiative that I spoke of a minute ago was proposed by a high school teacher who lives in my riding. The program that he teaches—developed by him and approved by the ministry—teaches the need for sustainable and local farming, and it's a program that's also built around saving youth at risk.

The first time that Al Nason, who is the teacher, came into my office, he came in with a 16-year-old boy who sat down to tell me about this project. The smile that radiated off this young man was absolutely incredible and contagious. This youth was completely at risk. He was not going to finish high school. There was no way this kid was going to college or university, and now he's doing just that, and he's doing it brilliantly. It's from projects like this, that planted a seed in this young man, and as he watched that seed grow, he was doing something productive. These are the kinds of things and the initiatives that we need to make sure are happening in our schools.

I had the pleasure of touring the greenhouse and meeting many other students who were just like him and who are all flourishing in different ways. Al has definitely been an inspiration for so many students in our community. The successes have been measured by the graduates who are now leaving his high school, and they're continuing their studies in agriculture.

But sadly, again, this bill does not speak to any of these projects of this sort. Al has worked with the education ministry, and he now has a program in the University of Guelph. It should be a model for other post-secondary schools in our province, where these young men and women are now coming out of high school and they're able to go into a horticulture field, and they're seeing the

benefits of that for their future. Knowing that they're going to be able to have an impact on our society, coming forward, is absolutely amazing.

We must enhance our school curriculum to include farming and agriculture. We must plant the seeds in the minds of our children early so that they will grow up knowing the benefits of eating locally grown products. We must create apprenticeship programs that will provide hands-on and practical training. If we want to have successful farms in Ontario, we must create programs in our education system to do this.

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We have to have a vision moving forward. New Democrats have proposed sensible ideas. We proposed a buy-Ontario plan, which will make it a law that Ontario's money be spent here in Ontario. This will encourage food processors to purchase locally grown foods.

This government is set on increasing marketing practices for producers and making it easier to get their products on the shelves. I've been sitting in on the LCBO report writing, and we were listening to hearings. The wine growers are having big troubles getting their local wines—the wines that they're producing—onto our shelves. We need to be working with them, encouraging them to bring it all in together and how we can get the LCBO to open more boutiques and other things at farmers' markets to encourage the sale of the local wines.

New Democrats feel that the Ontario Market Investment Fund needs to be expanded to invest in local chains and suppliers. This includes regional food hubs to link farmers directly with processors, restaurants and consumers. It will also assist businesses, farmers and processors with the marketing and advertising of local products.

We also need to look at ways to provide relief from municipal taxation and zoning restrictions that are preventing farmers from processing their products on site. Hamilton, unfortunately, has a bylaw that says that we cannot grow urban chickens. But I know in some municipalities, that's appropriate and it works well, but none in Hamilton.

Farmers in the National Farmers Union have been vocal about OMAFRA programs and strategies. They've called into question how much OMAFRA spending actually goes toward supporting the family farm. Some of these farmers are finding themselves selling their farms because—and these are family generation farms—their children do not see any future in the industry.

There are several other problems that farmers are facing for which the government does not attempt solutions. My time is running short, but I will follow up in my last submission.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm drawing triple duty here today for some reason, but I want to just take a minute to compliment the member from Hamilton Mountain for much of what she said. She's right about education. Certainly the ministry has been working with local farm

groups to promote that, as has the Ministry of Education through the ag special skills programs in various high schools and the support of a number of commodity groups, apprenticeship and first-start farm initiatives with young farmers. There's a lot of that going on. The establishment of many local—the member talked about a small, cute market somewhere over on Concession Street. The government is doing a lot to support local farm markets. They're springing up all over—part of the Foodland Ontario initiative, working with the Greenbelt Foundation in particular, around farming practices and such. So there's lots going on.

You might be interested to know, on the educational front, if any member of the House got a chance to speak with President Alastair Summerlee at the University of Guelph and look at what's happening with the \$55 million in ag support that our government is providing: They're just over the moon in terms of happiness with the educational support that they are getting there. There are lots of things that we can do.

I just want to end by saying that when we did the extensive consultation around the province, one of the things we heard—and the opposition may be interested in this—is, “We don't want to see a bill that has all kinds of regulations and reports, all kinds of phony targets. We want to work together to establish those initiatives together and move forward together, not have government tell us what we should be doing. Regulations are a problem in farming.”

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to speak to the member from Hamilton Mountain. I sat in a committee a couple of weeks ago, and we did talk about getting more of that local wine to the market. One of the things that I would like to bring up is that we certainly asked there that it—we've been proposing to go to the convenience stores to allow more, certainly in a rural area where we don't have boutique stores and probably will never have boutique stores. I want to wonder why they're continually voting against that, because they talk about wanting to support, but then when it comes down to the crunch of voting they are not always there or they choose to sit on their hands.

This bill, again—I'm representing the farmers in my community who came to me very directly, and they're concerned about the word “aspire.” They've “aspired” to set goals and targets. Well, I trust they aspired to balance the books over their nine-year tenure, and what have we got there? Record deficits, and they doubled the debt in nine years. They aspired to save the planet with their undemocratic Green Energy Act, and what have we got there? The highest energy rates in North America. They aspired to provide gas plants to Oakville and Mississauga, and what have we got there? A billion-dollar boondoggle and zero kilowatts of power; we're still talking about that one. They aspired to set up a recycling program for tires, and what did that result in? Increased fees to farmers and small businesses, by up to 2,000%.

How is that helping our agricultural community, particularly when they actually have the Premier as a part-time ag minister? I'm a little concerned there still.

Our ag community needs and deserves legislation that will make them more productive, will get that red tape and bureaucracy out of their world and let them be more productive farmers, because our farmers do feed cities—and feed all of us, in fact—and we need them to be the most productive people in our province. We need legislation that's actually action-oriented and will result in concrete benefits to our farmers, not a whole bunch more of this smoke and mirrors of, “We want to talk; we want to aspire.” This bill should have been things that were going to actually help the farmer. Not a farmer in my community has come forward and said, “Vote for that, Mr. Walker, because it's a great piece of legislation.”

Farmers feed cities, and we support them and will continue to push for concrete action for our ag community.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate and ongoing discussion about the nature of food in this province of Ontario, one that's incredibly important. It begs the question: Why are we talking about the need to ensure that there's a week to promote local food? It's 2013, and we have to remind people that it's important to support local food. Why is that?

Well, it is a fact that 20 years ago, 30 years ago, locally produced food was abundant in Ontario. Our tender fruit industry and our grains and oilseeds industry were absolutely flourishing. What has happened since then?

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Free trade: the opening up of doors through free markets, and our jurisdiction, our primary producers, having to compete against the cheapest forms of food production on the planet, not unlike what happened in Bangladesh. What is the cost of a \$5 T-shirt coming into Canada? Well, we saw in Bangladesh that it's at the cost of health and safety regulations. It's at the cost of lives, for a \$34-a-month wage.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, I am making that point. Why have we allowed and continued to allow the degradation of our primary producers in this country? Let's ensure that trading agreements have to be reciprocal, that they're fair trading agreements. The processes, the productivity, the environmental standards that our farmers put into place to ensure that we have the safest, most reliable source of food should not have to compete against the lowest-wage jurisdictions where those standards don't even come into play. Absolutely not.

This bill here today does nothing. It comes back to ideology. I've heard lots about the importance of farmers and agriculture in all your various ridings, but that party across the way and this party here—you guys signed your membership cards, so you should know what ideology

means in terms of your party preference, and your membership—you are ideologically opposed to protecting. As a New Democrat, I am proud to stand as a protectionist for our agriculture producers in this province, and I always will.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I am so proud to speak on this bill, because the agriculture industry is a very lucrative industry in Ontario and I'm sure that most of the people don't know about it. I think it's worthwhile to repeat that the agri-food industry contributes \$34 billion to our economy. Imagine, \$34 billion in our economy.

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The agri-food industry supports more than 700,000 jobs across the province, and it's growing. The food processing sector: 3,000 manufacturing businesses. We have seen the manufacturing industry going down because of the challenge we have from other countries, developing countries where they pay people a lot less. I know the member from the third party raised a very good point a minute ago, and it's important to encourage our agri-food industry, because we know that the Ontario agri-food industry means quality, means safety. You're not afraid to eat what has been grown in Ontario because we know it's safe.

Again, the food processing sector—3,000 manufacturing businesses—contributes almost \$10 billion of our GDP and employs more than 94,000 people. It's an important industry and a growing industry. I'm proud to say that the University of Guelph has a wonderful campus in Alfred, Ontario. We are very proud of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Hamilton Mountain for her reply.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Community and Social Services, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, my seatmate from Essex and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and francophone affairs.

I'll start by responding to the Minister of Community and Social Services. You know, Minister, if we were using policies like this to make sure we could get healthy food into our folks who are on ODSP and OW and who are in need of food in our communities, then we would be doing a world of difference. Things like that are something that would be encouraging. In Hamilton we have a \$10 food box that gives fresh fruit and vegetables to a family. There's not a lot in it, but it's a small start. I believe we're only servicing 100 of those boxes a month. It's not quite near enough, but that's something the minister could be looking into.

Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, putting local produce into our correctional facilities and doing procurement policies that did exactly that, making sure we have local food in our schools, in our long-term-care facilities, are the kinds of initiatives that would ensure that farmers have a market for their

local produce and that we're not shipping the best of our produce out of the country and purchasing back produce that is not even close to the same quality that we can produce here in Ontario. There's nothing better than a fresh tomato right off the vine, produced right here in Ontario. It's the absolute best, and no other country can compare.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much for the opportunity. I'm pleased to stand up and speak on behalf of farmers from the beautiful riding of Prince Edward-Hastings.

I've got to tell you that when we did talk about Bill 36 with the farmers in my riding, this was their reaction: "Meh." This bill does nothing, really, to address their concerns. When they looked at it—Ashley Baker, my newest employee in my office, is actually a farmer in the Madoc area; she shows Charolais cattle. She looked at the bill, and then she talked with farmers from throughout the region about the bill. Their reaction was, "Well, there's nothing much in this bill."

It's been described as a fluffy bill; it's been described as a vacuous bill; it's been described as a public relations ploy on behalf of the government. There's just nothing in it. It's kind of hilarious to watch their reaction when we do talk about it. They'll say, "Yeah, we'll take that amendment and consider that. We'll take that amendment and consider it." Why didn't they put those kinds of things in the bill before they actually presented it to the House for debate? It's as if it was just created to take up time here in the House.

So I'm happy to fill my 10 minutes here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the farmers in my riding of Prince Edward-Hastings. And as you may know—because you've been around here a long time and you've toured across the province and have likely been to Prince Edward county, maybe through Hastings county as well—there are farms all the way from Milford in Prince Edward county in the south to Maynooth in North Hastings, up into the Canadian Shield, where it gets a little rocky up there, but there's still some good farming that takes place in North Hastings.

As you know if you've been to Milford or if you've been to Prince Edward county, we have some of the greatest wineries in all of the province. As our leader, Mr. Hudak, likes to remind me, because he comes from Niagara, I come from the second-best winery region in the province, but I would argue with him on that point.

When we did get the opportunity to talk to dairy farmers and beef farmers, chicken farmers and owners of wineries in Prince Edward county, again their reaction was, "Well, what is this bill going to do for me?" It's not going to do anything, so we were happy to take their input and bring it forward to the House here today.

I'm happy to tell you about one of those farms. It's called Donnandale and it's located in Stirling-Rawdon. This year, the Donnan family hosted the annual Hastings

County Plowing Match and Farm Show. It was a great event in August. I actually got to go up on a tractor, which was kind of dangerous for those involved, but I did the furrow and was doing some of the plowing contests there. It was a lot of fun. I can tell you their farm is a big one. It's home to 300 Holstein heifers, 260 milking cows, 357 kilograms of quota they have there, and Donnandale is one of the top milk-producing farms in my riding. It supports four Donnan families. Donnandale is renowned for being highly successful and innovative; however, it's an operation, like many dairy farms, that faces challenges, challenges that are not unique to the dairy industry.

The Voskamp family: They have a chicken farm, Victoria View Poultry in Prince Edward county. They can relate to the same problems that the Donnans' dairy farm faces, and none of those problems have been addressed in this Local Food Act. The Voskamps own and operate a farm with roughly 45,000 chickens. Their chickens are antibiotic-free and free-range. The Voskamps, like the Donnans, operate a business that I'm proud to say is crucial in this province.

The Donnans and the Voskamps aren't alone with the challenges that they face. In fact, many, if not all, farms across Ontario are facing the same challenges every single day. The challenges range from detrimental weather conditions, of course, to uneducated consumers. Weather conditions affect every farmer across this province. Poor weather conditions lead to a poor yield, which inevitably leads to challenging times for local farmers and their families.

The general public is relatively unaware of farming practices and the produce that our local farms create. Consumers need to be educated on where their food comes from. They need to be properly educated on the practices that exist on the farms that are producing their food.

We need to find a way to reach the people of our province and provide them with accurate and reliable information. We need to ensure that they know that the farmers in this province, farmers like the Donnans and the Voskamps, are some of the most hard-working and dedicated people out there. The public needs to know that these farmers get up often before 5 a.m. and they work well into the night to ensure they provide the best care to their animals, which ultimately provides the best product to the consumer. They need to know that farming is 24/7, 365 days a year. We need to make the public aware so that they are more inspired to buy Ontario produce and so that they can be proud of the farmers that live and work in this province. If we don't provide the public with an outlet to learn and get involved, they'll find an outlet of their own, an outlet that oftentimes doesn't support producers and farmers, an outlet that oftentimes challenges the practices and morale of farmers across this province.

Dairy and chicken farmers are not the only industries facing challenges in Ontario. The wine growers of Ontario also face numerous challenges in getting their

Ontario-grown and produced product to consumers. My riding is home now to more than 30 wineries located in beautiful Prince Edward county. The wineries in Prince Edward county not only produce some of the finest wine in Ontario but also are attracting a lot of tourism and economic development to the area. The wine industry is a major industry in this province and is rapidly growing; however, it's an industry whose producers, which include many constituents in my riding, face many challenges.

It goes without saying that in order to encourage consumers to purchase Ontario-grown products, they need to have the opportunity to do so. Wineries need to have opportunities to get their product into the market for consumers to enjoy. That's one of the things that we've been talking about on this side of the House, giving those wineries market access. Right now, they're being restricted by high fees to get into the LCBO stores. We're proposing that they have the opportunity not only to sell at their local farmers' markets, which they can't do right now, but also to have the opportunity to find other venues in which they can sell their products to the public.

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The market is controlled by a government-run monopoly, as we mentioned, that isn't doing enough to maximize shelf space for Ontario-grown product. This is a problem affecting wine producers and, of course, consumers too. We need to provide ideas and options to help the producers of our province. We need to stand by them and help them with the challenges that they're facing, not create new ones for them.

We need to show the farmers of this province that we support them and we're committed to their success. We need to show them that we're committed to doing our very best to eliminate the challenges that they face. That's where this bill falls short. This bill does nothing to assist farmers with the challenges that they're facing right now and fails to outline a proper and effective approach to increasing awareness for our youth and the general public. The bill lacks substance. There's nothing in this bill that will provide the food producers or food processors of this province with any relief or any confidence. It certainly provides much less than what the farmers and processors of this province were hoping for.

This bill is a very weak, however accurate, display of this government's support of the agriculture industry. It lacks any kind of support that the producers in this industry desperately need. We have to do better for Ontario's producers and consumers. We must create a plan and a system that sees Ontario producers and farmers growing and succeeding. In our white paper, *Pathways to Prosperity: Respect for Rural Ontario*, we present and outline a number of ideas that would do just that; ideas that do more than simply create a week a year to recognize producers. We believe they should be recognized daily for their contributions to our province. Our white paper suggests focusing resources on insurance-type programs. These programs will help support and protect farmers and will help even out the good years with the bad years. Ideas like these are important to ensure that

farmers can remain in business when faced with times of uncertainty. Ideas like these are how we plan to do better on this side of the House.

Another idea brought forth in our white paper is encouraging the creation of new regional food terminals across the province. The current Ontario Food Terminal in Toronto shortens the distance that our food travels and creates farm-to-city linkages. Creating a new terminal or several new terminals would provide another opportunity for farmers to connect with consumers in a way that's already proven successful. There is much that needs to be accomplished in this province to ensure that our farmers and producers are successful. This bill doesn't even begin to touch the challenges facing producers and farmers.

Farmers want more. Ontarians want more. I'm proud to be part of a caucus that's ready to deliver more for our farmers and our residents in Ontario. We're ready to bring forward ideas that are designed to build an even brighter future. We're ready to bring forward bills with significantly more substance than Bill 36. We've seen examples of those types of ideas in our white paper that was put forward by our critic for agriculture, the very well-respected Ernie Hardeman from Oxford.

I can tell you, too, that there are many other items—and we've heard about them throughout the afternoon; we've heard about them for the days that we've been debating this bill—that we're not addressing in the Legislature. Again, as the small business critic for the official opposition and the red tape critic, red tape is the biggest thing that our farmers are facing.

Ernie Hardeman was out there all summer talking to farmers. The biggest thing that's affecting their production is red tape in the province. We need to address the red tape. Bill 36 does nothing to address the biggest issue that's facing the farmers in this province.

Thank you for your time this afternoon. I look forward to hearing your comments.

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

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to speak to this Local Food Act and to respond to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings. His comments were about recognizing the value of our farm community. I want to take a moment in this Legislature to recognize two of my favourite former constituents—four of them, actually—who have left to go to Prince Edward county to start their own farm: Ember; Mazy; Greg Landucci; and Misu Burns. They are some of the young Ontario people who believe that we need more sustainable agriculture in Ontario, and they've put their money where their mouth is. They've moved to Prince Edward county to do that good work. But we need their passion and their commitment to this province matched by the government.

If you just travel a little bit further east and you get to Quebec, you'll find a province that actually supports farmers and will support new farmers and people who want to work that land. I hope that when this bill goes to committee we are going to make sure that we look at other jurisdictions like Quebec that will support a young

farmer to stay on the land and support people like Greg and Misu and Ember and Mazy.

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

Mr. Steven Del Duca: It's a pleasure to rise again. This is my third opportunity this afternoon to speak to this particular bill and I'm happy to have the chance to do it. In particular, I want to thank the member from Prince Edward–Hastings for his comments, and the member from Davenport.

Sitting here this afternoon, I had the chance to listen. It's very clear that the members opposite have some very important ideas and are very passionate about this particular issue. I know the members on this side of the Legislature, this side of the House, are very respectful of the passion that the folks opposite are bringing to this debate. I think that's why it's extremely important, as the member from Davenport mentioned in his comments a second ago—when he mentioned getting this bill to committee, it's nice to hear from that side, from that caucus, that they understand that this bill needs to get to committee so we can move forward with this, so we can actually respond to some of the ideas and concerns and passions that the members opposite bring and their constituents bring to this issue.

Once again, for the third time this afternoon, I would ask the members opposite to work with us on this. Let's get this to committee. Let's get this going forward.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a couple of minutes of comments to my colleague the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

First, I just want to speak to the member from Vaughan. I think the government would be well served if, during their opportunities to provide questions and comments, they recognized that we are making some excellent suggestions. I think that democracy can be well served if we debate those suggestions here on the floor.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank Mr. Smith, the member for Prince Edward–Hastings. I found his examples of local farmers in his riding, the Donnan family, the Voskamp family, very similar to farmers in Leeds–Grenville as well. They certainly have given me the same opinion that Mr. Smith's constituents have: that this bill is weak; it lacks substance. It tries to aspire, but it doesn't inspire. I think that's something we can all take into consideration today as part of the debate.

I do want to compliment the member on the wine growers in his riding. As he said, there are 30 wineries, and I had the opportunity to tour some of them during the summer of 2010 with my wife, Deanna. I have to tell you, Speaker, that the member should be very proud of that industry. They have done a remarkable job at marketing in eastern Ontario. The owners and the employees were very cordial and courteous. They provided all of the time that they could to us in answering our questions about their industry, and I think we owe it to them to provide access to markets that I think they deserve.

I have some fruit wineries in my riding. Louis Gaal from Blue Gypsy Wines is just one of them. I know Louis would look to leadership from the government to provide the access that both the fruit wineries and certainly the wonderful wineries in the member for Prince Edward–Hastings’s riding have asked for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It has been an interesting discussion this afternoon. It’s not much of a debate, because I think that we feel very strongly, on this side of the House, that the act can be significantly improved, and I think that some of us are anxious to have that happen.

I think we have to just take a step back, though, and have a broader conversation about how you create truly progressive legislation. Traditionally, historically, you go out into the communities, you talk with stakeholders, you ask good questions. You talk to the people who have the lived experience, and these are those in agribusiness; these are farmers. These are people who are studying how to inject sustainability into the conversation around food. Clearly, that didn’t happen.

This act says that this gives permission for the Premier to consult. We don’t need permission to consult; inherently, this is something that it is our responsibility to do.

There are many stakeholders, like Sustain Ontario and Waterloo region, which has a sustainable food table, and they made recommendations. Those recommendations are not in this act because if they were, then this act would be effective and it would be stronger and it would connect all the dots that are missing on how to actually create and build the infrastructure for local food.

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This may actually even lead us one day to a conversation about development charges and how you build and support local economies. Infrastructure actually is a piece of this conversation that we haven’t even touched on to date.

When this piece of legislation actually passes second reading and we get it to committee, we will actually give it some strength, give it some teeth and actually put some courage into the conversation that we need to have around local food.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the comments from the members from Davenport and Kitchener–Waterloo, also Vaughan, and my friend Steve Clark from Leeds–Grenville for his thoughtful comments and for taking the time to tour Prince Edward county’s wineries.

I would encourage everyone to do so if they get an opportunity throughout the next several months. I was at Rosehall Run, speaking with Lynn and Dan Sullivan on Friday afternoon of last week. It was a beautiful day there, and I met all kinds of people coming in from Ottawa and Peterborough and sampling the wines there.

There are over 30 wineries for you to choose from, so please, if you get the opportunity, make your way to Prince Edward county this summer.

Make your way through Hastings county—some of the best cheese factories in the world, and of course all of the local beef and chicken. The cheese factories are fantastic. The Fish Lake Garlic Man is there. I’m telling you, there are all kinds of great reasons to come to Prince Edward–Hastings this summer.

Again, just back to Bill 36, which is the Local Food Act: It doesn’t address the problems that people in agriculture are facing today. Most farmers that I talk to are concerned about the value of their land because of MPAC assessments. They’re concerned about the fact that these solar projects are now covering agricultural land in many cases. We’re talking huge solar farms, not the panels that you would see set up beside a house, but we’re talking acres and acres—hundreds of acres, in some cases—of solar farms that are covering agricultural land. It’s happening in our rural areas, and we have to make sure that it doesn’t happen in the future.

Energy prices and the Green Energy Act are a huge concern for our farmers. The red tape, as I mentioned earlier, and the taxation are issues, and we talked about the tire tax several times today that the government is imposing as well.

Abattoirs are disappearing; it’s taking our farmers a lot farther from their farm to get their animals to slaughter to be produced, and it is a huge problem. I would just like to close by saying, I’m on my way back to Belleville, Mr. Speaker. The Belleville Bulls are playing game seven tonight against the Barrie Colts in the eastern conference final. Go, Bulls go!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We wish them well.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 36, the Local Food Act. Of course, I stand here in support of local food and to support this act, and hopefully we’ll be able to improve it.

Speaker, I think that having this discussion is very valuable to the people of the province because I think that it is very important for our kids across the province to learn and understand where food comes from; how it impacts our health; how it impacts our environment; and, of course, how it impacts our economy.

I obviously support enhancing the supply of local food and access to it across Ontario. I’m fortunate. I come from a city riding that has a great deal of rural land and therefore, a lot of agricultural land. In fact, many of the roots of my community are agrarian, and they bring up ideas of self-reliance, self-sufficiency and, of course, sustainability. I’m very proud of the folks that I represent in Nepean–Carleton who are agricultural leaders.

I want to just mention a number of them because I think they have been a tremendous asset to me over the years in understanding the importance of local food and

to farming and agriculture. For example, Ed and Rick Schouten are two brothers who own a massive dairy operation just outside of North Gower, on Malakoff Road; Dwight Foster, who has become a really good friend of mine; he is one of the largest grain operators in Ontario—the largest in eastern Ontario. Of course, he and his brother have a wonderful sweet corn operation. A friend of mine, Hilliard Green: Although he has passed away, he has left a wonderful farm, Abby Hill Farms, to his sons, Neil and Grant. They have almost everything—pumpkins to plants; they have tomatoes and cucumbers. They have wonderful sweet corn; they have this great food stand right off of Bankfield in Manotick. I think they're doing great work and I'm so proud of them because they're also entrepreneurs and they feed people in the city.

My friend Dan O'Brien has a cattle farm, and he makes sure that community organizations often will have some beef to auction off each and every year.

My friend Earl Stanley has a local business, Stanley's Olde Maple Lane Farm, and they produce, obviously, maple syrup.

We also provide in our riding, in Nepean–Carleton, mushrooms, garlic, apples, strawberries—again, we are a self-sufficient riding. Even though it is in the middle of a major international city, the city of Ottawa, and even though we have fast growth, it's really important for the communities across not only the rest of Ottawa, but throughout the entire province to recognize where this food is coming from. That's so very vitally important.

I would like to commend our agriculture critic, Ernie Hardeman, the member from Oxford, for the tremendous work he has done in not only travelling across the province, going to farms and meeting with farmers, as well as other agriculture producers within the industry, but he came forward with a white paper which I actually think is very significant.

My colleague from Belleville earlier alluded to the food terminals statement that we have made, that we would like to see another one in Ontario. Of course, I will be lobbying very hard that that actually happen in the city of Ottawa for eastern Ontario, but I go back to Mr. Hardeman, the member from Oxford, and his steadfast determination and dedication to represent the agricultural community here.

I want to say one thing very quickly. This past summer, when there was a drought in eastern Ontario, Ernie Hardeman was there. He came down to meet at Wyatt McWilliams' farm just outside of Navan, which is inside the city of Ottawa. I am forever grateful for that. When there was an issue on the payment program to assist our farmers, when it ran out in March and it wasn't going to be able to provide the farmers with what they needed, Ernie Hardeman was again on the case for our farmers. I really do thank him for that.

A number of speakers have said that this bill needs to be improved. I think the government acknowledges that there might be some opportunities to strengthen the piece of legislation. We heard from members of the third party,

the NDP, that they also feel that this bill could be enhanced significantly. One of the ways in which we believe, in the Ontario PC Party, that this can be enhanced and improved is by actually amending the Education Act, because we believe that teaching food literacy is going to be very important to children, because it is important that they not only understand where the food comes from and how it can be prepared, but it also helps with, as I said earlier, that environment that we live in, as well as the economy that we're trying to grow in the province.

Our amendment would require that curriculum guidelines issued by the Minister of Education include food education as a mandatory component of instruction for pupils in every grade. This could be as simple as including it with health promotion or in gym class, but making sure that at some point throughout the curriculum, throughout the year, that we are addressing this very important and vital piece of information.

The vision that we have on this side of the assembly, and that I very much agree with my colleague from Oxford in having, is to have food education not only address nutrition and healthy food choices, but it will also give the kids in our schools across Ontario the additional knowledge of farming, processing and agriculture.

I was very pleased a couple of weeks ago to go visit a few of my friends in the Fraser family—three generations were there, actually. Mrs. Fraser started farming with her husband in 1949, then they built an even larger farm that went to their sons Richard and John. John's oldest son Kent actually had us all come to the farm and see their new mechanical milker, their robot milker. They actually have three for 150 dairy cows. It has enhanced their flexibility on the family farm. Basically this DeLaval system that they have actually takes a robot arm, it milks the cow, and the milk gets processed. It's very high-tech and it's very wonderful that this technology exists. It's very efficient.

I was so impressed with this after watching four of the cows get milked—and then, of course, another four get passed by because they had already met their quota for the day—that I actually brought my little girl the next day, unprompted, just to see John in the driveway. I said, "John, would you mind if I take my husband and my daughter into the farm? I'd like her to see this. My daughter is a city kid. She lives in a neighbourhood where there are houses right beside us, and we don't live on a farm. I'd really like her to see this and experience how technology, science and farming have come together to dovetail to become a very strong agricultural and economic driver in our community." So I did. I took Victoria there. It was amazing. When I was there, John said, "Years ago we used to have lots of kids come from the schools." Unfortunately, Speaker, that sort of stopped over the years.

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We should be having more of this discussion. We should be encouraging more teachers and our school boards to have those visits to the family farm and see not only what is happening in terms of production of food

but the advancements in technology. When they work together so well, we see not only an enhancement in our supply chain for food, but we also see that there are careers that could be made.

Food literacy and student nutrition, as a result of this, will offer the opportunity to build a greater market for food from Ontario directly and, as I said, in the constituency of Nepean–Carleton, directly in our constituency. There are children who may live in Barrhaven or where I live, in Leslie Park, who would love to learn a little bit more about the farm five or 10 kilometres down the road—food that’s actually being sold in Ross’s Independent. By the way, Mr. Speaker, Ross’s Independent wins awards year after year for how they display their local Ontario produce, because they are big supporters of Foodland Ontario.

So again, in terms of our amendment that will be put forward by Mr. Hardeman and supported by the Ontario PC caucus, the idea would be to have food education not only address nutrition and healthy choices but also to better give our kids additional knowledge of the farming process and agriculture in general.

When we speak about this, Speaker, we look at this holistically. We look at this as a way for the government to actually improve their piece of legislation, strengthen that legislation so that we will actually make a profound impact not only on our agricultural sector here in Ontario and the importance it brings to our economy and, of course, the importance it brings to our environment, but also by teaching students a number of things. One that I think is important is that our farmers are the best stewards of our environment. Our children will learn that if they are dealing with this in school.

We’ve talked about the health benefits if our children are learning more about what local food means. Our children will learn a lot more about the economy and science and technology, as I’ve spoken about earlier.

Speaker, I think there’s a really good opportunity here, and I’m very proud, for example, that our daughter’s caregiver during the day, Myrna Hay, actually helps my daughter learn to grow Ontario products as well. We’re teaching her how to grow tomatoes; as well, she’s got a tulip. She’s eight years old, and we’re starting her young so she understands this. I think every Ontario parent wants the same opportunity for their children, and I think there’s an ability to do that, working within our education system with our farmers and our teachers.

Speaker, I think good things grow in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I’m glad to put my input into the debate we’re having today on Bill 36. Thank you to the member for Nepean–Carleton for her debate.

She brings up a very interesting point. One of the themes that went through her debate was the generation that’s here today, the children we have here today. It’s vital that we educate our children in where food comes

from. We need to have some improvements to the bill, and she suggested we amend the Education Act so we can teach our kids about agriculture in the classroom and then also take them out to the farm, take them out to where food is grown so they can get first-hand knowledge of where our food comes from and the type of occupational opportunities there are for young people.

We need to promote not just where our food comes from, how it’s grown and, of course, how technology has affected the farming industry, the agricultural industry and the types of career opportunities that are out there as well, but also encourage children—this generation—to look at farming as a career. New Democrats feel we can do that, but this government needs to make it easier for that encouragement to happen and for young people to pursue those careers. We look at perhaps creating an apprenticeship program so that students, young people, can go out and experience it first-hand, learn those skills and then get reinforced that it could be a career they could venture into. We know we don’t want farming to be a phased-out kind of career, where we’re going to look to our food, our sustenance to survive, outside of Ontario, outside of Canada.

Definitely, the member is making a good point, that we need to educate our generation that’s here, upcoming, but we also need to promote those jobs in farming so that we don’t lose that sector from Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member from Nepean–Carleton for her comments. I think she will agree that the farmers, the consumers in my riding of Ottawa Centre—they all want to have their say, to talk about this bill at the committee. So let’s get this bill in the committee so that we can get their point of view and get this back in this House and pass it so that many people can benefit from this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m pleased to provide a few comments on the wonderful speech by the member for Nepean–Carleton. I think it is a critical piece of the local food equation that hasn’t been included in this bill. We really need to equip our young people with a better knowledge of food and nutrition, including how to actually prepare a meal.

My good friend Monda Rosenberg raised this issue with me today, and I promised her that this afternoon, during debate, I would reinforce that aspect that’s needed in this piece of legislation. With the prevalence of fast food and prepared meals in our society, I’m afraid that we’re raising a generation that has no clue how to fend for themselves in the kitchen.

I know the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Mark Wales, brought that issue of food literacy here when he was at the Legislature and met with a number of people from the government. I hope they really were listening, because I think it’s something they need to take a look at in this bill, to change the context of

this bill so that we're actually teaching children in school the issue of food literacy.

I want to say to home economists like Monda and to agriculture leaders like Mark Wales, I think we need to encourage this government not to dismiss this program as part of Bill 36. We have some great products that our farmers are producing. I think it's great for us to promote those products, but we still need to make sure that our children don't make bad food choices, that we give them the tools to be able to take that wonderful local food and to join with the movement to make sure they are able to prepare the food.

I truly believe that the member and others have really hit the nail on the head when they say that we need to add food literacy to Bill 36.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member when she spoke, and she spoke quite eloquently. I was pleased to see that she cast herself and particularly her daughter in the light of a city girl, because one of the things that we forget, because so many of us live in towns and cities today, is that we are probably the first generation—and if not the first, the second—divorced from the land.

Through the whole of human history, of course, people lived on the land. They farmed. They were hunters and gatherers. They did a number of things, but they were not divorced from the land. They actually got their food from the place in which they lived. This is the first, or perhaps the second, generation where that is not the case. I commend the member for taking her daughter to see exactly how a cow is milked.

I know that when I made my own speech here a few days ago on this very subject—I had never, ever been on a farm when I was her age. I had never seen an animal up close until the time I went to the Royal Winter Fair. It was quite an experience to me, not only to see the animal up close, but to actually smell it.

I think that her daughter has learned a very valuable lesson, and I think that anybody watching today, anyone who has children, should get that child or those children back to the farm, if only to see it, because it is a way of life that will become increasingly divorced over time to people who live in cities. But it is a way of life that we all need to understand and to appreciate, because without the farmers, none of us could exist. None of us would have the food that we need. None of the cities would prosper. It is to them that we owe so very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean–Carleton has two minutes for a response.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I thank my colleagues.

First, to the member from London–Fanshawe, thank you very much for adding to the debate. I couldn't agree more that we really need to educate our children and a lot of adults on where our food comes from. I think we can do that together, but we need to make sure we have a strong bill.

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To my friend the Minister of Labour, he has a wonderful little market in his riding, the Parkdale Market, that I've gone to many times. Maybe many here don't realize this, even though Ottawa is the largest agricultural city in the world; my colleague from Ottawa Centre actually has a major farm, Canada's experimental farm, in the middle of his riding. So I appreciated his comments.

To my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, we share a boundary, and we share an awful lot in common. I thank him for his comments because I think he demonstrated one thing very quickly when he first arrived here in 2010, and he has continued it on, as he is a vocal advocate for the people he represents. He gets intimately involved with the details of their lives, and I appreciate him bringing that to the floor of the assembly.

To my colleague from Beaches–East York, thank you very much. It's a very important point when you talk about being divorced from the land. In my community, for example, in Barrhaven, 10 years, 20 years ago that was farmers' fields, and now that is, of course, housing developments. It's very fast growth, explosive growth. So it is important that we provide the next generation and this current generation that's in our school system with the knowledge and the skills to do a couple of things: understand where the food comes from; understand how to make healthy food choices; understand that our farming community does provide employment opportunities; and, finally, understand that the environment is important, and the best stewards of the environment are our farmers. So I do appreciate that.

I must say that I think it would be wonderful if we could amend the Education Act to include something like food literacy in our schools, encourage our school boards to take students to farms across this province to see what a tremendous way of life it really is and how much it contributes to our province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: This has been a tremendous pleasure, to listen to the ongoing debate on the Local Food Act bill, An Act to enact the Local Food Act—a lot of acting going on there—2013. Well, acting is about what we're getting with this bill. I don't want to get too negative, but this bill in itself does not accomplish a whole lot. But I'll tell you what is accomplishing something, if people actually take it to heart, and that is the debate that's been going on in the House with respect to this bill and the thoughtful and insightful suggestions that are being made by members of this assembly on what we might do to better promote this wonderful industry—and it is an industry, but it's also a vocation, a life, this life of agriculture and farming, one that is so very important to us as a society, not in the numerical way that it used to be in the number of people who actually practise farming, but farming is tremendously productive with technology and machinery and everything that we have today.

I'm going to talk a little bit about what it was like in Renfrew county in the old days, and I'm not talking

about my lifetime. I'm talking about when my families came here from Ireland and Poland back in the 1800s and what it was like farming in Renfrew county. But before I get to that, I want to talk a little bit about our son, Zachary, and Stephanie and their children. They raise their own chickens and their own turkeys. We were there on Saturday having a birthday party for our granddaughter, Lilli, who I'd mentioned last week in the House. She turned one on April 24. But our grandson Wallace is four years old—"Four," as he would say. "How old are you, Wallace?" "Four." He's four today.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Happy birthday, Wallace.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So I've got to say happy birthday to Wallace. Grandpa loves you and can't wait to see you again.

Of course, they raise their own turkeys and chickens—God, they've got hundreds and hundreds.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Free range?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yeah. But, you know, May, Wallace's older sister, when she was just a couple of years old—she wasn't even as tall as those turkeys, and they're big. These domestic turkeys, the ones you raise, they're quite large. She's right in there among those turkeys just like they were her best pets. She had a chicken, one that had no feet. The chicken had no feet, and she used to take that chicken around like a pet and protect it from everything because the chicken was kind of helpless. She'd have it in the house, have the chicken in the house.

So they're learning about the importance—they eat their own meat and they share with some others. One of their friends raises some pigs and they share the bounty, but they eat a lot of wild meat too. They're all hunters as well, so they eat a lot of venison and moose and bear and you name it. If it's crawling, they'll find a way to get it on a plate. They're very good at cooking it too.

Mr. Steve Clark: I've heard about Willi Schmidt.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So anyway—yes, Willi Schmidt. He'll be in Rankin on Friday, cooking up some roast beef. Well, Willi's not running the catering business anymore. He sold it, but he's kept all the good recipes, including those marinated onions that we'll be having on Friday in Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke up in Rankin.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Can I come? I can't wait.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Lisa MacLeod is going to be joining me there, so it's going to be a real humdinger. I hope some of you folks over there can make it.

Let's get back to the old days of farming. I want to talk particularly about Renfrew county. Renfrew county is one of the most beautiful places in the entire world, and I am very blessed to be living there and also to be representing that area. Part of Renfrew county is good farm land, but part of Renfrew county is not conducive—it's a big place, folks. Renfrew county is four times the size of Prince Edward Island. It's a big place, but not all of it is good farmland. In fact, some of it was never really made to be farmed at all. I'll tell you, when you think back about the people who came to that area of Renfrew county—and I'm talking about the western end, Barry's

Bay, Wilno, Killaloe, those areas, up to Eganville and that—man, oh, man, real Canadian Shield country, it was absolute hard labour to be trying to produce food—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back-breaking.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —back-breaking hard labour to produce food on those tracts of land. And if you drive through that country, you see the old stone fences. You see these fences of nothing but boulders and boulders and boulders. Every one of them would have been laid in there by hand, every one of those boulders removed from the land, transported over maybe by a horse and a stone boat over to the property lines, and building stone fences. We can just imagine when those folks came over here—as my friend from Beaches East-York said, we were people of the land then. You had to be able to raise your own food. The first year that you got here to this country, you had to have a crop in the ground. You had to be able to raise some kind of food so that you could support yourself through the year, through the winter, and also be able to build some kind of a rudimentary cabin to be able to have shelter.

Then, of course, life has changed over the years. But I think it is unfortunate that so many young people today, particularly those who are raised in the cities and have never been on a farm, really don't understand where their food comes from. They think it comes from Loblaws or Valu-mart or Metro or some of the food stores. You need food? That's where you go. Well, that may be very well where you go, but that food had to come from somewhere. My friend Peter Shurman is nodding his head.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Sobeys.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sobeys. We're going to get Peter on the farm here one of these days.

Look, I'm not a farmer myself, but I've got the absolute—I can't speak to the depth of the respect I have for them.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My boys back there are saying I know how to spread the fertilizer. Well, you know what? I'm not so bad at that, but I'll tell you, the people who do make that choice and make that commitment to feed us by devoting their lives to ensuring that there's food on our table through their efforts—I take my hat off to them. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude.

I think one thing we want to remind people of and this government—I know they always talk about being friendly to rural Ontario and friendly to farmers. I mean, this food act is a great idea—I shouldn't say great idea. No matter what it is, there's going to be some good in it, and this is a good idea, because it is going to help to promote something that is very important, and that's recognition, understanding and awareness of how important agriculture and the people who make their living in the agricultural business are.

But this act in itself is not going to do anything. It really doesn't compel anybody to do anything other than the minister must write a report about local food and devote a week the Monday before Thanksgiving each year to be proclaimed Local Food Week—no harm. It's

not going to cause anybody any problem at all. But I think what we have to do is remind ourselves: What are we doing to make sure that farming remains sustainable? What are we doing to make sure that farming remains sustainable? What are we doing so that—and I don't say, "The practice of farming;" I say, "The people in farming." We have to ensure that it is sustainable for them, that they are sustainable, that they can make a good living on the farm, providing us with the food that we absolutely need.

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I don't know anybody out there yet that doesn't require food—maybe the Tin Man; you just have to oil him once in a while. But the rest of us require nourishment, require food, and that comes from our farmers across this province.

Yes, we get a significant portion of our food from other sources as well, but I think this Local Food Week may promote us to do much more than we do already about procuring that diet from as near to home as is possible. I know there's all kinds of people in my riding who continuously promote the 100-mile diet, ensuring that we procure as much of our diet as possible from within that 100-mile radius.

So there are some positive things coming out of it. I think the most positive thing that I'm getting is the thoughtful debate that's going on here. The question will remain: Is this government going to become supportive of farmers, or is it going to continue to stand in the way, as it has in so many cases, with their regulations and red tape?

One thing that we've done in our white paper is to propose basically a one-stop shopping window for farmers to deal with all of the regulations and red tape that we put in front of them as government, and that's a positive sign. I hope that we're going to hear something positive from this government in that regard, as opposed to putting up more barriers.

Let's celebrate our farmers and the wonderful work that they do for us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his speech. I thank him for his dedication to the people of the farming community. I thank him for what he had to say here today.

He's absolutely right about the debt and gratitude that we owe to each and every farmer who is out there. He's absolutely right in terms of how history has changed here in Ontario, for a scant few generations ago, back to his own family, who were Polish and Irish immigrants who came here to the land—so much has changed.

I ask, though, that the members start to remember, when making their speeches, that we are here in day 8. Much of what needs to be said has been said. As much as all of us appreciate the farming community and the role that they play within the Ontario economy—as much as we appreciate how much they are central to our being

well fed and to Ontarians being proud and prosperous—the time has come to actually take some action to support them. I do agree with the member that there is not a great deal in this bill. But just as there is not a great deal in the bill other than to proclaim a farming week and for the minister to occasionally write a report, it still behooves us to do that.

I don't know how much will be gained from further speeches, and I ask everyone to temper that thought and to pass this so we can send it to committee and, in the end, make it the law of Ontario. We have many other things, other important issues, that need to be discussed as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am in complete agreement with the honourable member from Beaches–East York: Let's get this bill passed. It's wonderful hearing these stories—we've heard lots of them—but let's get it passed. We've got other work to do in this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Well, hello. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and reference the comments that we got from our honourable member from Renfrew.

You know, there are really good people—good things grow in Ontario; good people grow in Renfrew county as well, because there are a lot of champions out there hailing from Renfrew county that are working so hard to make sure people know that food doesn't just come from their stores.

I say that in referencing Crystal Mackay. Crystal Mackay is the executive director for Farm and Food Care Ontario, and she comes from Beachburg, Ontario, which is in Renfrew county. For her entire life, Crystal has worked so hard to make people appreciate where their food comes from, and now she's at the helm of a very effective provincial organization that is doing just that. I invite people to go to that website, Farm and Food Care Ontario, because there you will see a series of virtual farm tours to see how goat milk is produced, to see how cattle are treated and fed and cared for, to see how chickens are raised and eggs are produced. It's a very, very effective virtual farm tour of a whole variety of species and commodities, and that's where we need to be going when we talk about local food.

As my colleague said, this act to enact the Local Food Act is a lot of window dressing and it doesn't go far enough for what we need today in 2013. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate, because I'm sure my colleagues here will be very well versed to demonstrate why we need something deeper. If this gets to committee, we need some hard talks as to how we're going to support local food in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his conversation on the debate that we're having today.

We do agree in the House that local food is extremely important. We've debated this, as the member from Beaches–East York said, and we've had enough conversation. We're all in agreement that this act is a lot of fluff. Instead of this act taking action to support local farmers, to employ local farmers and to provide local food to the Ontario consumer, this government's act is making plans for a plan.

We know how important it is to have local food production created in Ontario, and that it sustains jobs. This is an industry that has been here from the moment of time because growing food is a part of survival. If we don't have access to local food, then we're not going to have access to food so we can continue to sustain ourselves. It's extremely important that we keep that in mind, but by the same token, we need to pass this bill to committee because we're all in agreement that it is a very important thing to do and that local food is something that has to be sustainable.

We also need to make sure we're promoting the advertising of local food and helping our farmers—not just having a lot of fluff about how great local food is, but having a real plan so that we can keep our farmers in our economy, in a job and creating the local food that we all want to see here in the House and that all our communities want to see in our farmers' markets. Part of that is making it a strong bill so that we can have that support for farmers, so they can continue on with the good work they have been doing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, you have two minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank my colleague from Beaches–East York; the Minister of Health, who didn't speak too long; and the members from Huron–Bruce and London–Fanshawe for their comments as well.

To the member from Huron–Bruce: Thanks for the shout-out to Crystal Mackay. It's always great to hear about the fine agricultural people we have in Renfrew county. I say to the member for Huron–Bruce, maybe she can make it up to the Beachburg Fair one of these days. It's the first big fair in Renfrew county, always around the 20th or the 23rd of July. It's a great fair and it really shows what kind of community spirit there is, and the hard-working spirit of our agricultural people.

I appreciate all the comments that have been made, and I think that there's an opportunity here for us all to renew our commitment to our agricultural people across Ontario. They do such a tremendous job for us. Our products are of the highest quality. They are safe. They are tasty. They are nutritious. We need to spend a lot more time letting the world know just how great our products are, but more importantly, letting each other know not only how good our products are but where they come from. They come from your neighbours. I know that if you live in the city of Toronto, you may not think of that, but your neighbours are not that far away. They're outside of the city of Toronto, and they're producing the kind of quality food that makes us among

the healthiest people in the world here in Ontario and Canada.

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I think the Local Food Week is an opportunity to blow our horn, maybe, champion a few things and put a stamp on a special week of the year. But let's not forget: Our commitment to farmers should be at least as good as their commitment has been to us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to the Local Food Act. I know we've had a lot of debate on this, but it's nice to talk about something as wholesome and that is such an important part of our heritage here in the province. Almost all of our families—many of our families—date back as farmers in different communities and different townships. To me, it's something that's almost family-like.

First of all, I should tell you that my wife, the girl I married, was a dairy farmer's daughter. Even today—

Interjection: She's got the hair.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: She's got the hair, yes.

Even today, we always travel the back roads wherever we go so we can look at all the different farms and what's new in the operations, because once you've been a farmer, you're sort of a farmer for life. You've always got that love and concern for the land.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I should tell you that both of my children have decided in the last year to get into real estate, and they've both bought farms. I'm very proud of them, because they've made deals with neighbouring farmers—they both have full-time jobs—to make sure the hay is put in place and taken off and make sure there are crops put in on a rotating basis.

With my daughter's farm—she's into horses; I think they have four horses now. They're right across the road from a farm where two of my granddaughters train horses all the time. So agriculture has become a very important part of our family right now. I'm looking forward to doing a lot of work out at their farms. I like doing physical work anyhow, and I'm looking forward to helping them both a lot over the next few years.

I also want to say a few things about local food. One of the things I really enjoy—I don't know how many other people in the room do this, but I love going to farmers' markets. It's a great place to meet people. You meet the very sensible, common sense type of people, and they're in there on the weekends, earning a few dollars, whether it's produce or some fruit or maple syrup—that type of thing. It's just fun to go and be part of that. Again, it goes back to our heritage and the kind of people we are. All of my farmers' markets in my riding seem to be doing very, very well. We've got some small ones, and we've got, for example, the Orillia Farmers' Market, a large farmers' market. But there are some challenges they face. Obviously, the Local Food Act—I give credit to the Premier. It's a nice, warm and cozy type of legislation. It doesn't really say an awful lot, except it gets a lot of debate.

One of the things I wanted to put on the record, though, is how can we help farmers more? Calling it a Local Food Act—I hope everyone would want to buy, and would buy, local food, whether it's at the farmers' market or at our produce stands. I know we've got Ego's up our way; we've got Hewitt's in Orillia. These are all people who sell really nutritious, good food. They're well-supported by our communities, and they're particularly well-supported by people who visit our communities, particularly in the summer months when they come to their cottages and love to go to the farmers' markets as well.

Just before lunch, I met with people in my riding, people from Simcoe county, and they're concerned—this is where I think the real concerns are—how good farmland is being just crushed with this Green Energy Act. I don't know how many have seen these solar farms. Whoever came up with the idea that we're only using class 6 and 7 farmland—it is such a misdemeanor to people to actually say. I can show you farms—I don't actually have the exact bushels per acre, but they're some of the best farmland you can imagine, because they've had proper tile drainage, proper fertilizer etc. Now they're covered in solar panels, with no accountability and no accountability to the local municipality. What really drives me crazy is why this House has twice now voted against bills that would give municipalities more power over where those bloody solar panels would go. They are sick. Some day, I think we're going to pay the price for it. We're already paying it with our hydro costs and special rates for people who have put these in. That's what the farmers are telling me. There's land that they could have bought and put into productivity, with wheat or corn or soybeans. They could have done that, and you know what? Right now they're covered in these metal solar panels. Someone, like the Samsungs of the world or the big energy companies, is making a lot of money out of this at the expense of all the people who are trying to, say, use the energy for their factories and they're finding that the energy costs are too high because of this. So, it has been a real mistake.

The same group talked to me about growth. We took the greenbelt, and all we've done is leapfrog it into Simcoe county. I'm going to tell you, it has been a mistake. We've got a place up in the Midhurst area, in Springwater township, where they want to put 22,000 more people in the secondary plan. Originally, the growth plan for Simcoe called for 6,000 people. Now the government has made an amendment that will allow 22,000 people. Guess where the people are going? Not in areas where there may be pine trees or some more rugged area; they're going right on the farmland. The best farmland you can imagine is going to be plowed under for sewers and water and townhouses. I tell you, it's completely irresponsible. The people up in our area, particularly the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, are adamantly opposed to this kind of nonsense. But, you know what? We're stuck with these guys. They've made these laws. They're making these amend-

ments. I have no idea who made the amendment to go ahead and give them 22,000 more people in one little township. It's almost like a favour is being paid to somebody, you know, for something they've done. I don't know. But it's not right, and we have to make changes.

I want to thank, first of all, the Premier for bringing the bill forward. It's a good topic to debate. But I want to pay special attention to some of our former Ministers of Agriculture, people I've worked with here: for example, Bill Stewart, Lorne Henderson, Helen Johns, Ernie Hardeman in the last term, and Noble Villeneuve—Noble Villeneuve was my favourite minister. I met him a number of times at ROMA. He was here before I became elected in 1999. I understand that his daughter, Roxane, is now our candidate up in that area. I've talked to her a few times. She's just like her dad. She's full of energy and enthusiasm and will make a great member when she arrives here at Queen's Park. I'm quite sure she will do excellent work and will be here after the next election.

With that, I've only got two minutes left, but I wanted to say, as we move forward with the Local Food Act, I thought that one thing that was really interesting today was the thought of an amendment by our education critic to actually make sure that this act had input from education. Who needs to be trained more than our young people? Young people from all political stripes and from all different ridings across Ontario should know in their schools about nutritious food, how to buy local food and how to support our economy by buying local food. So I applaud Lisa MacLeod for bringing that amendment forward. I hope that when we get to the committee hearings the government will listen to these kinds of amendments. The government says, "We want to get the bill passed; we want to get it into law." So let's make sure that we look at really, really good amendments at the same time as we move forward.

I also want to thank all my colleagues, particularly in my party, that have come from agricultural backgrounds and agricultural communities. I know that basically it's almost impossible to be an MPP in rural Ontario without being highly connected to fall fairs and all the different associations, whether it's the cattlemen's association, the hog producers, the chicken farmers or the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. We're all connected to those people on a regular basis. It's a group of people that I love to work with.

This year I've been fortunate enough that I've been able to work with another group of people I really enjoy working with, and that's all the people I'm working with to fight the College of Trades—all the tradespeople in Ontario. So I've had kind of a perfect year as far as being able to work with people, because we've been able to work with the people who do hard work and create jobs and create opportunities for people. Of course, the farmers are right in there.

1630

I've only got 20 seconds left, but I did want to say a special thank you to all the farmers in the riding of Simcoe North. In particular, I'm noticing a lot more

young farmers up our way and they're helping on the family farm. Just recently, I know of a young couple who decided they were going to take over their parents beautiful dairy operation up in Tiny township. I was so proud of the whole family because they were worried the young lad may not want to do that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, my time's up and I'll make more comments in my final hit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The member from Simcoe North makes some good comments about the incredible value of agriculture to Ontario's economy and society.

The bill before us is one that is very modest. It is one that effectively talks about planning to make a plan for a plan, and it proclaims a Local Food Week. And that's pretty much it. If we're actually going to do something useful with this bill, I think we need to stop debating it in this chamber. We need to get it to committee and talk about amending it so it actually can have an impact on the agricultural communities, on the farm families, in this province.

This bill reminds me of one that was brought forward by the Liberals a number of years ago, the status of the artist act, which started out quite grandly and ended up being effectively a status of the artist day. Not a bad thing, but a far cry from the ambitious title. Similarly, this bill, the Local Food Act, talks about the need for sustaining Ontario's rural economy, our agricultural economy, about our farm families, but I don't think this plan for a plan, this declaration of a week in recognition, is going to do even a tenth or even a hundredth of what has to be done in Ontario to make sure that this sector gets the recognition it deserves and the resources it needs to come to its full potential.

I appreciate what the member from Simcoe North had to say. I ask that we get on with the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm not going to speak long. Obviously, on the government side, we're very excited, very enthusiastic about Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act. I've had opportunity in the past week or two to speak on this piece of legislation and talk about the incredibly vibrant and diverse agricultural sector that I have in my community, out into Murillo, Kakabeka, Oliver Paipoonge, Conmee, Gillies, O'Connor, Neebing, all of my rural riding—a very active, aggressive and diverse agricultural community.

As a government, we are excited and enthusiastic about the legislation, but we want to get it to committee as soon as we can. As a result of that, I'm going to stand down and not take all the time available to me. It seems that's what we're doing as a government. We're hoping that the members on the opposite side will do that as well and allow us to get this into committee as quickly as possible so it can be passed as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's an absolute pleasure for me to speak in regard to my colleague from Simcoe North. He's a passionate person. I've admired him immensely since I came into this House and how he's out on the hustings talking to people every day of the week, average Ontarians, and hearing their story, listening and bringing that back here.

He knows what he's talking about. His wife's a dairy farmer. His children have bought farms and they have horses on their own property, and I know he's been a stalwart against the Slots at Racetracks Program boondoggle that the Liberals have created in decimating yet another industry.

He talked favourably about farmers' markets, and absolutely they're wonderful things. I have a lot of them in my riding in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and it's a great thing. But you know, he brings up a valid point, that we need to be doing more. He always comes with the question: How do we help? How do we do more in our community to make it viable?

Garfield has travelled across this province in regard to stopping the trades tax on apprenticeship programs. He's been relentless, with 100 communities he's travelled to. In the course of those, he's met a lot of farmers who are bringing those concerns that he's brought here.

He talked about the Green Energy Act and the solar farms. We don't see them producing any food for our great province, and yet they're taking good-quality farmland and they've taken local democracy away from the locals. He talked about the greenbelt leapfrogging, again, decimating and taking out good-quality agricultural land in his riding.

He made a very valid point about former ag minister Noble Villeneuve and his daughter, Roxane, who's coming back because she wants to make it different, like her dad. She knows that there are huge concerns out there in our agricultural communities across this province. I'm proud that she has put her name forward. I think she's going to do a darned good job when she joins this caucus, because she's there like Garfield Dunlop is; she's there for the people. She listens. She wants to bring true, good legislation to this House that's really going to actually result in action, not just a bunch of fanfare and fluff and a 30-second buzzword.

Speaker, it's absolutely my pleasure to stand here and give Garfield Dunlop his kudos that he deserves, because he's always out there working on behalf of his constituents and bringing good legislation to this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Just a reminder to the member: This is the third person that spoke in the last little while, and you're all calling each other by first names and last names. I'd ask you to refrain from that and call the members by their riding.

Mr. Bill Walker: My apologies, Speaker. It's Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The member from Simcoe North raises an interesting point, and I want to build on that. He

talks about the concern about sun farms, or solar farms. What I think is even more of an issue, a bigger issue than the number of acres that are used in solar farms and that could be used for agriculture—I think a bigger issue, and it's a serious issue across all of Ontario, is that though we think of Ontario as having vast, vast amounts of land, there's a very limited amount of land that's actually good enough to grow food on. Much of where our cities are sprawling and our suburbs are sprawling—they're sprawling into that very high-quality land.

Our limited land which is actually good and arable and can be used for farming is being covered by more and more expansion. We'll realize in the not-too-distant future that if we are serious about having local food, we need to have a place to grow that local food. We need to have local farms. If all of the arable land, all the good land that we want to build these farms on, is being developed into homes, residential housing only, and industrial complexes, then we'll run out of that good land.

I think we have to seriously consider the way we build our infrastructure and look at building houses, industry and commercial things that we definitely need, but build them in areas where the land is low-quality. Build them in areas where it's not arable land, not high-quality agricultural land.

All too often, we're seeing the direction or the way cities are expanding and growing is that we are taking land which is great for farming—it turns out that it's also great for building homes, because it's easy to till, it's easy to plow and it's easy to set up in terms of building construction. But that's a very precious commodity, and it's a very limited commodity. I think we really need to reconsider how we expand the province so that we really have space left to grow local food.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Simcoe North, you have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Toronto–Danforth, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Bramalea–Gore–Malton for their comments with respect to my comments on Bill 36.

I will go back a little bit to the Green Energy Act. Basically, I appreciated all the things people said. But I wanted to touch base a little bit on something that was brought up to me today, and I wasn't as informed as I should have been on it. It's this thing with the Green Energy Act and around the solar panels, and apparently even with some of the wind turbines, and that's stray voltage. Apparently, Jason French, from Holstein Ontario, is bringing a report forward and some comments on this.

Here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. They've said that these are only going on scrub farmland, these solar farms, these big FIT programs. That may be fine to people who don't believe, under the Canadian soils inventory—but the reality is that most of that farmland that they're going on across Ontario has been improved. Today, that farmland is qualifying as class 1, 2 or 3, and it's actually,

in most cases, abutting other good farms. So this stray voltage is impacting agriculture production and cattle, the beasts, that are out on different farms. It's a serious, serious problem. I had no idea until a dairy farmer today—I think he has about 500 acres of crops up in the Springwater township of Simcoe county, and it was him who came forward and said, "You have to address this because it's major, and it's having a major impact on our farms."

1640

I hope that the government is listening to some of these concerns. I'm hoping that's the kind of thing under the food act that we can actually address at committee that everybody wants to get to so quickly.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to say a few words. I look forward to getting it to committee.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to join in the debate this afternoon to discuss Bill 36, the Local Food Act. I have to tell you, Speaker, that when I am out at events, this is one government bill that my constituents do ask me about.

In fact, recently, I was at two events back to back, and the issue of the Local Food Act came up. One was a fundraiser for a group called Loaves and Fishes. It provides nutritional meals for families in Brockville. They had a fundraiser called Empty Bowls. The second was the annual Delta Maple Syrup Festival, which has been a tradition in my riding in north Leeds since 1967.

The very first person who approached me that day asked me about our local food charter and the Local Food Act. It didn't take too long into that conversation to really realize that that constituent even knew that the bill didn't provide a lot of detail and really was like a lot of the legislation that we've seen from the government—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: I appreciate that the Minister of Health is responding to me. Actually, Bill 11 was one of those bills that the government said would address the problem, in terms of the debacle at Ornge. But when you spoke to people, like members of the opposition, like the Ombudsman, it was severely lacking the detail and the transparency that people wanted.

I guess, again, sort of the same thing is clear with the Local Food Act. When you read the bill, as I have read it, and you get past sort of the fuzzy mom-and-apple-pie preamble, there's really no meat on the bones. Nothing sums it up better than this line from the bill: "The Minister of Agriculture and Food may establish goals or targets to aspire to in respect of local food." That has to be one of the most wishy-washy statements when it comes to a bill. To use the word "may" really gets the minister off the hook when it comes to setting goals and targets.

There's really no discussion that's been brought forward by the government side on how they expect that those targets are going to be met. They have a few veil words about getting it into committee. We'd really love

to see how we would actually meet these targets, or establish the targets, other than aspiring to them.

I guess it pretty well sums up the state of affairs in the Liberal cabinet these days. Ministers have done such a terrible job in running the province that the only performance measure they can handle is to aspire to get it right. Don't worry if you can't balance a budget, manage the health care system or come up with an energy policy that isn't causing the province to go broke—no, just aspire to do those things.

I should mention, though, that there is one thing this bill does do in that it creates a Local Food Week during the week leading up to Thanksgiving. They didn't even get that right, as the member for Oxford has said in his address. Anyone who has spent any time in rural Ontario knows that, for the past 15 years, the week leading up to Thanksgiving has been Agriculture Week.

While our caucus is going to support this bill, and I'm going to support this bill, there's one thing that I can tell you: There are a number of things that we want to amend in this bill once it gets to committee. The member for Nepean–Carleton talked about the issue of food literacy, and I know the member for Oxford has mentioned, on a number of occasions, this issue of Agriculture Week.

If you want to talk about local food, I think I mentioned earlier the Delta Maple Syrup Festival, but in every corner of my riding of Leeds–Grenville, you'll find farm-fresh meat, eggs, dairy, honey, fruits and vegetables, and just about anything else you can imagine that grows in Ontario. Our farmers' markets have thrived in the past couple of seasons as more and more families actively seek out local products to put on their table.

Earlier this spring, there were about 50 people from a cross-section of community groups who attended the first meeting to discuss a local food charter for Leeds–Grenville and Lanark. The meeting was organized by the Healthy Communities Partnership and EcoPerth, and I'm looking forward to hearing about the next steps in that exciting project.

I also want to mention the groundbreaking Local Flavours, which has been an initiative of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere reserve. If you're planning, Speaker, to visit our corner of Ontario, eastern Ontario—I can't imagine why you wouldn't want to see that beautiful corner of the province. We've got a number of speakers from eastern Ontario today. I want to tell you, you should explore the website www.localflavours.org. You can plan a route to tour local farms, you can meet the farmers whose products are second to none, and you can get everything you need to prepare a gourmet local flavours meal from our area of the province.

There is one local flavour in my riding that I do want to mention, and that's a rather large operation: Burnbrae Farms in Lyn. It's about 10 minutes from my constituency office in Brockville. In fact, for the past 125 years, this local company, operated by the Hudson family, has grown to become one of the leading egg producers in Canada. I attended an Earth Day tree planting and barbecue at the farm. I had a chance to talk to Joe

Hudson and his team and learn more about their award-winning products, but also to see a new structure being built on their property, which I'm told will be Canada's largest egg grading station. Whenever I go to Burnbrae Farms, I have to make the pledge to Joe Hudson—and I was proud to make the pledge—to support supply management. I can't think of a better company than Burnbrae to represent my riding, and I always look for their products when I go to the store or to local facilities.

There's another group that I want to do a shout-out for today, Speaker, and I did previously in a two-minute hit: Wendy's Country Market in Lyndhurst. The owner, Wendy Banks, is really on the cutting edge of our local food movement in Leeds–Grenville, far earlier than when it became trendy, as it is now. She has been in it for the long haul. I can't think of a better resource on local food than Wendy, who has her store and mobile market. Her delivery service now has products from more than 70 different local producers. They really know how to connect farm to fork. Yesterday, Sunday, she had more than 400 people at her farm gate store for their weekly food festival, to meet the musicians, artisans, chefs, bakers and farmers gathered to celebrate local food. In the summer, the number for that weekly food festival swells to a thousand people every weekend, coming through to Wendy's store.

Families are eager to be part of something like the local food movement, and I have a sense that when you're doing that, you really get a chance to see who you're actually dealing with.

There are three things that Wendy wanted me to bring up that are lacking in this. She identified three key things that we need to do. First, you can't let the word "local" get misused, because it takes away from regional promotional efforts. It's great that people want to buy Ontario first, but I think what people in my riding of Leeds–Grenville really want is they want to identify the products from the farmer down the road. You need to protect your regional identity, and I know that people in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere have mentioned that as well. I've said it in the House before. The definition in the act says "Ontario," and I think the expectation from people in my part of the province is that when you look at Ontario food, they want to look at it from a regional perspective. We've identified and put a lot of effort and time—when we talk about local flavours, it's our region of eastern Ontario. Those are the flavours that we want to capture.

The other thing that Wendy mentioned to me is the issue where it says, in terms of regulation, "food produced or harvested in Ontario"—all you have to do is look in the section that says the minister "may" make regulations to limit that definition. Again, we see the word "may" rather than "shall." I really believe—and I know Wendy does—that this is where the Local Food Act has really failed.

1650

The final thing I want to mention on her behalf is reducing red tape. That's the biggest problem that I think anyone in the local food business really sees: the

increasing amount of red tape that's being brought up. She plays by the rules, but she's mentioned the issue of small abattoirs. She's also talked about the challenge for smaller producers to gain access to institutions like hospitals, jails and schools.

Speaker, I could go on. I could actually ask for consent to speak at least—

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

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you again.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Grant Crack: I really admire the passion of the member from Leeds–Grenville. He's really excited about this great Local Food Act that we've been putting forward here.

I'd like to talk about some of the comments the member from Simcoe North made, and, I believe, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, when they were building up previous Ministers of Agriculture in the Harris government. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when the Honourable Noble Villeneuve was a Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—here's a quote from Wikipedia—“his government presided over considerable funding cutbacks in the agriculture department and the elimination of local representatives.” That's 42 OMAFRA offices, one in Alexandria, my hometown. They closed 42 OMAFRA offices and they cut \$164 million out of the agriculture budget—\$164 million. That is shameful.

Stop professing to be the great champions and defenders of agriculture and food in Ontario.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's great to get up and speak to the comments from the member from Leeds–Grenville and the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. I haven't counted how many offices they have reopened—I don't believe any—but he's right about one thing: There's a great tradition in the Villeneuve family. We will be looking forward to continuing that on in the Legislature.

The member talked about some of the local initiatives in this bill and the word “may.” There's a big difference, as I think he pointed out, between the words “may” and “shall.”

We'll be looking forward to getting to committee, because this is the government that really almost shut down farmers' markets. I remember, when I was warden, leading the charge for eastern Ontario. I went out and really, through public opinion, forced them to reverse the legislation that would have killed farmers' markets. Is there anything more local than the farmers' market as far as local food? It really is too bad to see initiatives like that. They're really hurting the farming community.

The education one I've heard before. My neighbour used to entertain some of the kindergarten classes from the local schools. That's gone because it's deemed to be

unsafe to have these children visit farms. Really, this was a farm that had chickens and cows and different types of horses; they had a few hundred deer on the farm. It was kind of a unique farm in eastern Ontario because it looked at so many different aspects of agriculture. Sadly, changes through this government and a lack of initiative have stopped those tours by the children from the local schools. I think it's really missing something.

We aren't seeing the intent. They're a government that maybe talks about some of the cuts that went on, but if they really are going to talk about them, they should have at least tried to put them in again if they thought they were wrong. But when you don't undo something, I guess you agreed with it.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd like to add something to this debate today. In 2005, there was a study that noted that current dietary habits of Waterloo regional residents do not meet the dietary recommendations of the Canadian food guide to healthy eating. Over half, or about 58%, of residents consumed fewer than the daily recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables.

The other part of that study shows that evidence suggests that people are more likely to meet their dietary recommendations when they have ready access to fresh fruit in their grocery stores.

I think we're all in agreement. We've gone over this a little bit now, and I'm happy to continue to debate because that's what democracy is about. So if the party opposite wants to continue talking, I'm happy to do that and to make some valid points as to why local food is so important.

When we're talking about dietary needs, fresh fruits and vegetables certainly are going to be the best source of a balanced and nutritious diet. When you go into a grocery store, you don't want to buy a can of tomatoes; you want to buy those fresh tomatoes.

This act is very important. I'm glad it's here in the House. It needs a lot of work. As we said before, it's a little weak. It's a plan to create a plan. It's a week to recognize Local Food Week, so that's great—to promote it. But we need to take some action, and the way to do that is to lob it over to committee so that we can all work on it and make it a stronger act so we can have support for farmers, to have our local food grown in our cities and our communities. Consumers, as they've done in the past and continue to do, support the farming industry and how important the farming industry is to our society so that we can enjoy the fruits of their labour.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I thank my colleague from Leeds–Grenville for the fact that he tied in a lot of the people he knows in his riding, the farmers' markets and specific farmers, people who have done an amazing job.

I wanted to get back to Noble Villeneuve for a moment because the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—when I first got to know him was through the

eastern Ontario disaster relief plan. You all remember the ice storm?

Interjection: Yes.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: That was a tragedy. Everyone in eastern Ontario will, of course, remember that. He led the attack on that, trying to get us funding. I know that our county—at the time, whatever year it was, I was the head of the planning services department in the county of Simcoe. There was so much tragedy down there. Through a program that Noble Villeneuve was involved in as the Minister of Agriculture, he actually asked other municipalities if they would provide funding. If the municipality provided funding in any other parts of the province, the province would match that. It was a great program.

That's when I realized the sensitivity of the man and how he really got to understand, as a cabinet minister, the value of being a good minister and looking after Ontarians, not only in his area but reaching out to the rest of us in Ontario to help him with that. As a result of that, that's the kind of person his daughter will be—Roxane Villeneuve—when she comes to represent here at Queen's Park. She'll be someone who's passionate. She's a hard-working person and I'm sure the people in the riding she's running in will elect her and she'll be here as a good, solid, hard-working person representing the people of her riding. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Leeds–Grenville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member for London–Fanshawe, the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and also the member for Simcoe North for their comments.

I want to say to the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell that in my riding of Leeds–Grenville I've had the pleasure of knowing three people who have represented our riding: my predecessor, Bob Runciman; when I first was elected mayor of Brockville 30 years ago, Norm Sterling represented the Grenville side of the riding; and, for a period of time, East Grenville, because of redistribution, was represented by Noble Villeneuve.

I have to say to the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell that Noble Villeneuve was one of the most respected members of provincial Parliament in eastern Ontario. Doing your research off of Wikipedia is not the way to deal with this man. This man has stood up for farmers in eastern Ontario and has represented the people of this province and sat in this place and would never—and, I must say as well, your predecessor, Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde, would never have stooped to that type of research and that type of slam for that gentleman.

He was a man of honour, Speaker. I'm pleased to know Noble Villeneuve. Yes, I do; I know his family—his wife and his daughters, including Roxane, who's a wonderful person. But I tell you, the members of this Legislature have stood up for people in eastern Ontario. When I look at people like Noble Villeneuve, I'm proud to know that man, Speaker. I would never, ever use my

time in this House to malign that member or his predecessors because I've served with them, and I think it's very important that we have that type of decorum in this House.

1700

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I stand in my place this afternoon to add my voice to the debate on the government's bill promoting the buying and selling of local food in Ontario, Bill 36, the Local Food Act.

I am generally supportive of this bill, but I am disappointed by how weak the bill actually is. At the end of the day, though, it is better to have this bill than to continue to live in its absence. If this bill passes second reading, amendments can be made in committee to make this bill more effective, and the first amendment I support comes from the member from Nepean–Carleton, our education critic, to teach the importance of local food in our elementary schools.

My comments on this bill will be critical but constructive. Bill 36 fails to live up to expectations. I have three major concerns with this bill:

(1) Input from key stakeholders has been ignored, and so the bill is ineffective.

(2) This bill does not take an incentive approach to helping this important industry, but takes a restrictive approach by mandating requirements to be met by stakeholders.

(3) This bill does not address the real issues that are holding back the local food industry, such as over-regulation and restrictive new laws governing food production in Ontario.

First of all, the producers and consumers have been waiting a long time for the government to come forward with a comprehensive strategy to help and highlight local food. Many stakeholders have been working with the government for years on this issue. Stakeholders such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Holland Marsh Growers' Association and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association have told the government what needs to be in this bill. We now know that much of their effort was futile, because this government didn't take their advice. These organizations, and others like them, are close to the ground on this issue and need to be heard.

Respect for local food producers begins with showing them that government has been listening. Bill 36 falls short on that, and I will expound on that a little later.

The Premier, who is now doing double duty as agriculture minister, has touted the government's action on this file and promised this Local Food Act to be one of the first pieces of legislation her government brings forward this session. Well, I think it was a rush job. This bill is not a comprehensive strategy to support local food. It is a public relations plan. Unfortunately, more often than not this government shows itself to be all talk and no action.

As the bill's preamble states, "Ontario has robust and resilient local food systems: a highly productive agri-

cultural land base, a favourable climate and water supply, efficient transportation and distribution systems, and knowledgeable, innovative farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers and restaurateurs.” It goes on to say that our local food systems’ diversity reflects the diversity of its people. This needs to be celebrated, the bill says.

Well, I submit that we need to do a heck of a lot more than celebrate our favourable attributes as Ontarians. We need to change the way our agriculture industry is treated by government. Instead of pandering and positioning, we need an act we can actually sink our teeth into.

Secondly, this bill fails to give the local food industry incentives. Bill 36 talks about setting targets and meeting goals, putting in metrics to measure success by. This is all well and good, but the message sent to farmers is, “You’re not working hard enough,” and to consumers, “You’re not buying enough.” Also, mandating that all government organizations buy local food is not a reasonable solution, because at least in the short term it will drive up food costs for those government organizations and departments. We simply cannot afford any increases in government overhead at the moment. Instead, we should promote local food to other people who can afford it.

As a start, we should explore the feasibility of offering incentives such as tax breaks for producers and consumers. We could waive the provincial sales tax paid by local food processors. To help make the price of local food competitive, we could waive all sales taxes usually paid by or passed on to the consumer. These are just two examples of providing incentives to making, producing and consuming local food more attractive.

Thirdly, there are some pieces of legislation and regulations that in fact interfere with or discourage the availability of local food to local consumers. In the last 15 years, over 100 small community abattoirs have gone out of business in Ontario. The main reason is the high cost of upgrading facilities that is mandated by the many new regulations that have been forced upon these small businesses. In effect, we have regulated these abattoirs out of business. There is now a shortage of abattoirs across Ontario. This has reduced the availability of local beef, pork, lambs and goats to local consumers, and it has increased the cost of slaughtering several-fold, which is passed on to the local consumer. This increased cost discourages the purchase of local meat by local consumers.

We are so over-regulated right now that the abattoir owner can be charged with a host of crimes, the farmer can be charged with a host of crimes and even the local consumer can be charged with a host of crimes. The crime is trying to sell, process or buy local food.

I have an example in my community, where Major Mark Tijssen was taken to court and charged by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food for the terrible crime of buying a pig from a farmer and taking it home and killing it. That is illegal, according to the Food Safety and Quality Act, and Mark defended himself in court for two years and was fighting it on his constitutional right to be

able to choose the food he wants to eat. MNR, which was taking him to court, or the crown attorney, decided to drop the charges at the last minute. What a waste of taxpayers’ dollars; what a discouragement of local food consumption. That is very, very wrong. That is a bad law, and we need to fix things like that.

More recently, Anthony Scissons was selling lambs to community members. The MNR were on the road with their cameras in black-tinted-window cars, taking pictures of him and his customers, and they’ve charged him with the terrible crime of selling lambs. This kind of thing has to stop. It discourages local food consumption. The government has gone overboard with regulations, and those are two great examples of just what “overboard” means.

I recommend that we review all regulations that pertain to small abattoirs and farmers in the business of producing, processing and selling local meat to local consumers. Regulations should be modified, streamlined or even eliminated with the objective of making local meat more readily available to local consumers and improving the business environment for abattoirs and farmers.

We should encourage and allow local consumers to buy meat animals directly from farmers. There would be a willing seller and a willing buyer. The buyer would inspect the animal and accept it as safe food. The buyer would take the animal or carcass to his home property for processing. This has been the culture and tradition and trade of mankind since agriculture was first practised.

Another area where local food can be and should be promoted is at farmers’ markets, country fairs, church suppers, community suppers and celebrations, and similar events. These local food-centred events are wonderful chances to celebrate local food for farmers, cooks, processors and consumers to meet, talk about and eat Ontario’s delicious foods that we grow. We must again review all regulations with the objective of making local foods at these community events more available. No more pouring of bleach on sandwiches at church suppers by the health unit.

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Local food in Ontario can only flourish if local farmers, small business and small abattoirs can flourish. Small businesses in the local food production chain need our help, and consumers need to be proud of their local food producers, whereas now they’re not sure why local food is not available everywhere.

This bill deserves our support, if only to get it into committee, where we can temper its flaws. I will be voting for this bill.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened with some great intent to my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. He spoke probably the most profoundly of all of the speakers I’ve heard over the last number of days, coming from a very rural community and understanding the travails of many of the farmers and what they have to deal with

daily in terms of maintaining their quality of life and the way that they have done things for generations.

It is difficult sometimes for people from the city, such as myself, to understand bringing home a pig to your farm to kill it and eat it. It's difficult because we wouldn't do that kind of thing, but it wasn't that many years ago that I remember my own grandmother going down to St. Lawrence Market, buying the turkey, bringing it home and doing what she had to do for Thanksgiving dinner. It's something that's not done anymore, and I can understand why people in the farming community who have spent generations doing farming in the way that they were taught by their parents and their grandparents want to hold on to that aspect of their life.

I commend the member for bringing that up, and I am glad that he is supporting the bill, but I would like to go back—having heard that story, I don't think anybody else could tell a better one. I'm saying that we've probably talked enough on this bill. I could be totally wrong. Somebody may come up with something better, but I think that he's probably said one of the best ones for the day. I, personally, have had enough.

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

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for his speech. I would point out to the House that we've had about 17 and a half hours' debate on this bill. Let's bring it to a second reading vote, and send it to committee.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Again, some good information from the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills. He stressed in the development of this proposed legislation the lack of consultation and the lack of citizen participation or involvement of people within the food community and the farm community.

It's unfortunate that this government didn't listen to agriculture groups such as the Christian Farmers. They didn't listen to the National Farmers Union, who in their proposal addressed the need to bring more young people into agriculture. NFU stressed the need to protect the environment through, again, another piece of new legislation—there's an opportunity here to do that—and to ensure that our farms are financially viable. There's no mention of this at all in this particular bill.

Again, if you support local food, you have to support the local farmer, the local grower and the local producer of that particular food. The OFA laid out adoption of market structures to empower farmers in the marketplace—value-added initiatives, co-ops and farmers' markets, for example—and food education. I took agriculture in high school and I taught agriculture in high school, so I benefited immeasurably from that.

We've got to make comment of feeding a pig and selling it to your neighbour down the road. I know many years ago—putting together a barbeque—my neighbour had some hogs; he had about seven or eight. You climb in the pen, and—you've heard that expression, "Squealing like a stuck pig?" Well, it's not true. They squeal

until you cut their throat. Once the deal is done, they're quiet as anything.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It's a pleasure to rise and to speak about this bill, this very good bill. We just want Ontarians to be able to eat local food wherever they are: at home, at school, at restaurants, everywhere.

I know that we've had over 17 and a half hours of debate. I'd like to know if there's anything new that hasn't been said already. I would urge the members to send this bill to committee if there's nothing new to say, so there's a lot of pressure on the next speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I am a farmer, and I used to sell my products at the Carp Farmers' Market. It was one of the most enjoyable times of my life. I happen to like being a salesman, and I've always loved being a farmer. We had beef cattle. I could sell you a roast beef that, you know, you would think you were getting the most wonderful roast beef in the world, and last week I would have been mad as hell at that flea-bitten old cow. I learned that from my father. He could take the nastiest old cow in the world, and by the time the guy came to buy it, he'd dress it up like she was just like the Queen of England. Of course, it was always worth more.

Food, I think, is an invaluable thing. When you can buy food directly from the farmer, there's great value there, so we should never complain about the price of food. I thoroughly enjoyed dealing directly with consumers, giving them advice on what good food was, where it came from, how we cared for the animals, how we fed them, how we kept them healthy. People understood that farmers genuinely cared for their animals and that if they weren't well cared for and healthy, they wouldn't have been good, healthy food. So everything goes together. Good management is being a humane caretaker of your animals—properly fed, properly housed; you look out for their health—and all of those good things. In the end, we get wonderful food to deliver right to the consumer.

I remember, at the Carp Farmers' Market, one of the greatest events I had was one of the first times I had actually had anything to do with politicians. We had this feature day and it was Beef Day, so we decided we'd have a cow-chip-throwing contest. Of course, the guests of honour who threw the cow chips were the politicians, so I used to have great fun at the expense of politicians. Of course, invariably, the highest-ranking politician, who happened to be the mayor of Ottawa, Jackie Holzman, won. I've got to hand it to her: She was a real man, because she turned down the gloves. She just grabbed the chip and threw it.

It was a wonderful experience. Buying food from farmers and selling it to consumers is a wonderful experience. Food is fun and it's enjoyable, and it's a wonderful country we have here that we can do that.

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

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's a great honour and privilege to stand in this chamber, always. Of course, we're talking about Bill 36 here this afternoon.

I've listened with some, obviously, interest in the matter because, being a farmer myself, food production is always in the forefront of my thoughts and my constituents', from the great riding of Northumberland–Quinte West, where we have fantastic beef, dairy, and of course, let's not forget our grain production there as well.

I do, obviously, have some major concerns with this bill—a flawed bill, if you will—for a couple of reasons. The government, I think, is completely out of touch with rural Ontario. This just is one more example of being out of touch on what rural Ontario is and represents. A bill on buying local food is not going to be sufficient to sustain the rural economy.

I mean, this is a government who actually destroyed the horse racing industry not too long ago—60,000 people out of work, potentially. These people are not asking for a handout. They're hard-working, tax-paying citizens of this great province, and yet this government thinks that by introducing Bill 36, all is well in rural Ontario.

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I'm here to tell you that it's not all well here in rural Ontario. It's very disconcerting for me on a number of points when it comes to education; we'll use as an example. As a former high school teacher, we always impressed upon our students to go into various trades and skills and go off to college or university and be the best that they can be, and hopefully get a job once they come out of college, university or apprenticeship programs. But one of the things that was never actually stressed was the opportunities that were there when it comes to the agricultural sector, whether it's actually being a farmer themselves or being a part of an industry that is behind the scenes of the actual farmers and the growers and the producers in the manufacturing sector, whether it's canning, processing etc. That is where I think this government has failed: in educating young people in the opportunities in the agriculture sector that are there.

It's been said here in the chamber this afternoon that if you're going to support local food, you have to support the local farmer. Unfortunately, in my riding, the average age of a local farmer is 54 years old. So 54: What kind of opportunities does that mean there are for young people to reinvest, purchase the family farm, and continue the production, whether it's beef, dairy, poultry or grains? There is no incentive. And as we lose farmers, we're losing that local feel, we're losing that opportunity to buy local produce.

If we don't get to the root of the matter, which is ensuring that young people have a vested interest in taking over the family farms, then it's all for naught. We can bring legislation until the cows come home.

Mr. Bill Walker: Or the horses.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Or the horses. But it's not going to address the immediate concerns or the future concerns of food production here in the province of Ontario. That's where I have some major concerns.

I was reading an article the other day saying that generational farms are more productive than the big agribusiness that we've become. Even though the size of family farms and agribusiness have grown dramatically in size—and that's important—it's also important that the young people on those farms and running those agribusinesses have the opportunities. I don't see it in this bill, in particular.

Let's not forget that today's modern farmers are very high-skilled and have a very strong knowledge base profession. We tend to sometimes forget that, Mr. Speaker, especially in the urban centres, because we're disconnected. That's not a jab towards my urban brethren and sisters, it's just the fact of the matter that there is that disconnect. We need to do a better job of reconnecting urban and rural Ontario together and understanding each other to move forward and work collaboratively so that we can actually build this province again.

I think our caucus, the PC Party, has some great things. The member from Oxford, Mr. Hardeman, has done a fantastic job on reaching out, and Mr. Pettapiece, my seatmate from Perth–Wellington. They've done very strong and great things reaching out to the agricultural communities here in the province of Ontario. We put forward our white paper which has outlined some very great ideas that have actually been supported by rural Ontario. You know, I think that we really need to look at that.

I think of individuals back home. When I talk to Scott Honey—I grew up with Scott in the great town of Warkworth. It's small but mighty: Both the MPP and the MP come from Warkworth, population 500. I don't know if it's the water or—

Mr. Bill Walker: It's the work ethic.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's the work ethic from Warkworth. I think you're right. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is right. It's the work ethic from Warkworth.

When I think of Scott Honey, who does a lot of custom work for me now because of a lack of time to manage my own farm, planting the crops and so forth—when I talk to him and I talk to other farmers, there's a lot of red tape there.

My esteemed colleague over here from Carleton–Mississippi Mills made a very good point, that the local abattoirs are having a really tough time with red tape. I think of Mr. Hayden Taylor, just down the road from me, who has his small abattoir. Again, he's doing a service to produce local beef and poultry and items that can go onto our dinner tables at night.

I think of Mr. Dave DeNure, who is the proprietor of Hoards Station, with the sales barn there. He has a couple of major concerns, one obviously around red tape. He called me up a few weeks ago and we were talking. There was some issue around Mennonites selling some farm-fresh eggs at the sale barn. An inspector came around and asked if this was locally produced, like at the sales barn. Dave said, "Well, no. We let various vendors come, like a farmers' market, and sell their products,

whether it's a chicken or a rabbit." They weren't allowed to sell their fresh eggs. But if Mr. DeNure had had laying hens on site, then those farm-fresh eggs would have been allowed as his right to sell to the general public. So there are some issues there. Also, the taxes on the sales barn and the red tape—it's endless here with this government.

I'll end with this. Where I also have grave concerns with Bill 36 is that Mr. Bert Johnson, a fine member who served with distinction his riding, brought in Agriculture Week. For the last 15 years, the week leading into Thanksgiving has been celebrated not just for food and produce that are produced by farmers and agri-business here in the province of Ontario, but for the hard work behind the scenes that actually goes into everything. So for the last 15 years we've had this, and I think it's a great disservice and dishonour to Mr. Bert Johnson for this government to step in and try to claim that they are the saviours of agriculture.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My congratulations to the member for Northumberland—Quinte West for his comments on this bill.

If we're actually going to preserve farmland in Ontario, if we're actually going to preserve our agricultural economy, then what we need more than anything else is action on sprawl. Farmers need support for their products. We need to have local purchasing, but we have to make sure that we don't continue to have this endless expansion of cities like Toronto and Ottawa and Kingston into the good farmland that exists around them.

This bill, I think, will be seen by most people as inoffensive. It really sets things up to plan for a future plan. It is meant to recognize local food in a week that's so designated. But, Speaker, as you are well aware, that is far from what Ontario's farmers and agricultural communities need. They need their land protected so it doesn't get paved over, so it doesn't have subdivisions built on it. It needs to be preserved for the long run. That's something that this government needs to be bringing as a far more substantial piece of agricultural legislation.

As I've said before, this bill needs to get out of this chamber and into committee, where it can be amended and made far more useful.

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

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Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to congratulate the member from Northumberland—Quinte West for his wonderful 10 minutes of building themselves up while tearing this government down.

Let me just stress one of his points that I actually agree with. Today's modern farmers are highly skilled; he did say that. Technology has changed over the years. I can remember back in 2003, under the previous government, when we experienced what we would call either a blackout or a brownout right across the province of Ontario. Why was that? It was because of a lack of in-

vestment in the electrical system across the province. That had a devastating effect on the farmers in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Farmers were a whole week plus without electricity. So don't pretend to care about rural Ontario if you're not prepared to invest in the electrical infrastructure like our government has done.

What the people of this province want—the stakeholders want us to move forward, this House to move forward with the Local Food Act. It is the Local Food Act.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order.

Mr. Jim McDonell: That issue with the brownout originated in the States. It had nothing to do with the power system of Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I don't find that that's a point of order; it's an interesting point of information.

I'll return to the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Speaker. What I can say is, the people, the stakeholders want this act to move to committee. They're filibustering; they're delaying it. They're putting up 10-minute speakers. The third party is compromising a little bit here. They want to work with us to take it to committee.

Stop wasting time in this House and let's deal with the legislation. Send it to committee. Do everybody a favour. Stop looking after yourselves.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to comment on the speech from the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. I certainly found it interesting, the rewriting of history by the member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

I would like to comment on the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. He made some good points about abattoirs disappearing across the province. That's something I've heard when I speak with farmers in Parry Sound—Muskoka, about the difficulty and the travel distances, and how that really works against local food production. So I certainly agree with them there. They talk about the rules and the cost of the rules that make it prohibitive to stay in business. If we want to have local meat production, we need to address that problem.

This bill, Bill 36, is really more about PR than anything else. It establishes Local Food Week. It may establish targets to aspire to; it may require the minister to prepare a report about local food every three years. That's about it.

I am happy to say that in Parry Sound—Muskoka, there is quite a bit of local food produced, and, I'd say, a growing movement to make people aware of it. We have Savour Muskoka. I attended an event at Brooklands Farms, Ken and Katya Riley's place, not long ago. They were in the middle of the maple syrup harvest. They also have berries, and they have asparagus and many other

things growing there. There's the Muskoka Meats store, which has a 100-mile policy—everything has to be within 100 miles—and they're really promoting local foods. Of course, we have about 14 fall fairs around Parry Sound–Muskoka that help urban visitors to the area to really understand where their food comes from, to help promote local food. So Parry Sound–Muskoka does have a strong history of rural agriculture.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: It is a privilege to comment on the statement made by the member from Northumberland–Quinte West. I hadn't quite realized that he was from Warkworth—a nice little town.

As I listened to him, he made all the right statements. He talked about us needing to help farmers. He talked about the weakness of this bill. He talked about having the bill go to committee, where it could be made into something that would actually help the farming community. I am not sure, in this bill, what it's going to do. I've made statements about my love of the farmers of the community, of the food that we eat and all those things, but this bill contains a week that's set aside for farmers, which is already Agriculture Week. It sets aside that the minister may prepare a statement every year or so.

I think we have to do far more for the farming community than what is contained within the body of the bill. I am convinced that the only way we can actually help the farming community, help all of those people who feed cities, is to send it to committee and change the bill, and I hope the honourable member, in his two-minute reply, will tell us what changes he wants to make to make sure that the bill actually does something.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West now has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I want to thank the members from Toronto–Danforth, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Parry Sound–Muskoka and Beaches–East York for their comments.

I agree with the member from Toronto–Danforth in the sense that another issue that obviously is of concern of mine is urban sprawl and the development of grade 1 soil, great farmland and other farmlands that essentially eat away, if you will, at our future potential of growing food items.

Mr. Speaker, that's a part of what I would like to see in Bill 36: something that would address that concern. But more importantly, it's been brought out earlier in the discussion on this bill about the lack of any real intent in this bill. If the government was actually concerned with local food production and agriculture in rural Ontario, they would have actually put in place a bill with some substance. We're just drinking water over here in this bill. There's no substance to it at all, and so we would like to see what the government has.

But I believe that this government is out of fresh ideas, out of fresh produce, out of fresh products that they can

bring forward. I would say that this is the reason why they're bringing forward legislation that actually has no substance. It's not just Bill 36 we're witnessing here. There are other bills that this government has brought forward that have nothing to do. It's window dressing.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It is my privilege to rise today to speak to Bill 36, the Local Food Act. With so many Ontarians struggling to put food on the table, I really think it's a good idea that we've having this discussion right here in this House right now.

I would call it a debate, but it's kind of hard to debate a bill with such little substance. It seems to have been hurried along so that this government can have a reason to put on radio commercials or hold press conferences or even have photo ops. I saw an article that suggested that instead of October, May would be an appropriate month to select for Local Food Week since “may” and not “shall” seems to be the theme of this bill.

I quote from the bill: “The minister may, to further the purposes of this act, establish goals or targets to aspire to in respect of local food.” What goals? What targets? Is there any criteria here? The bill may get results; it may not. Until more substance is added to it, we can't be certain for sure. It is possible to address this topic and include actual goals.

In 2010, the region of Halton enacted a local food procurement policy for their cafeteria, and the program is being met with success. I'm sure that the cafeteria is serving those great apples from the region that the member from Halton knows oh so well.

If you want to look at somebody who understands Ontario farmers, look at PC agriculture and food critic, Ernie Hardeman. He understands that to talk about local food, you cannot ignore agriculture. You must consider each step of the way from field to fork. The member for Oxford has done a remarkable job for us as our critic in this file. This comes as no surprise considering he's a former agricultural minister, back when that position wasn't simply a political prop.

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Last summer, he championed the PC Party's agricultural survey to ask farmers what issues they encountered day to day. They gave us great feedback that we incorporated into our Respect for Rural Ontario white paper. We heard from farmers who were having trouble paying their hydro bills or keeping up with paperwork due to increased levels of red tape, farmers dealing with higher taxes, and programs that were too complicated to get benefit from.

Their issues don't stop there. Most recently, I spent some time with local farmers at a round table getting to know their issues. One of the folks I spoke to was Jacques Tetreault. Jacques is president of the Chatham–Kent Christian farmers' association. During our brief chat, I asked him what government-related issues he was having. Without hesitation, Jacques mentioned the burden that the recent tractor tire fee increases have

placed on—you guessed it, Speaker—farmers. He had just gotten back from Cottingham Tire, in the great little town of Tilbury, Ontario, and he told me that the farmers there, and even the establishment itself, were shocked by the sudden fee increase.

As the PC Party has said all along, to have local food, you need local farmers. The issue of tire fees has received much attention thanks to the hard work done by our member from Kitchener–Conestoga, and it is a concern that is certainly resonating in my great riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex.

The PC Party thinks there is a better way. To promote local food, we should try to make it easier for food to get from the farm to your plate. Food terminals reduce the distance that food has to travel in order to get to communities, yet there's only one in the province, which leads me to ask: Why aren't there more of them in Ontario? I know my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, as well as southwestern Ontario as a whole, would be greatly benefited by adding a food terminal in the region. We've also called for a comprehensive Ontario food act that would lead by example in supporting local food by increasing the amount of Ontario-grown food purchased by the broader public sector.

How can we call this an act? It would be like calling a teaser trailer a movie. Yes, it's something interesting, but it's only a glimpse of the finished product that will be released somewhere down the road. The bill essentially says that the Liberal government supports local food, which is wonderful, but it's not a bill.

Another issue that we as a party have with this bill is that it would effectively do away with Ontario Agriculture Week. Somebody at the Ministry of Agriculture must have forgotten to look at the calendar, because the new Local Food Week falls directly on Agriculture Week. In light of the fact that many Ontarians do not know where their food comes from and are not familiar with the farming processes, doing away with this important week could have major ramifications.

The agriculture and food sector is one that is near and dear to me as a lifelong resident of Chatham, and one that is the backbone of my riding. Here are some very particularly interesting agricultural facts about the magnificent riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex; here's a little food for thought.

Did you know, Speaker, that there are 2,196 farms in Chatham–Kent, which accounts for 3.8% of Ontario's total farms? Leamington, which is in Essex but in my riding, is known as the greenhouse capital of North America, with an astonishing 1,500 acres under cover in that town. In addition to these farms, greenhouses in Chatham–Kent now account for 3.2% of Ontario's total greenhouse area.

One of note is Cedarline Greenhouses, which recently partnered with GreenField Ethanol to use surplus heat and carbon dioxide to save about 40% on heating costs.

Chatham–Kent is the number one producer of tomatoes, seed corn and pumpkins in all of Canada. We're the number one producer of sugar beets, green

peas, broccoli, lavender, cauliflower and quail in all of Ontario. Why, Speaker, did you know that we even grow 2.5-megawatt turbines? Oh, wait, that's not agriculture—but then again, they are built on farmland. They've inundated the region, populated rich, fertile soil. They take up rich, fertile soil, some of the richest, most fertile soil in all of Canada. So turbines—I know, Speaker: Although you can't eat them, they will drive up your energy costs to a point where maybe many will not be able to put good, locally grown food on the table.

Food production is also important to my riding. Heinz has a plant in Leamington that alone employs 800 full-time employees, with another 200 seasonal employees. That's a source of 1,000 jobs in a town of under 30,000 people.

One of my goals prior to becoming an elected official was, and still is, to bring food processing back to my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex. We've lost Libby's, Campbell's Soup, Hunt Wesson and the jobs that went along with them. Just last summer, I took a contingent of people from my riding to view the Institute of Food Processing Technology in Cambridge. My team left motivated and inspired and shared my vision for the great riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex. What better place to go to appreciate all aspects of good, fresh, local food?

To truly support local food, you must support the farmers and food producers of this province. So far, all we've heard from the new government is the same old rhetoric we've been hearing for 10 years now. The more things change, the more they really do stay the same.

I have a saying, Speaker, which I think is very applicable here: If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got. The definition of insanity is continuing to do what you've always done but expecting different results. Speaker, this bill is insane. What does it really do?

At a time when we should be celebrating farmers, we find that they are instead being burdened by increasing hydro rates and a growing number of regulations that are making it more difficult for farmers to put food on their own tables and on the tables of all Ontarians. I value the opportunity to promote local food and engage in a discussion about the challenges that the agriculture and food industries are facing in this province.

This bill is an empty plate. Though some hard work in committee is needed, let's add some beef from the Buis farms in Chatham, and potatoes and some fresh Ontario vegetables, and while we're at it, let's add some delicious Lake Erie perch from Erieau to all of this mixture.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to join the debate, and thank you to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex for his remarks.

He mentioned something that was kind of—well, very important. He said that a lot of the food processing plants in his area are no longer operational and they've moved out of Ontario. That's a very good point. We can tie that in to local food. Why not encourage the businesses that

are already here in Ontario to buy local food for processing?

One of the things that New Democrats have said should be in this bill is a Buy Ontario policy, so that government institutions buy local, food processors buy local, grocery stores buy local. That way, we can promote the economy and make sure that our food processors don't leave—and create jobs. Having a Buy Ontario policy is one of the ways New Democrats feel that we can support our farmers and grow our economy and grow our jobs.

We look forward, when it does go to committee—and it sounds like the members opposite also want this bill to go to committee. We would like to see that happen so that we can give our input with regard to supporting our local food markets and our farmers, and making sure that the food we grow gets into processing plants so that our processing plants can remain in Ontario and we can all benefit from fresh fruit and vegetables grown in Ontario and on our tables, once the food processors get them.

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

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we've had around 18 hours of debate. Let's send this bill to committee.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to stand and share remarks on the astute comments made by the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. This is our right; it's our responsibility to take our time to make sure that we're on record stating the facts and making sure that when this goes to committee, people are dealing with the things that need to be dealt with. I look forward to addressing that in more detail when I start my debate.

1750

Going back to the astute comments from the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, two things really struck a chord with me. First things first: He talked about the ridiculousness behind replacing agri-food week with Local Food Week, which has been proposed in Bill 36. Bert Johnson from Perth has been a champion throughout his entire career, and he started this, as was mentioned, 15 years ago.

Do you know, in my past life I was general manager of the Ontario Dairy Goat Co-operative? Marketing dollars are very, very tight, because you try to pass as many dollars back to the farmer as possible, and when you're going to make people choose—commodity organizations choose, do we go full hog—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: —thank you very much—and promote agri-food week or the local food? You know what? There are not enough dollars to go around. It's going to be Agriculture Week because that's the only essence that connects food production with the farmer. We have to always tie the farmer in.

The other thing I want to touch on is the comment that you made with regard to the regional food terminals. Nothing is more exciting than being at the food terminal

first thing in the morning. How many people have been at the food terminal? Not many hands are going up. With that said, I've been there with many teachers and with the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program. We need regional terminals to make sure that local essence is felt across this province.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a privilege to have heard the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex as he talked about his local community. I often have an opportunity to visit many parts: Leamington, some of the wine areas down in that part of the country. To see the local farmers, the produce and all of the greenhouses—the amazing thing is the row after row after row of greenhouses in and around the Leamington area, with the capital sign, of course, that says “The Tomato Capital of Canada.”

He's right, too, I think, when he talks about people in the area being upset because the thing that they're seeing grow the most is the giant wind mills. I'm not sure whether they're fertilized or whether they're watered or what makes them grow so tall or so fast or so many of them, but quite frankly I can understand the frustration of some of the locals down there who have to look at that and have to look at the kind of farmland that is and was there being changed irrevocably, I would think, in many cases, with the sprouting of those mills.

He talked about the—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: You should have voted for my bill.

Mr. Michael Prue: I didn't vote against it.

He talked about agricultural week versus Local Food Week, and I think the point is well made there as well, that you cannot confuse the two. People already in this province have come to accept agricultural week. It is already dedicated to farmers, to farming communities, to the growth of produce. This will only cloud the waters, and he's correct in that. If the government is serious, they should choose another week; I would agree with him on that. I commend him for what he had to say, and I'm looking forward to my next trip to Chatham–Kent–Essex.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now return to the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I would like to, again, thank the members from London–Fanshawe, Huron–Bruce and Beaches–East York, and I would be reluctant if I didn't mention Kitchener Centre, but he just wanted to be on the record to let us know that we've had 18 hours of debate on this so far. It must be painful. However, it's not painful to the farmers in our community, because you know, to the House, what I do have to say is that—

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Oh, now they're getting a little riled up, but that's all right.

What I do have to say is that I was part of a round table with our deputy agriculture critic, Randy Pettapiece, the member from Perth–Wellington. In that round table discussion, we had about 40 farmers. We had con-

gregated on a chilly day inside a barn, and we wanted to hear what some of their pet peeves were, what some of their issues and challenges were with regard to trying to provide food for Ontarians and to buy local.

You know, the saying “farmers feed cities” is so very, very true. Unfortunately, the people who live in the urban centres—some of them maybe never even have seen a farm before—don’t understand what’s involved.

Of course, these farmers are really upset about the amount of red tape that has been going on. I’ve spoken with a farmer down in our area who had an abattoir and was told, after a food inspector had come in, that he had to spend somewhere close to \$75,000 to upgrade everything and to get it so that he could still remain active in his business. He did all of that, and then they came back with different rules again and he had to spend another \$35,000.

Well, there’s so much red tape here, they’re making business almost prohibitive, and of course, they’re attacking the farmers. If you attack the farmers, we don’t have the food. So I think it’s very, very important, again, that this bill will go into committee. We will support it, but it needs a lot more meat and potatoes.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I’m very pleased to join the debate here this afternoon on Bill 36. So much needs to be said and be put on record so that the facts can be dealt with when we go into committee with this particular act, because this bill is very, very shallow, and if it is going to be enacted into law, there needs to be a lot of help given to it.

First things first: I have to let people know that I’m proud to say I grew up on a farm. It was a beef feedlot, cash-crop operation. I showed my first purebred 4-H calf when I was at the age of 11, carrying on the tradition of my grandfather Thompson and my dad. I have a brother who is an OPP by trade and a farmer by heart. Together with his wife, they raise cattle, sheep and goats for meat. My in-laws, my three sisters-in-law, are all married to very proud Holstein producers, and they work very, very hard alongside their husbands. And my husband and I have a purebred Boer goat operation. I’m really glad to say that Deidra is home from school, and she’s going to be able to help out with kidding while I’m here in Toronto.

I mentioned Deidra, and she’s home from school. This fall she heads off for one last year; she’s heading to Ottawa. She just attended Brock University, and she’ll be graduating from that on June 14. She’s heading to teachers’ college, and we’re very proud of her. Her focus: intermediate/senior biology and mathematics. I can tell you that agriculture will be taught in her classrooms, because it’s very, very important to make sure that food literacy is carried on in a proper context.

That’s the problem here with this particular bill: The context has been lost. Suggesting another week of celebration of local food, when we already have a very viable and relevant week that we have to celebrate because of Bert Johnson—it just doesn’t make any sense whatsoever.

The whole concept behind what this act has suggested needs to be reviewed, and that’s why I’m going to take some time and talk to some very specific things. On April 9, the Minister of Agriculture and Food first introduced this bill, and she said at that time that this bill is “about finding ways of raising people’s consciousness about accessing that great Ontario food.”

Well, Speaker, I feel we need to continue the debate on this particular bill, because we have to help raise the consciousness and awareness of the Minister of Agriculture and Food’s own file. She’s missing so many points. We need to fill her in on a few things, so I’m going to continue on with some of the comments that were made.

She goes on, in her initial debate, to talk about celebrating local food by proclaiming a Local Food Week. We’ve talked a lot about that. We don’t need redundancy. People’s dollars are hard to come by, and the reality is that Agriculture Week is perfect, leading into Thanksgiving, where we celebrate the people who produce our food here in Ontario.

Thirdly, how do we best increase demand for and access to local food from across the province? I have the answer to that, Minister, and that is less regulation. You know, I thought it was very fitting. Today alone I received two emails and I had one phone call conversation that spoke to the need for less regulation, more research, better support for farmers and a look at how to better manage the cost of production.

I want to share a couple of comments from Ritzema Dairy Ltd. I want to share this. This is about managing the cost of production. This concerned farmer wrote to me:

“It’s 5 to 1 on a Monday morning,” and she was worried. She worries about the Varna Wind project that’s going to be ruining her countryside, but she also worries about running her “milk business while enduring skyrocketing electricity costs, which ultimately come back to each and every consumer of milk in this province.”

There’s going to be a thread that ties all of this together. So much regulation over the last decade has caused the cost of production to go up, and we have to learn how to better manage that. I look forward to continuing this debate at my next opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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