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Tuesday 30 April 2013

Mardi 30 avril 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SKIN CANCER PREVENTION
ACT (TANNING BEDS), 2013
LOI DE 2013 SUR LA PRÉVENTION
DU CANCER DE LA PEAU
(LITS DE BRONZAGE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 17, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to regulate the selling and marketing of tanning services and ultraviolet light treatments /
Projet de loi 30, Loi visant à réglementer la vente et la commercialisation de services de bronzage et de traitements par rayonnement ultraviolet.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I start my one hour lead, I would like to introduce a few people who have joined us this morning in the gallery. I'm talking about Nicole McInerney—I did better with her name this time—Kelly Gorman and Joanne Di Nardo. All three of those women have been coming to Queen's Park. They work for the Ontario branch of the Canadian Cancer Society and they really, really want this bill to move forward.

Basically, the bill that we're talking about today will do a few things. The first thing that it will do, and it's the thing that the bill is best known for, is that it will ban young people—that is, 18 and under—from gaining access to tanning beds and tanning salons. Adults will continue to have free access, but anyone 18 and under won't have access, which means that when you go to access a tanning booth, a tanning bed or a tanning salon, they will ask you for your ID—very much similar to what we do for cigarettes or alcohol etc.

It will also ban selling of advertising for tanning services to people under the age of 18. So right now, if you go onto the Internet, if you go on web pages, if you go on Facebook, if you go into graduation books—graduation is coming, Mr. Speaker, so kids are getting together, putting together books from their years in high school. They sell advertising so that they can put the graduation books together. Well, this new bill, when passed, will ban

the practice: You will not be allowed to promote and advertise the use of tanning beds directly to youth, to people under 18.

It will also make it mandatory for everyone who intends to sell tanning services to tell the public health unit. The public health unit will now have a registry of where all of those tanning beds and tanning booths are. Because right now, Mr. Speaker, some are pretty easy; if it says Miami Sun, you have a pretty good idea they're selling tanning services. But for some of them, frankly we have no idea that they are doing this. You can go to a gym—I'll name GoodLife, which is in my building right now and has this great deal on. For a minimum amount of money you can tan all you want. Sometimes the tanning beds are at the back of a gym. Or basically we just don't know where they are. So if you own the equipment, that's fine, it's yours; you do as you see fit. But if you use the equipment in a business, that is, if you derive money from it, you will have to call the health unit, and the health unit will now have a registry of everywhere we have tanning beds. You would be surprised; there are a lot of them out there, not only in beauty salons and hair salons but also in, as I say, health and fitness types of places.

The bill will create a system of enforcement so that not only will the health unit keep the registry—you will have to register with the health unit—but there will also be a system of enforcement, so that if you don't check for ID, if you do provide tanning services to young people, then you will have a penalty fee. And some of those are rather substantive.

The bill also may create exceptions for medical reasons. Although, after having spoken with more dermatologists than I knew we had in Ontario—we have quite a few; I have realized that—none of them could ever see a reason why they would send someone to a tanning salon. So it could very well be this is a moot point, but we left it in the bill just in case there is somebody that we haven't talked to.

As you know, this is a bill whose time had come. Basically, way back in 2008, the former member from London-Fanshawe—not the present member sitting beside me but the former member—introduced almost the identical bill. In 2008, he brought it for second reading. Unfortunately, it died on the order paper. He and I re-introduced it as a joint bill, that is, co-sponsored between—he was a member of the Liberals—the Liberal Party and ourselves. We reintroduced it as a joint bill with the idea of really showing that this was not a political issue, that this was a basic health promotion issue that

we were putting forward. It sort of makes sense to have it as a co-sponsored bill, which we did. Here again, the goodwill of 2010 between two parties died on the order paper.

I brought it back in 2012—we're getting closer and closer—and by that time it had received tremendous support. A lot of the groundwork had been done. Whereas in 2008 and in 2010 there was still quite a bit of pushback from the industry, by the time 2012 had come, things had changed dramatically.

First of all, we had the association of Ontario medical students. They did a fantastic job reaching out to university students and really educating them as to the danger of using tanning beds. Madam Speaker, there is no such thing as a tanned skin; a tanned skin is a damaged skin. There is no safe use of tanning beds. The glamour industry is way more powerful than any one of us in this room. When they put a message out, oh, they know how to target their audience and how to be heard. They had all of those false pretensions about the goodness of tanning beds: "Oh, it will help you with your vitamin D deficiencies." It did everything but the dishes. None of that is true. There is nothing good that comes out of using tanning beds. A tanned skin is a damaged skin, full stop.

0910

The Ontario association of medical students had gone through universities and got the message out to all of the younger people. There was a very nice postcard campaign that I'm not supposed to show, but I will read. The postcard campaign was called "No tan is worth dying for!" It urged the government of Ontario to enact legislation that bans the use of artificial tanning equipment by youth under the age of 18. It was, "Show your support, sign a postcard," and it was by the prevention and screening network of the cancer society. This particular one came from around my riding. I want to thank Dr. Sutcliffe from the Sudbury and District Health Unit, who put together a youth group that went out and did education in high schools, where a lot of young women, mainly, make the decision to use tanning beds for the first time. What the postcard asked for was quite simple: "I support the Canadian Cancer Society's call to action for the government of Ontario to:

—"ban the use of artificial tanning equipment by youth under the age of 18;

—"prohibit the marketing of artificial tanning targeting youth;

—"develop and maintain a registry of artificial tanning equipment in Ontario;

—"ensure all staff operating artificial tanning equipment are trained on operation, procedures, maintenance, and how to identify people at greater risk of developing cancer, particularly those with type 1;"—that is, people with very, very fair skin, sometime with freckles;

—"require that signage be placed in clear view of each bed, clearly outlining the health risks of artificial tanning."

I forgot to say in my opening statement that this is also something that is contained in the bill.

The postcard went on with a little "Did you know?" box. The "Did you know?" said, "Exposure to ultraviolet radiation, such as that emitted from artificial tanning equipment, during childhood and adolescence can increase a person's risk of getting skin cancer both now and later in life.

"Melanoma is the second most common form of cancer in young Ontarians aged 15-34." Those were rather powerful words. Those postcard campaigns were done—there was a petition that was basically identical to what the postcard campaign had said, that went throughout Ontario.

Then came the cancer society. The Ontario cancer society in 2012 held a breakfast here at Queen's Park, in our dining room. They had dozens and dozens of very, very good and dedicated volunteers with them who came from all 107 ridings here in Ontario. They basically had a chat, a one-on-one, with their MPP to explain to their MPP why it was important for us to support this.

The work has been done, Speaker. The work has been done. Youth are now on board. They realize the danger that this is. They realize how powerful the glamour industry is for some of their peers and they are ready for protection. They are asking us for protection, and I think it is our duty as legislators to do that. How do we do this? We do this by passing this bill, the Skin Cancer Protection Act.

There were a number of other activities that had also taken place. Again, the great volunteers from the cancer society throughout Ontario would go to high schools and talk. I had the pleasure to attend some of those presentations in my own riding. I will always remember, we went to Lockerby high school, which is a big high school in Sudbury. They had arranged for all of the graduating class and the class before that to come into the gymnasium. There were hundreds and hundreds, close to 1,000 young people in there. The cancer society had found a woman who was actually the mother of one of those students, who came and talked. She came and shared her own story of her own battle with cancer. You could see that the students were listening intently. We then put out the message about the damage of using tanning equipment. Then we asked them to take a pledge. We knew that this would put a lot of peer pressure, so we made it comfortable for whoever was not willing to take the pledge. They all did, except for three just gorgeous young women, extremely tanned. The message I got out of this is that when you can share your message early, when you can protect them, youth get it. They know that nothing good will come of this. They know that they are partly the target/victim of the glamour industry. But once they have the knowledge, they take the right decision. What we are trying to do right now is to make it easy on all by banning them.

We've all had—some of them are too young, but I'll speak for myself. It was tough raising kids through their teenage years. My three went through teenage years like bing, bang, bang, all of them at the same time. I'm happy I survived that period of time. As hard as it was on them,

I think it was even harder on me. It's a tough time to be a parent of teenagers. They want to drive the car, sometimes when it's not appropriate. They wanted to experiment with alcohol when I didn't think it was appropriate. They certainly were under pressure to experiment with recreational drugs when I thought it was inappropriate. And they wanted to go out with people who I thought weren't good either. So you end up saying no on a whole lot of things to your teenage sons and daughters as they grow up. Then they want to get tanned. At some point you have to say, "I'm tired of saying no all the time. I don't want them to drink and drive. I don't want them to do drugs. I certainly don't want them to drink to excess. Maybe I'll give up on something—you know, to try to give and take with your teenager. And what do you give up on? It seems like tanning is something that you could give your support to and say, "Well, at least, she's not drinking and driving or going out with this guy that I really don't care for." So you give up. You give in, not knowing that what you're doing is increasing her risk of skin cancer by 75%.

I worked in a hospital long enough—we had a cancer treatment centre and I worked on the oncology unit long enough to know that skin cancer is no fun. The treatment for melanoma is no picnic either. The chances of death are right up there. Melanoma is not easy to treat. Once you have it—hopefully you catch it early, but once you have melanoma and you fight skin cancer, you're in a battle for your life. Unfortunately, many of them will lose that battle.

Looking back to all of those parents that are going through those trying years of trying to guide their teenage sons and daughters on the right path, let's take that battle away from the raising of kids. As legislators, let's do the right thing and make it clear that it doesn't matter how much you beg your mom, you're not going to be allowed in there. You are not to be allowed in there because nothing good will come of it, because a tanned skin is a damaged skin. And the damage just keeps on adding; it never goes away.

This is what we are trying to do here today. We are trying to have this debate on the use of artificial tanning equipment and how this industry needs to be regulated.

0920

Another part of the bill is that we will be putting clear signs, warning signs, directly on it, very similar to what you see on cigarette packages right now that spells it out in black and white: If you smoke cigarettes, chances are you will get cancer. Those warning signs will be there. Although youth won't be allowed to use tanning equipment, a lot of other people still will be allowed, so at least we will be giving them information that comes from a reliable source as to what are the effects.

The actual wording is not in the bill, simply because Health Canada has also decided to look into this, and Health Canada will be issuing a warning, will be mandating warnings, on tanning equipment. So if the warning that Health Canada—if we can coordinate our efforts so that we agree, then all the better. Not only will

there be just one sign; it will be clear language that will be throughout all of the different provinces and Ontario.

The need for this bill to regulate the tanning industry is gaining more and more support. I talked a little bit as to what some of the youth are doing—youth on youth, through either the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario branch or their regional branch, and through the health units in different areas, where they talk to one another. I've talked about what was happening at the university level with the medical students that attend those universities.

But the pressure to move on with this bill is also coming from the health care society, so I would like to thank the many groups that I'm about to read out. This group, of course, includes the Canadian Cancer Society. When the Canadian Cancer Society started to put their time and effort and energy behind this bill, I knew that we were on the right track. They have a way of recruiting volunteers, of training them, of doing peer mentoring that is just phenomenal. When they identified tanning, the regulation of tanning beds, and started to put their message out, it became very, very credible and very powerful.

The Canadian skin cancer association also put their shoulder to the wheel. Again, the skin cancer association is specifically for people living with skin cancer. I will highlight one such person, who I think a lot of you got to know. Her name is Kate. You met her last spring, the spring of 2012. Her name is Kate Neale. Kate is just, you know, one of those drop-dead gorgeous young women. She is very, very pretty, and she's very smart.

Kate started working for the tanning industry when she was in her teens. Kate started tanning quite regularly, up to 16 times a month, basically every second day, because—you know what, Madam Speaker?—in Kate's contract of employment, there was a clause that said, "In order to keep your job, you must maintain a tanned appearance."

Can you believe this, Madam Speaker? We are telling those young women throughout the hundreds of tanning salons we have in Ontario that if you want to keep your job, you have to expose yourself to a known carcinogen. Since 2009, the World Health Organization has upgraded tanning equipment to the highest level; it's on par with arsenic and tobacco and everything else. If you use tanning equipment, you increase your risk of cancer. It's not an "if" or a "maybe"; it is quantified. You increase it by 75%. So here we are, a young woman wanting to make a few dollars so that she can pay for her tuition, her books and enter the workforce, who is told, "If you want to have a job with us, you will have to maintain a tanned appearance." I don't know about the rest of you, but I can tell you that in Nickel Belt, in February, maintaining a tanned appearance is not that obvious. It is impossible to do this unless you go to a tanning bed, unless you expose yourself to a known carcinogen. Yet it was in her contract. Kate did not want to lose her job. Like many young women, she needed the money. But like everybody else, I can tell you that this year we've had the winter that did

not know when to end. I was ready to ditch it out weeks and months ago, but it stayed. By the way, the ice went off the lake on Sunday at 2:30, thank heaven. Spring is here. This aside, it was a long winter. How do you maintain a tanned appearance? You go to a tanning salon. You got to a tanning booth.

So here is Kate, taking all of the training that her employers were offering. She became extremely knowledgeable about all of the goodness of tanning beds. Then, the worst happened. Then she went with her mom to an appointment with her dermatologist. When she tells the story, she is able to tell the story lightheartedly, actually, because when she got to the appointment, the doctor thought that it was for Kate's mom, because Kate was so young. She was not even 20 years old. Yet she had developed skin cancer. Kate is now 22 years old. She has a big scar on her breast and a big scar on her stomach from where they did surgery to remove skin cancer. Kate couldn't attend when the Minister of Health reintroduced the bill because she was undergoing medical care. But Kate—not only is she very pretty; she's very smart—used her knowledge of the tanning industry to speak to her peers, to turn things around, to make things better. She's asking us to follow in her footsteps and make it easy, to make the right decision the easy decision: Ban it for everybody under 18. Put warning signs on it. Make sure we know where those things are. Make sure we talk to people with type 1 skin. Kate should never have tanned. She's one of those with the type 1 skin. Yet she did, 16 times a month; about every second day she used the tanning bed.

She talked about it. She said that after a while she felt like she had become dependent on it, that she needed her fix of sunshine, she needed her fix of exposure to UV. Of course, there is nothing we can do to change the past, but as legislators we can certainly change the future for the better.

I also had a chance to meet with the Melanoma Network. Melanoma is the worst type of skin cancer, in the sense that it is very tough to treat. The treatment can only be described as brutal and not always successful. There are many survivors of melanoma. Once you get them all in a room, they often have something in common: They used tanning beds when they were younger, not knowing.

0930

Kate's cancer developed really quickly, but the statistics would tell you that it usually takes between 10 and 15 years before the cancer will appear. So if you use a tanning bed when you're 16 years old, chances are you will be 26 or 30 when the cancer shows. At 26 or 30 years old, you are just starting your career. You finally finished school. Hopefully, you got a job that allows you to support yourself. Often, your first job will be a little bit more precarious—lots without drug plans, lots without job security—and you have to undergo cancer treatment. They are just starting out in life, and then they get news like that.

If you spend any time with the Melanoma Network, you will see that, unfortunately, a lot of their stories all

have something in common, something that we can change right here in this Legislature. What they have in common is that they used tanning beds when they were young.

We also met with the David Cornfield Melanoma Fund, which is basically a fund that helps people deal with melanoma-type skin cancer and what it does to their lives. Because, have no fear, not only is it hard physically and emotionally for yourself, your family, your loved ones and your friends, it also hits you in the pocketbook pretty heavily. If you haven't got a drug plan, be ready to get into debt. It is expensive.

The Ontario Medical Association has given their unconditional support. They are the ones who get to break the news. They are the ones who get to look those beautiful young women in the eye and say, "This weird-looking freckle there is not a freckle. It's actually skin cancer." There's not one physician in world that likes doing this. It is hard on the patient; it is just as hard on the physician. They know what it means. They know what the future holds. They know the hardships. They know that they have just hit this person in the stomach and that they are about to keel over, because when you are the one who is tasked with sharing news like this, nobody likes it. The Ontario Medical Association and their members would much rather we prevent it than that they had to share that news and then support their patients. The Canadian Dermatology Association is doing the same thing.

I must say that back in 2008 and 2010 Ontario would have been the very first province to bring regulation to the tanning industry. We're now old news. Most of the other provinces have done it already. You look to Quebec, you look to British Columbia, you look to the Maritime provinces, Newfoundland—they've already passed those bills.

Actually, it was quite something because when Maryse Gaudreault, who was an MPP for Hull at the Assemblée Nationale in Quebec, when they started to do their work, they actually came to Ontario. They wanted us to share the research that we had done. They wanted us to share our bill with them, which I did. They beat us to the punch because they took our bill, ran it through their Legislative Assembly, and not only did the bill pass, but all of the regulations and everything else have already gone through; it's already in place, it has already happened.

It feels sort of weird because at the time we were the leader on this issue. We're also the province that has the most tanning salons, in part because we have more people, but as a percentage we're also very high. The National Assembly in Québec did it, and they did it in a fairly short period of time.

There is very little pushback from the industry. Here again, I have to thank the good people at the cancer society. They did what we call on-the-ground research. What they did was they hired young people and they asked them to go—I used to know the number by heart, but we'll say 72; the number is about that—to 72 tanning

salons in Toronto. They were all underage, and they basically presented themselves and asked to tan. What do you figure happened? Do you figure that the industry, who had guidelines as to who they should and should not let in their doors—they had guidelines that they were supposed to post and show to everybody regarding type 1 and warnings—well, I won't keep you in suspense any longer. Nothing happened. The kids paid their money and they were allowed in. None of the warnings that were supposed to be there were there. None of them had done all of the guidelines. A few of them had one or two of the guidelines in place; none of them had them all. All of them welcomed their money and rolled out—it wouldn't be the red carpet—the heating lamps for them to go under.

I sort of did the same thing in my riding. I had 12 of them at the time; I have 13 now. I called them for my daughter, saying that my daughter wanted to go tanning, and if she would be allowed in. The conversation never lasted more than 30 seconds. Within the 30 seconds, it was, "I will fax you this sheet that says that you allowed her in." It didn't matter if I pretended she was 14, which she was not. All I had to do was agree to their offer of signing this fax—they had it on the Internet—or she could just bring a piece of paper from home and go tanning. None of them talked about "not allowed under 16" at the time. None of them talked to me about her skin type or anything like this.

The industry has been under guidelines for many, many years. It has not worked, which is why things have changed. Things have changed in five other provinces, and things are about to change in Ontario.

I had told you that the member from London—Fanshawe had introduced the bill. We co-sponsored it. I brought it back. Then the Minister of Health, in this session, finally brought it forward. When she came to see me—because she said, "This is more or less your bill"—to see if I was okay with it, I asked for one thing. I had no problem giving the bill away; it is not a partisan issue. I asked for one thing: I asked that it be moved through the House quickly.

As you know, Speaker, the government controls the legislative calendar; I don't. My second ballot, my chance to bring a bill for second reading, is not until December. Now that we have a budget coming, it probably won't be until February 2014. I don't want to wait until February 2014 before this Legislative Assembly does the right thing. I want us to move with this, and the quicker, the better. So when the Minister of Health came—I thank her for this—and offered this, I jumped at the occasion. She has the opportunity to move this through the House quickly, and I sure hope that she does. I will come back to this in a minute.

0940

I talked about some of the agencies that have supported us, and there have been many, many. I'll share some of the statistics with you: 16% of grades 11 and 12 teenagers use tanning beds. That is 16% of youth in Ontario who are putting themselves at risk of skin cancer

and melanoma. I'm no statistician or anything like this, but I can see a bleak future where 10 years from now, of those 16% of youth—which represents hundreds of thousands of youth—a lot of them will have skin cancer, and a lot of them will need our health care system to try to go through this.

When I mentioned the provinces, I forgot to—in the Maritime provinces we have Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, on top of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and British Columbia.

If we look a bit at the international market—because when you bring a private member's bill forward, you do a ton of research, actually—the first country to ever ban it was Brazil. Brazil has lots of sunshine, but yet there are people who fall to the pressure of the glamour industry and want to tan some more.

In December 2012, a territory of Australia called Victoria banned all sun beds, and by December 2014, a big part of Australia will have banned tanning beds altogether. It's not only for youth; it will be no more—no more, no more. Australia already has a very high rate of skin cancer. They don't have to deal with the winter that we deal with, and the people there are exposed to natural sun a whole lot more than we are. So a lot of their population have skin cancer, but here again, the tanning industry, the glamour industry, got to their youth the same way they got to ours, and the need to be tanned was still there, was still put forward in a way that a high percentage of young people, mainly young women and girls, in Australia do that. Australia is going way further than us. They are banning this altogether.

There is a time-sensitive period to this. The first one is when people go away for the March break. The tanning industry will tell you lies such as, "Oh, if you get a base tan, you won't burn as much. Oh, if you...." None of this is true. None of this is true. A tanned skin is a damaged skin.

There is another big push that is coming, and this is graduation. There will be lots of people graduating from high school, from college, from university, and those parties are becoming bigger and bigger all the time. Not only do you need the right dress and the right partner; you also need the right tan.

I'm really proud of many high schools in Nickel Belt and Sudbury that have brought forward the campaign "Cool to be Fair"; that is, cool to be fair-skinned. They take pledges that they will not tan before they go to prom, they will not tan before they go to a graduation ceremony, and more and more of them are doing this. But, here again, for 16% of youth, the pull of glamour is stronger.

When you do health promotion with that age group—I call them the "three I's": they are invincible, immortal and infertile—it's really, really hard to get any of those messages across to that particular age group. I don't want to leave it to parents anymore; I want us to do something. Because although they feel invincible and they feel immortal and they also feel infertile, they are none of the above; they are just like the rest of us. Some of them die

and some of them get sick, and you know what happens with the rest of them. The idea here is to take that away.

We're not asking for a big step. We're not ruining the industry or anything like this. Other jurisdictions are banning them all together; we are taking small, reasonable steps, which I would say most of the industry knows are inevitable. After Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Newfoundland and us, having had this bill in this House for the fourth time now, they know that it is inevitable. I would say soon, I hope this afternoon, we send this bill to committee. I would say that if we need two hours in committee, that would be about it. Because there is no pushback to this bill anymore. We could line up 100 groups and speakers who will come and speak in favour of it, and this is fine. I still want it to go into committee, because the people have a right to see the bill in its entirety. And if we can tighten up the language and do things even better, I'm all for that. But I want this to move, and to move quickly.

I've been talking about girls and women because they are the main users, but an interesting statistic is that 3% of men also use tanning beds and their skin is no different than the skin of a woman. They are increasing their chances of melanoma and skin cancer by 75%, just like the girls and the women who agree to use those tanning beds. But tanning equipment is more common among young women. You can see that it decreases as you stop buying the glamour magazines; it follows the same age range: 26% of women between the age of 16 and 24 years old use tanning beds—26%; I told you the statistic. In 10 years from whatever age they are now, chances are—I don't wish any harm upon anybody, but chances are some of them will be going through a very tough time. And it decreases: 7% of women age 45 to 64. I don't want to wait till they're 64 before we get the message across. Those statistics come from the Ontario Sun Safety Working Group and are dated 2010. I'm taking a pretty sure bet that the curve has not gone down. Unless we do something, it will continue.

In the last two decades, we've diagnosed 80,000 new skin cancers every single year. I'll let that sink in: 80,000 people get a diagnosis of skin cancer. Everybody's starting to do the math: 365 days; that means many, many people every day are faced with the news that they now have skin cancer. The most common cancer for people aged 15 to 29 is skin cancer.

Let's look at the economics of that. It's pretty daunting. Right now we're looking at close to \$1 billion a year in care. That is just the care that is paid for by the government. It's actually \$922 million. This is based on 2010, called the Economic Burden of Skin Cancer in Canada. This is a lot of money.

0950

When we're looking at how we can save money in the health care system—well, the best way to save money in the health care system is to not need it in the first place. I absolutely guarantee you, Madam Speaker, nobody will volunteer for chemotherapy and radiation treatment unless they need it. If you don't have skin cancer, no-

body—those 80,000 people? They're not going to volunteer for the treatment. We only treat them once they have cancer. We could prevent a whole lot of this hardship from happening, and it has an added bonus: Not only do you save hardship on people and families, you also save money within the health care system.

In Ontario alone, the cost of skin cancer—the statistics I was just giving you are Canada-wide. In Ontario alone, in 2011 the cost to our health care system was \$344 million. That's a lot of money, \$344 million; I can think of a few things that I'd like to do with that money in the health care system. I think a five-day home care guarantee would be a nice place to start, but I digress.

Interjection: Or a mental health strategy.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Or a mental health strategy—even better. I could think of a whole lot of things \$344 million could buy us rather than treating skin cancer in young people when it could have been prevented.

When we start to look at Ontarians, how do they feel about regulation of the industry? Well, 83% of Ontarians support a ban on indoor tanning—83%. I've been in politics for five and a half years, and that's long enough to know that we will never get 100% support, no matter how good the idea is. To have 83% support is pretty high; 83% of the people in Ontario get it. They know that this industry needs to be regulated. Of the people that were polled, 73% said that the industry cannot be trusted to self-regulate, 83% said we should ban indoor tanning for youth under 18, and 80% said that we should have legislation to regulate the tanning industry. I think it is high time that Ontario do this. The studies are there. The World Health Organization has spoken.

The guidelines for tanning salon owners, operators and users, which are based on Health Canada's 2005 guidelines, have not been effective. Health Canada did put out their guidelines, but they were not followed. If we looked at the website—you don't even have to go on-site; go onto the website of the tanning salons, and 40% won't even mention any of the regulations and guidelines from Health Canada. Only two websites—that's 5%—provide information about skin cancer risks. This is rather shameful.

I don't want to paint them all with the same brush, because I have been in contact with many, many tanning salon owners that have come to see me, and many of them get it. Many of them realize that they are not all the same—some of them want to do the right thing, but then, they work within an industry, and if their competitors across the street are opening their doors to girls of 16 and 17, and they are doing the right thing and turning them away, they're not going to be in business for very long. Those operators do want the industry to be regulated, and a lot of them out there are quite willing to do the right thing. They know what the right thing is, and they're quite willing to do it.

But as it stands, because it's not regulated in Ontario, you can see the constant reaching out to youth. If you look at social media, the tanning industry is all over social media. Whether you talk about Twitter or Face-

book or YouTube, everywhere youth gather, you will see the tanning industry. They need to be regulated, and this is what this bill will do.

I would say that in 2008, in 2010, it could have been unpleasant politically because the industry was still fighting this quite a bit. They still wanted us to believe that there was some good coming out of a tanned skin, that a base tan was something good, that vitamin D was something that Ontarians needed. They've changed their tune about this.

The cancer society has done its work, it has done this research and it has been phenomenal at educating people to basically put a clear message out: A tanned skin is a damaged skin; there is no safe tan. If you repeat it enough times, people get it. But the industry still needs to be regulated.

Avant de conclure, j'aimerais vous parler d'une campagne que le Service de santé publique de Sudbury avait commencée. Je suis très fière de la D^{re} Penny Sutcliffe, qui est notre médecin-hygiéniste à Sudbury, pour le district de Sudbury, qui avait lancé la campagne de cartes postales. La carte postale s'appelle « Se faire bronzer ne vaut pas le risque de mourir! ». C'était une carte postale qu'un groupe du bureau de santé publique de Sudbury avait commencée, mais c'est une campagne qui s'est propagée à la grandeur de la province où des jeunes des écoles secondaires partaient avec leurs cartes postales et demandaient à leurs pairs—c'est-à-dire d'autres étudiants du secondaire et parfois du collégial—de signer les cartes postales. La carte postale dit : « Faites pression auprès du gouvernement de l'Ontario pour qu'il décrète une loi interdisant l'usage d'équipement de bronzage artificiel par les jeunes de moins de 18 ans. Montrez votre appui en signant une carte postale. » Puis, cela avait leur logo.

Ce qu'ils demandent est exactement ce qu'on a dans le projet de loi : « J'appuie "l'appel à l'action" de la Société canadienne du cancer, division de l'Ontario, qui demande au gouvernement de l'Ontario :

« —d'interdire l'usage de l'équipement de bronzage artificiel par les jeunes de moins de 18 ans —ça c'est la partie de la loi que les gens connaissent le mieux;

« —d'interdire la commercialisation de bronzage artificiel qui cible les jeunes »—donc, dans les cahiers de fin d'année, pendant les bals de finissants, on ne verra plus d'annonces de l'industrie du bronzage;

« —d'élaborer et de maintenir un registre de l'équipement de bronzage artificiel en Ontario » parce qu'en ce moment, on n'a aucune idée; dans un salon de bronzage, on a une pas mal bonne idée qu'il va y avoir des lits de bronzage, mais il y en a dans des gymnases, il y en a dans des clubs d'aérobic, il y en a chez les coiffeuses, il y en a un peu partout. Maintenant, le bureau de santé publique va savoir exactement où ils sont;

« —de faire en sorte que tout le personnel responsable du fonctionnement d'équipement de bronzage artificiel participe à une formation sur les procédures, l'entretien et les façons de cerner les personnes qui sont plus à risque de développer un cancer, surtout celles qui ont une peau

de type 1... »;—une peau de type 1 : ils ont tendance à être très pâles, et parfois ils ont des taches de rousseur—
« et

« —d'exiger qu'une affiche soit placée bien en vue de chaque lit de bronzage, décrivant les risques du bronzage artificiel pour la santé ». Donc, lorsque tu vas vers un lit de bronzage, ça va être clair.

Il y avait un petit message également : « Le saviez-vous?

« L'exposition à la radiation ultraviolette, comme celle qui est émise par l'équipement de bronzage artificiel, au cours de l'enfance et de l'adolescence peut augmenter les risques de développer un cancer de la peau, maintenant et plus tard dans la vie. »

Et le deuxième : « Le mélanome est la forme de cancer la plus commune chez les jeunes Ontariens et Ontariennes de 15 à 34 ans. »

Une campagne excellente.

1000

I'll use the two minutes I have left to say how important it is for us to move forward. We have a minority government. There is a budget coming. There are all sorts of rumours as to, will there be an election? Will there be changes?

This bill has the support from all three sides of the House. I was very happy to listen when the minister and her PA did their hour lead. I did the same thing when the PC lead was done. I listened to the comments that were made and the personal testimonies that were shared in this House of people who have been diagnosed with skin cancer, friends they know who have melanoma or other forms of skin cancer.

It is quite obvious that on all sides of this House people want this regulation to take place. People want this bill to go through. I hope that it is sent to committee, this afternoon, if possible, right after this if at all possible, that it has a short period in committee to tighten up and give people—I still want to give due process to the legislative process and democracy, but that it receive third reading and royal assent before prom.

The highest usage of tanning beds will take place between the last week of May and the end of June. This is when hundreds and thousands of new girls will use tanning beds for the first time. We have it within our power right here, right now today, to protect all of those young girls from going into a tanning salon and taking the first step towards what could be skin cancer, melanoma and everything. I hope we do the right thing. I'm counting on you.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to respond to the remarks from the member from Nickel Belt.

I'd like to thank you for telling Kate's story. It's interesting. The weekend when I went home after the Minister of Health tabled this bill, my neighbourhood and lots of other neighbourhoods in Guelph were plastered with lawn signs asking people to come in and get their cut-rate tanning. Like, "Special offer. Come and get your tan." I've also started to get letters in my constit office

telling me that it's not possible for young women to get cancer so quickly. So thank you for telling Kate's story and explaining how a young woman who is vulnerable to skin cancer because of her skin type, if she tans frequently, actually could, as a young woman, get skin cancer, because that belies some of the information that is being delivered to my constituency office. I think it's really important for us to have that information about an actual case.

I want to say that I agree with you totally that we need to pass this bill quickly. The reality is that tanning bed season and prom season are one and the same. If we all work together to pass this bill quickly, to move it along quickly, to get it through third reading quickly, we can actually have a real impact immediately, mainly on the lives of young women but sometimes young men, too.

It's important for viewers to understand that in order to do that, we need all three House leaders to agree to have the vote. We need all three House leaders to agree to stop putting up speakers. We certainly agree with you that we should get on with this. All three parties have indicated they support—

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

Mr. Todd Smith: Merci, madame la Présidente. C'est un plaisir de parler à la présentation d'une heure par la députée de Nickel Belt. How's that?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Not bad.

Mr. Todd Smith: Not bad? It is a pleasure to speak to this bill, and it was a great presentation by the member from Nickel Belt. Sixty minutes is a long time and there were a lot of stats that came out during that presentation. Many of them are very important for those who are watching and listening. Unfortunately, I don't believe that many of the people that this bill is targeted at reaching are watching and listening to this debate today.

Having been representing the riding that Kate Neale comes from, the Belleville area—Kate is a wonderful person to be spreading this message. As much as the Minister of Education or the MPP from Nickel Belt or the MPP for Prince Edward—Hastings, for that matter, can stand up and talk about the stats and how people are affected negatively by indoor tanning, the best advocates and the most important advocates are people like Kate Neale, who can tell her story. She's 22 years old. She's a beautiful young lady who has been tanning for six years now and is dealing with the effects and the aftermath of melanoma and what that has done to her body. I know from talking to Kate that she lives in fear every day now, because, as you mentioned, there is that 90% chance of melanoma recurring, which it has for her, even after the surgeries that she's had, that have left scars on her body—this terrible disease that she's going to have to live with for the rest of her life. It's so important that people like Kate are out there and spreading the message of how dangerous indoor tanning is.

I especially appreciate the remarks from France Gélinas where she said that not all of these tanning bed owners should be painted with the same brush, because there are some good ones out there. But this is a very

dangerous thing affecting our community, and we look forward to supporting this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure, actually, to stand up and follow the member from Nickel Belt. Her advocacy on this file is to be commended. She has shown great resilience in reaching out across the entire province to secure support.

It's hard not to be a little bit frustrated. This could have happened in 2008. But you know, we have an opportunity before us to actually do something about this. As the Minister of Education mentioned, it's going to take all the House leaders to accelerate, if you will, and make up for lost time on this front. I think that this can be achieved, especially given the political context of moving into a very high-pressured discussion around the budget process. So I share the enthusiasm from the member from Nickel Belt to sort of get this done and get this done today, and get it to committee, fine-tune it and then get it into regulations so that we get ahead of the whole prom season.

I think that the people of this province support this, and they would support us getting this done today, because they've waited a long time. I especially appreciate the comments from Nickel Belt, as a mother of teenagers who are moving into that "No, no, no" season, as she rightly pointed out. I mean, I think that parents would be very appreciative of the fact that their children could not access tanning beds at a facility. I think that that is our job, and we can get that job done today.

I just want to say thank you to her and to the legislators in this building who have taken a leadership role on this: good work. The people expect us to actually work together in this way, so let's get this done. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Moi aussi, je voudrais féliciter la députée de Nickel Belt pour sa présentation. Je pense que c'est très important aujourd'hui qu'on travaille tous ensemble pour prévenir les cancers dans le futur parce que le cancer n'apparaît pas tout de suite. Le cancer de la peau, on dit que ça commence même chez les bébés—alors un conseil aux parents de ne pas exposer leur bébé et de mettre de la crème solaire.

Puis, il n'y a pas de meilleur temps que présentement pour lancer le message, non pas seulement aux jeunes, mais aux parents aussi. C'est le temps des graduations. C'est le temps où les jeunes filles voient dans les magazines—et elles sont les plus influençables à cet âge-ci.

On sait, comme parents—on dit que les parents sont toujours en train de dire « non, non, non », mais on a besoin de toute une communauté pour envoyer ce message-là.

So I'm very impressed with the presentation of my friend from Nickel Belt.

I have two concerns. The first concern is about the medical exemption, because as a former Minister of

Community and Social Services, you cannot always trust 100% the medical community, who will have clinics like the special diet clinic—some doctor has a clinic and they will sign; they don't know the individual, but they will sign. So I want this to be raised at committee.

The second thing that I would like to see at committee is it should be “No, no, no,” that an employer would put in a verbal or written contract—because a contract is not always written; verbal and written contracts—that the employee should use the tanning salon.

I trust that this will go to committee sooner than later and these two topics will be discussed at committee. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Nickel Belt has two minutes to respond.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank the Minister of Education, the member from Prince Edwards–Hastings, my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo et la ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels et désignée aux services en français pour leurs commentaires.

I think the time has come. You've heard the comments around this room. Everybody agrees that the industry needs regulation, that the bill we have in front of us is a good foundation to do this. Do we need a little bit of tweaking? Every bill can be improved. Let's send it to committee today so that we can do the last tweaking and it goes through third reading and royal assent before prom season comes.

One of the comments that I had made was that people who work in the industry are under contract to maintain a tanned appearance. We cannot stand idly by when workers have no choice but to either lose their job or to expose themselves to a known carcinogen. This has to change.

The foundation of the bill that we have in front of us is something that we have worked on since 2008. The groundwork of the health promotion initiative has been done. I cannot thank enough the people from the cancer society, dermatology, medical association, nurses' association, health units, all of the students who participated, and the Ontario Medical Students Association for their help. I had a long, long list and I can't find it. We had so many people help along the way. The work is done. The people of Ontario are ready for this. The industry is ready for this. What are we waiting for? The time is now. It will make a huge difference in the lives of many young women.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? The member from London—no. I'm looking at three other people at the same time.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Because you said that, Whitby–Oshawa.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to welcome several members from Advocis, who are joining us in the gallery today: Mr. Jack Snedden and Wayne Daley from Whitby, and Alex Fischer from the great riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce a few members from my community who are sitting in the members' east gallery today: from the Wise Advisory Group, Julian Wise, Kim Sevcik and David Stewart; from Qualified Financial Services, Denise Vitellaro Turner; and from Bearing Capital Partners, Jamie Sevcik. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure this morning to introduce a former page of this assembly and also the daughter of a former well-esteemed agriculture minister, much loved by every member of this assembly and previous assemblies: Roxane Villeneuve Robertson.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to welcome Kris Birchard from Advocis, from the wonderful Blackburn Hamlet in the riding of Ottawa–Orléans. Welcome, Kris.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's an honour to introduce the warden of Middlesex county who's joining us today, Brad Richards; the CAO of Middlesex county, Bill Rayburn; and also a good friend of mine from London, from Wernham Wealth Management, Ted Wernham. Welcome.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'd like to welcome from my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, Claude Rochefort from Advocis to the Ontario Legislature today. I look forward to meeting with him this afternoon. Thank you, Claude.

Mr. Michael Harris: I too would like to welcome a few members from the region of Waterloo here today with Advocis: Alan Anderson, Darren Sweeney and Dennis Yanke. Welcome to the Legislature. I look forward to meeting with you today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I got it all?

Mr. Randy Hillier: You got it all.

Thank you very much, Speaker. It's my pleasure to welcome and introduce to the House—I had a lovely meeting with some representatives from Advocis today in my office, and I look forward to them having a great day, as I am sure they are, at Queen's Park today: David McGruer, John Saikaley, Richard Chartrand, Roger Rhodes, Jacques Duplain and Sean Lawrence. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. David Zimmer: I'd like to introduce a Willowdale constituent, Sonny Goldstein, who's here for Advocis Day.

It's the annual Queen's Park day for the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. I remind members there is a Queen's Park reception today at 5 p.m., and all are welcome.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to welcome a good friend of mine to the Legislature today, here for Advocis

Day as well, a well-known financial investor from Belleville: Shannon Neely, who's sitting next to the daughter of the former Agriculture Minister Noble Villeneuve, Roxane Villeneuve.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of page Fiona Marshall Young: Kristin Marshall, Paul Young, Michelle Young, Waverly Chow and Lisa Chow.

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: I'm privileged to introduce Allain Labelle and Michael Vagnini from Advocis. A little historical perspective: Michael Vagnini is a former student of mine who attended my office often for some sound advice, so we welcome him warmly—and Allain warmly—to the Legislature.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome John Willoughby, president of Advocis.

I'd also like to recognize Tenzin Shomar, who's the page captain today. His parents also join us—that's Phurbu and Tsering—and sister Dephel. They are in the gallery here watching Tenzin as page captain today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome Brad Richards—he is the warden of Middlesex county—and Bill Rayburn, the CAO. Welcome, please, to both of you gentlemen. Thank you.

Mr. Frank Klees: I also want to extend a welcome to the members of Advocis who are here with us today: Mr. Peter Tzanetakis, the vice-president, government and corporate relations, for Advocis; and my life insurance agent, Roger McMillan. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There's a joke in that, but I'll just bypass that and move right along.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'd like to welcome today Linda Gratton, who is part of the Advocis group from Peterborough.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, it's that time. I would ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages serving in the second session of the 40th Parliament.

Please assemble.

See how quickly they did that.

Brendan Adamo from Mississauga–Brampton South; Eve Cassavoy from Scarborough Southwest; Ethan Chisamore-Johnston from Newmarket–Aurora; Benjamin Comley from Niagara West–Glanbrook; Jack Dawson from London West; Gabriel Demizio from Niagara Falls; Victoria Farkas from St. Paul's; Megan Gauvreau from Sudbury; Kelly Ge from Scarborough–Agincourt; Madison Hogg from Beaches–East York; Brigid Howard-Waddingham from Eglinton–Lawrence; Fiona Marshall Young from Toronto–Danforth; Chedi Mbaga from Trinity–Spadina; Samantha McCluskey from Etobicoke–Lakeshore; Simon Osak from York Centre; Karinna Pe from Willowdale; Shruti Sandhu from Thornhill; Anjali Sharma from Markham–Unionville; Tenzin Shomar from Durham; and Daniel Starrett from Whitby–Oshawa.

These are your pages for this session.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question this morning is for the Premier. Premier, this morning, the Ontario Power Authority's CEO, Colin Andersen, brought a spreadsheet to the justice committee that showed the cost of the Oakville cancellation to be \$1.1 billion, less any savings. I'm sorry he had to disclose that on you.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: That's \$1.1 billion, less any savings, for a net cost potentially of \$310 million.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Willowdale will come to order, and I'll start identifying individuals. That includes members on all sides. I'm trying to get control.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They're not used to the truth over there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew has just got himself a little deeper than I think he wants to. I'm seeking your co-operation. I will identify individuals from here on in.

Please finish your question.

1040

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you. I asked him if the government knew it was more than \$40 million, and he said yes. And when I asked him who in the government knew, Speaker, his answer was one word: Everybody.

Premier, will you now apologize to Ontarians for not telling them what you've known all along about this gas plant scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, all parties, first of all, opposed the Oakville facility. The government honoured its commitment to the people of Oakville and renegotiated—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The opposite of Bad Boy: Everybody.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. As I've tried to indicate to you, it does go both ways, and it is starting to happen that way. So, the member from Renfrew, for the second time, would you please come to order?

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the government honoured its commitment to the people of Oakville and renegotiated the Oakville facility. In September 2012, the Ontario Power Authority posted on its website the memorandum of understanding and a 216-page contract. That contract identified sunk costs and also contemplated a wide range of other costs. That was there for the whole world to see in September 2012.

The Auditor General, in his Mississauga report—it was very, very clear from that that these are very complex calculations—

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, given what we've heard this morning, I hope you're not going to follow the path of the other Liberal witnesses who have appeared before the justice committee when you testify today. They've either all developed sudden-onset selective amnesia, or they just plain didn't tell the whole truth to the committee. One admitted to destroying documents illegally, while another ordered the OPA to withhold documents. We heard that this morning from Colin Andersen again.

Ontarians are fed up with this obstructive nature and are fed up with the Liberals taking care of their political whims with hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer and ratepayer money.

Premier, how can you expect to maintain the confidence of this House and Ontarians when you knew all along your numbers were false?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Energy?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I'll continue the answer that I was in the middle of before.

What's clear from today, as well as from the previous auditor's report, is that the calculations are very, very difficult—so complex that this morning at committee, the OPA acknowledged an estimate that it made about four weeks ago with a particular cost; it had a different cost today. The consultant that was referred to in the particular report also had a different cost figure. The opposition has a different cost figure.

That's why the Premier asked the Auditor General to come and do a report: because we need an independent, reliable figure that we can count on, moving forward.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, I asked Colin Andersen who in the government knew the cost of cancelling Oakville would be more than \$40 million. His answer was: Everybody.

Premier, there is nowhere for you to go now except to come this afternoon and tell the truth. You've known about the costs for months and yet have stood in this Legislature—you and your ministers—and told us something different. Behaviour like that is why you do not have the confidence of Ontarians, nor should you.

Premier, what are you going to tell us this afternoon that you couldn't have told us a year ago?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, in September 2012 the whole world knew there were extra costs. It was on the OPA website. A 216-page contract identified sunk costs. They identified that there will be more calculations and more costs to come.

The critic—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will come to this side and say the same. I'll start identifying you in-

dividually. My ear is pretty good. I don't even have to see you sometimes.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, we agree with him. The whole world knew there were additional costs; it was on the website. The critic stands up and he misrepresents—he speaks—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let me do my job, please.

The member will withdraw.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

But what I will say is that he uses selective facts and selective quotes without completing the sentence, without stating that the whole world knew there were additional costs. There was a 216-page contract. If he didn't read it in September 2012, that's his problem. Do your job right.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham will come to order.

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, Colin Andersen from the Ontario Power Authority said that your Oakville gas plant decision is at least \$310 million. That's eight times the amount you stood and told this House.

Ontarians are disgusted, and what's even more disgusting is the Premier's arrogance by saying this week that this House only gets one confidence vote, and that will be the budget. That's her decision; forget the parliamentary rights of the rest of you.

The budget to be tabled will be overseen by a Premier who's been rather "liberal" with the truth—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. You can't say indirectly what you can't say indirectly, so I'm asking the member to withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker—and it will be tabled by a Minister of Finance whose seat was bought by one of the gas plant decisions. I ask the Premier: Do you honestly believe that this House has confidence in your government? If so, then why don't you call the non-confidence motion right now and test your theory?

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear on the issue of confidence. I believe that the budget is an imminent and an important opportunity for the Legislature to express confidence or non-confidence in the

government. I really hope that the members opposite will read the budget and then they will make their decision.

I just want to say this: I will appear before the committee this afternoon, but whether I'm in this House, whether I'm in the hall speaking to media, whether I'm at an event in some part of the province, I always tell the truth, the truth that I know, absolutely—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the members opposite are in a position today that they want to undermine that statement, but the reality is, that is the truth.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Well, Premier, you chaired the meeting where the Oakville cancellation was approved. You signed off on the cabinet minute approving the cancellation of the Oakville plant. You stood in this House and told us a dollar number that you knew was not the whole truth. Colin Andersen said just a few minutes ago downstairs in committee that everyone knew the true cost, and that it was much higher than what the Liberal Party and what you yourself have admitted.

I ask the Premier: Who's telling the truth, your—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: —the person who you put up as an expert and said that we should respect, long-time civil servant Colin Andersen, or you, the Premier? Are you telling the truth, that you didn't know the true cost, or is Colin Andersen telling the truth, which he just said under oath?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I believe that Colin Andersen was telling the truth, absolutely.

We called the OPA to committee to answer questions about the Oakville cost. This morning, as I understand it, the OPA provided two different cost estimates. Both estimates differ from what the OPA previously advised the government. That makes the case that it's extremely important that we have the Auditor General look at the books and determine the cost. That is why I called and asked the Auditor General to look at the Oakville situation. That's why I asked the Auditor General to look at it, because of the complexity that the Minister of Energy was talking about, because of the complexity that Colin Andersen spoke of.

1050

Every time I have spoken on this issue, Mr. Speaker, I have told the truth as I have understood it. I will continue to do that today and at committee.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that the Premier stood in this House on September 24, 2012, and said directly that the costs of Oakville were \$40 million. The Liberals screamed and howled every time we, the Tories, said that it wasn't true.

Now, we can understand the Liberals wanting to buy off the NDP in an attempt to cling to power during the budget discussions, but what we can't understand on this side of the House is why it's in the best interest of taxpayers or the half a million people unemployed in this province to keep this government going, to in any way prop up this government.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been caught red-handed and red-faced. Won't you get up now and apologize to the people of Ontario for not telling them the whole truth? You have an opportunity to do that. You have an opportunity to save what little reputation you have. Apologize and call the non-confidence vote.

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that the complexity that Colin Andersen from the OPA talked about this morning makes it very clear that waiting for the Auditor General's report is extremely important in this case.

What I want to say to the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, is that I regret that this situation has come to this. I regret that we are in this situation. We collectively, because every party in this House said that they wanted to make sure that these cancellations happened, Mr. Speaker. The complexity was not going to go away if it had been the PCs who had been implementing the decision or if it had been the NDP who were implementing the decision. The complexity around the costs of these cancellations was going to be in place no matter who implemented the decision. We implemented it. At every juncture, we were given information. That's the information that I relayed whenever I spoke on the issue.

When I came into this office, I said that we've got to get these questions answered. That's why we opened up the process; that's why the committee has had the opportunity to ask these questions.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier likes to describe her government as new. People want change from the same old politics that have left them cynical about the work that we do here. Does the Premier agree that it's time for that kind of change?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I'm not sure exactly where the leader of the third party is going with this, Mr. Speaker, but you know, from my perspective, what's very important is that I follow through on what I said I was going to do. I said that we needed to open up the process around the gas plant discussion, that we needed to make sure that all documents were available, that we

needed to broaden the mandate of the committee and make sure that all questions could be asked about every aspect of the decision. That's what I've done.

At different junctures, both opposition parties didn't want us to open up the process as much as we wanted it open. We've managed to get it open so that the committee can ask its range of questions. I think that's what I said I was going to do. I've followed through, Mr. Speaker. From my perspective, that's what the people of Ontario should be able to expect.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier keeps insisting that things have changed, but anyone watching the committee this morning, the committee that was charged with looking into the cancelled gas plants, can see that it's politics as usual here at Queen's Park.

This morning, the head of the OPA confirmed that the cost of scrapping the private power deal in Oakville was eight times more, eight times higher than the government claimed. Does the Premier think this will make people more cynical or less cynical about politics in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I hope that what comes out of this is a better process, that we can make sure that this doesn't happen again. Because the reality is—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact that the OPA has had different numbers to report at different points is a real problem. It creates frustration. It creates a sense of insecurity in terms of what are the experts actually looking at and how do we calculate these numbers. So how do we make sure that in the future we have a better upfront process, we make a good decision about siting this kind of infrastructure?

But if there has to be a cancellation, I think we all need to ask, how do we better predict what the costs are going to be, and how do we avoid a situation where the people who are the experts, and they are the experts, on whom we are relying—that they are able to give us better estimates?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we go to the supplementary, I'd ask the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek to come to order, please.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier said she'd offer change, but instead of real answers and explanations, Liberals are busy trying to call failed Tory candidates to testify at committee in a desperate attempt to score some political points, and Tories table motions that will never be called for debate in this House. Does the Premier think this is the sort of change the people of this province want?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We also called the OPA to come and to deliver their information. We're trying to get—and I know the OPA came as an NDP witness, but we had asked that they come earlier. The reality is that we are working with the committee process, we are

trying to get the information out; we're trying to make sure that all the documents that both the NDP and the Conservatives have asked for are available and that everyone who they've asked to come forward are coming forward. I'm going to be there this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

This is not a political game. From my perspective, this is about making sure that people have the information that they need. It's about making sure that we find a way to work together and ensure that the next time around, we have better information, we have a better upfront process and the community is involved earlier on so that we don't get into a situation like this again.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In tough times, people are looking for some real sense that their government will put the challenges facing people at the top of the agenda, not the challenges facing the Liberal Party and their well-connected insiders. The Premier has made it clear what her priority is when it comes to facing the facts on the cancelled gas plants. Is she ready to admit that this just isn't good enough for families who expect more and better from their government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said that I regret that this situation evolved the way it did, that we did not collectively have a better process in place so that the decision could have been made up front. I agree with the leader of the third party that this should not have happened the way it happened. I agree that we should have had better information and that we should have been able to pin down what the costs were going to be in the first place.

But the reality is, this is where we are. A decision was made that was agreed to by all of the parties in the Legislature, and we are having to deal with the fallout from that. I am not happy with that. I'm not happy with that at all, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the people of Ontario should be happy about it either. But what they should expect is that we get all the information, we learn from the situation and we put a better process in place next time around.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people feel like they're falling behind, and they'd like some sense that the government understands their challenges and will put their needs first. That's not what they've been seeing here in Ontario. The millions of dollars handed to hedge funds so the government could scrap gas plants and hold on to political power is just one example. But when people see that money can be found for corporate tax loopholes and CEO salary hikes at hospitals while they're being told to pay more and expect less, they know that it's time for a change. Is the Premier ready to put people first in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That is exactly what our throne speech—and what our budget is going to be about, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to a fairer society, and I

think that the leader of the third party understands what that means. That means focusing on the education, on the health care that our citizens in this province need, that every resident of Ontario—every child in the province, every senior who needs service, every child who needs an education—has access to that excellent institution that we are so proud of in Ontario. That's what the budget will be about. The budget will also be about making sure that we have the conditions for economic growth, making sure that we are fiscally responsible so that we can deliver those services that the people in Ontario need.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For people struggling with tough times, this isn't a game. It's millions and millions of dollars that could have been invested in hiring nurses, creating more home care or helping young people find the job that they need. When they open the papers today, they see a lot more of the same: top executives at Ontario's lottery corporation getting fat raises while people receiving chemotherapy treatment learned that their government refused to regulate the company that was mixing their drugs.

Is the Premier ready to get her priorities in check and not just talk about it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party, I think, knows it's extremely important that we absolutely put the people of Ontario at the centre of all of the decisions that we make, and to make sure that, as we bring our budget forward, we recognize that making people's lives better, making sure that young people have access to employment, making sure that people who need care in their homes get that home care, making sure that people in our northern and rural communities and the aboriginal children who are not succeeding in school get the supports that they need—those are the priorities that we need to focus on in terms of making this province a fairer society. In order to do that, we need to stay on track in terms of our fiscal plan. We're going to do that, and we'll be bringing that budget to this House on Thursday.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier of Ontario, and it's dealing with a very serious matter. It—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —not only with her eroding credibility but also with the confidence the people of this province have in her government.

I was at the justice committee earlier today when Colin Andersen made it very clear that everybody knew that those costs were much higher than 40%. I assume, as do all of my colleagues, that "everybody" includes you. You've known all along that the costs of this political—

Interjection.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —motivated decision were huge, but you misrepresented those numbers in this House several times—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member knows that it's not allowable. Withdraw, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Speaker.

The Premier knew, as a minister and now as Premier, that that \$40-million figure she had been suggesting wasn't true. So, we have a serious question for you: When were you first briefed that this \$40-million figure was inaccurate? And can you tell this House why you deserve to have the confidence of the people of Ontario given what you have done?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the government House leader will want to comment on the supplementary because I know he has been following the issue very closely. But I just want the member opposite to know that no matter her accusations and no matter the tone with which she—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Somebody is making it too loud. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No matter the tone in which she delivers the accusation, the reality is that I have said I will appear at the committee and I will tell the committee exactly what I know and my experience of the situation. I will answer all the questions and I will continue to do what I have done all along, which is to tell the truth. At every juncture I will tell the truth as I understand it—at every juncture, whether I'm here in this House or whether I'm at committee or whether I'm out in the hall—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member from Lanark will come to order, please.

Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: She can run and she can hide, but the people of Ontario have seen what this government has done. Don't take my word for it. Colin Andersen said, right in front of me at the justice committee, that the \$40-million figure was 775 times higher, and that everybody knew—his words; they weren't mine, they weren't the member's from Nipissing. They were her own hand-picked OPA chair's.

We know that Premier Wynne chaired the cabinet committee that signed off on the documents. We know that she was the campaign chair for the Liberals in the last election. We know she sat around the table when Colin Andersen said that everybody knew the costs were much higher than \$40 million. Then, she stands in this House on September 25 and continues to cite that erroneous figure.

The people of this province have lost confidence. They want to know: Will she put our want of confidence motion on the floor to be debated and to be voted on?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Interjections.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, let's start dealing in facts. This is what Mr. Andersen had to say in front of the committee this morning—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton will come to order. I think that's the second time I've mentioned his riding's name.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let's quote from Mr. Andersen in front of the committee this morning: "The \$40-million number was the one used at the time of the announcements because it was the one that was very crystallized, if you will, at that point of time. But what was key in the sentence that you just used, the \$40 million in sunk costs—because that's exactly what it describes; it's the sunk cost, which was acknowledged all along as only being a portion of the costs. There were other elements that were noted."

Do you know what else Colin Andersen had to say? He said, "We have a board, and we talked about the fact that there was a very strong commitment on the part of the government and all three parties and the citizens in the area"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton will desist, please.

You have a 10-second wrap-up.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Andersen acknowledged the very simple fact that the Progressive Conservative Party was out there on the campaign trail supporting the relocation of both of those plants.

CANCER TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Yesterday, the committee heard from Marchese, the company that supplied the diluted chemo drugs to the hospitals. Marchese has always known that they were unregulated. Marchese actually told us that they had directly asked both federal and provincial officials to oversee their operation but they were refused. Why did the province refuse to regulate Marchese even after they were asked?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for this question. I think it's very important to note that Marchese did approach the College of Pharmacists. The College of Pharmacists reported back to Marchese that because these were not drugs that were being mixed for individual patients, it did not fall under

the definition of a pharmacy. Therefore, it did not fall under the jurisdiction of the College of Pharmacists.

The College of Pharmacists referred Marchese to Health Canada. Health Canada is responsible for the manufacturing of drugs. Indeed, it has a policy on its books that if a pharmacy does not fit under the definition of a pharmacy, then it likely is a manufactory and falls under the jurisdiction of Health Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is still rather disappointing to hear the answer from the Minister of Health. It's as if the College of Pharmacists exists out there without the oversight of her ministry, and it's as if the grey area is still news to her ministry. These facts were known long ago. The reality is that the government chose to do nothing. To make matters worse, the government now seems to be putting the responsibility of oversight on the backs of our hospitals.

My question is rather simple: Does the minister understand that it is her job to provide oversight of our health care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I take my responsibility extremely seriously.

I do think it's important that the member opposite understands that Health Canada is responsible for the safety of drugs. I was very, very pleased that Health Canada has clarified the position and that we have introduced regulations—that the College of Pharmacists is posting regulations that will fix this problem. That will go a long way to fixing this grey area.

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Speaker, I am as concerned about this situation as anyone—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —taking strong steps to fix the problem.

AIR QUALITY

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Last week the minister released the 2011 Air Quality in Ontario report, which marked the 41st year of long-term reporting on air quality in Ontario. Research has shown that air pollution has negative health effects, increases health care costs and causes premature deaths. The 2011 air quality report concluded there was a decrease in the levels of air pollutants and that air quality improved in Ontario. This is great news, especially to the health of the youngest residents in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he tell the House about the improvements that have been made since the last air quality report?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, Ontario's air quality is continuing to improve. Emissions of harmful air pollutants continue to decrease. Air quality has improved significantly over the last 10 years, especially

nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide, three major smog-causing pollutants.

We also measure levels of fine particulate matter—tiny particles in the air that can come from a variety of sources like aerosols, smoke fumes, dust, fly ash and pollen. Yearly averages have decreased approximately 30% since 2003. Fine particulate emissions from industrial processes have decreased by more than 57% over the 10-year period from 2001 to 2010, and the transportation sector shows a gradual decrease of 23% over the same period.

The report confirms the actions we have taken, specifically the phase-out of coal, emission trading regulations, emission controls on Ontario smelters and Drive Clean emissions—

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I would like to thank the minister for his leadership and sharing with the House the positive news.

Air quality in Ontario has improved significantly over the past several years. In the minister's answer, he identified some of the progressive initiatives that our government has undertaken which improve Ontarians' health, taking our commitment to the environment seriously.

Since 2003, our government recognized that the health of our Ontario communities, like my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, and our environment are a high priority. We have taken many steps to improve the air quality in Ontario.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he explain what our government is doing to improve the air quality in Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Ontario's air standards, as you would know, are among the toughest in North America. We're still looking at new ways to improve our air quality. We don't intend to give back the gains we've made, and there's still more to be done.

Eliminating dirty coal-fired electricity generating units is the largest initiative of its kind in all of North America. Since 2003, our government has cut coal use in Ontario by nearly 90%. By the end of this year we will only have two coal plants operating, and by the end of 2014, Ontario will be one of the first places in the world to eliminate coal as a source of electricity production.

Our emissions trading regulations for nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide have helped to reduce air pollutants, and the Drive Clean emissions testing has successfully reduced emissions in our transportation sector, an area where reductions are needed and difficult to achieve.

Ontario's long-term energy plan is helping to improve our air quality by increasing the use of emission-free electricity, such as wind, solar and other forms of clean energy.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. In light of the emerging gas plant scandal, where the government schemed to understate the true cost of cancelling

the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants and then took deliberate steps to hide who was responsible for deciding to cancel the gas plants, how can the Premier continue to maintain the pretense that her government has the confidence of this House?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of talk this morning about transparency. This afternoon, the Premier of this province will be appearing before committee, as suggested.

After the arrogance of what went on across the way—and I hope there will be an apology to the Premier from the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, who stood in this House and said, “We shouldn't have to haul you before the committee like some Quebec construction industry snitch”; the member from Leeds–Grenville, who talked about playing calendar and playing games. Yet when we asked the Leader of the Opposition to be before the committee today, he was suddenly too busy. He may appear on the 7th or the 14th; who knows. When we asked Geoff Janoscik, the candidate in Mississauga South, to come before the committee, he refused.

Mr. Speaker, I will go on in my supplementary.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. There's a moment in which it's difficult to find whether or not I can land somewhere, because everyone's heckling, even when the answer is being given from the members of that side, and when the question is being put on that side. You would help everybody if we all agreed just to stop heckling, and let the question be put and let the answer be put.

Supplementary, please?

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, the Premier keeps saying that the budget motion is a confidence motion, but taken literally, it only pertains to the budgetary policy of the government, not confidence in an overall sense. In contrast, our confidence motion allows for a more comprehensive test of the confidence that the House has in the government, setting aside the political auction sales that the last two budgets had become in this minority Parliament.

Hundreds of years of parliamentary tradition dictate that any vote can be designated as confidence by the government, and any government that can't command the confidence of the House should resign.

By refusing to call the confidence motion for debate and a vote in this House, the government demonstrates that it believes it might be defeated if a vote were held. If they themselves don't believe that they can command the confidence of the House, what gives them the right to table a budget this Thursday afternoon?

Interjections.

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

Answer.

Hon. John Milloy: You know, Mr. Speaker, I keep hearing heckles across the way that this is a serious business, and it is a serious business—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Simcoe–Grey, come to order. The member for Leeds–Grenville, come to order. Thank you. Now you've got it.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, this isn't political games that we're asking these people to come before committee.

Geoff Janoscik put out a press release saying, "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." We asked him to come before the committee to talk about the PCs' position on the cancellation; he has refused.

We asked Mary Anne DeMonte-Whelan to come before the committee. She put out a pamphlet to thousands of houses saying, "The only party that will stop the Sherway power plant is the Ontario PC Party." This morning, at the last minute, she cancelled.

Will they work with their colleagues to make sure that these witnesses come before the committee?

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Emails from Chris Morley, former chief of staff to Dalton McGuinty, show the Premier was briefed personally about cancelling the Oakville gas plant. Presumably, there was a discussion of costs.

Does the Premier agree that it cost a lot more than \$40 million to relocate the Oakville gas plant? And when did she know that these costs were much higher than her government was claiming?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite knows that I am going to be at committee this afternoon. I'm going to be speaking to whatever questions are put before me.

I will just say again that at every juncture, when information was given to me, that was the information that I related, Mr. Speaker. I talked about the information as I understood it.

But the reality is that, this morning, the OPA provided two different cost estimates. Both estimates differ from what the OPA previously advised the government. The estimates have changed over time. That is what the OPA said this morning. I will be at committee this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: For months, the government has claimed it cost \$40 million to cancel the Oakville gas plant. The Minister of Energy said on October 3, 2012, "Let's be very clear: The memorandum of agreement speaks to the cost ... and we know that the cost ... is \$40 million." Since the Premier was sworn in, she hasn't corrected that number.

We know the Premier was briefed by Chris Morley before she signed her name to the government policy to go into arbitration on Oakville. Why did it take months of public pressure and committee hearings to get the Premier to agree that the cost was a lot more than \$40 million?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: It was this Premier who has asked the Auditor General, an officer of the Legislature, to look into it.

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There was a bit of noise before, a little bit of enthusiasm. Let me share Colin Andersen's quote from this morning: "The \$40-million number was the one that was used at the time of the announcements because it was the one that was very crystallized, if you will, at that point in time. But what was key in the sentence that you just used, the \$40 million in sunk costs—because that's exactly what it describes; it's a sunk cost, which was acknowledged all along as only being a portion of the costs. There were other elements that were noted."

We have asked the Auditor General to look into it. As has been pointed out, a number of figures were provided by the OPA. Let's allow the Auditor General to do his work, and let's have the committee start to do some productive work to make sure a situation like this doesn't arise in the future.

FLOODING

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Minister, Thunder Bay and the surrounding area municipalities of Oliver Paipoonge and Conmee experienced significant flood damage in May 2012. This flooding, which was reported to be as high as six feet in some basements, resulted in damages to 4,400 homes and businesses, affecting countless families. It also resulted in significant damage to municipal infrastructure, washing out roads and bridges, damaging culverts, and causing shoulder erosion and sinkholes.

Could the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tell this House what the government has done to help the people of Thunder Bay, Oliver Paipoonge and Conmee to help them recover from this flood?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank my colleague for the question, and I want to recognize the people, the staff and the first responders of Thunder Bay, Oliver Paipoonge and Conmee for their tireless work during and after this disaster to help their community.

As the House may know, I was up in Thunder Bay last week, and I was able to meet with the mayor of Thunder Bay, Keith Hobbs, and the disaster relief committee to commend them for their swift action at the time of the flooding and their assistance to residents to recover from the flood. They acted quickly, they repaired basements and removed dangerous mold, and they ensured that residents were in a safe and healthy place to live. As a result of the hard work and advocacy by my colleagues from Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Thunder Bay–Superior North, I was happy on Friday to inform the city of Thunder Bay that the province will provide \$4 million under the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program to help the city pay for their response, and we continue to work with them today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister. It's good to hear that we have support in the city of Thunder Bay and municipalities in repairing the damage that was caused by this flood to over 4,400 homes.

The minister mentioned in the original answer that our government is committed to providing \$4 million to help the city of Thunder Bay pay for these repairs to many of the private residents' basements. Unfortunately, there have been claims in this House that our government has only provided \$300,000 to the people of Thunder Bay for this disaster.

Could the Minister share with this House if our government has provided additional funds to the people of the city of Thunder Bay and the surrounding areas to repair the damage?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I appreciate the question. The province remains committed to providing up to \$17.2 million to Thunder Bay and area municipalities under the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program. To date, we have already provided \$3.5 million to help to reduce the financial burden of Thunder Bay and affected municipalities. These funds will help rebuild and rehabilitate infrastructure such as roads and bridges. It also helps reimburse individuals who have suffered losses from this disaster. We've also provided up to \$200,000 to cover the administrative costs of the disaster relief committee, who are volunteers who have done important work to help the people affected.

While I was in Thunder Bay, I was able to clarify the ODRAP rules, and when the staff of municipal affairs and housing looked into the estimates of those claims, we noticed they were on the low side. I'm glad to report that the committee will be re-examining its eligible claims, and I expect there will be an adjustment on those claims.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Premier.

Colin Andersen's testimony at justice committee this morning was a scathing indictment of your Liberal government's scandal. He confirmed that your \$40 million figure to cancel Oakville is not even remotely accurate, and that the true cost is nearly eight times higher. While we have become accustomed to your numbers not adding up, even your finance minister must feel uncomfortable standing behind the fudged numbers related to these gas plant boondoggles.

Our want of confidence motion has been tabled, and refusal to call our motion for debate is an affront to democracy. Premier, will you stand in your place and commit to calling the confidence motion today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Colin Andersen appeared in front of the committee. I've shared some of the quotes, some of the material that he talked about—the original \$40-million figure. He also provided the committee with a number of different cost estimates, which I think lends a lot of value to the move by this Premier to ask the Auditor General to look into it.

But again, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that Colin Andersen pointed out today was that he was very much aware that all parties of this House supported the cancellation of the Oakville plant. As I say, these are not political games. We asked the Leader of the Opposition to come today—a man who starred in a YouTube video, a man whose candidates put out press releases and a Twitter feed, all promising this—to talk about the work that they did, the policy work and valuations. We've asked Conservative candidates to come forward, and one surprisingly cancelled first thing this morning, while another has refused to go. So perhaps in the supplementary the honourable member can talk about his efforts to get them—

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

Mr. Bill Walker: Same old spin.

My question is back to the Premier again. Premier, when you took the week-long mediation course, you must have learned that there are two sides to each dispute and a means to resolve every dispute. In case your memory fails you, I'd like to offer the following reminder: Your Liberal government told the hard-working people of Ontario that the cost of cancelling the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants to save Liberal seats in the last election was approximately \$355 million lower than the actual cost. The hard-working people of Ontario are tired of your government wasting taxpayer dollars in scandals, Premier.

The Ontario PCs have tabled a motion to test whether or not the people of Ontario still have confidence in your government, given the accumulation of the scandals under your watch. Premier, will you stand in your place, show some integrity and call that confidence motion today?

Hon. John Milloy: I don't see this as being spin. The member of Halton, Hansard, June 1, 2010: "The people of Oakville have told you they don't want the proposed gas-fired power plant ... and I agree with them."

The member from Halton, Hansard, September 14, 2010: "Oakville residents have called on you to change the location of the proposed Oakville power plant.... I have listened to the people of Oakville, and I agree with them."

The member from Halton, a press release, September 14, 2010: "Minister, will you move the Oakville power plant? I am asking the minister to consider moving this plant."

The member from Halton, Hansard, October 19, 2010: "I was pleased when it was cancelled."

Mr. Speaker, I could go on. Dozens and dozens of quotes from the opposition, where they put forward the exact same commitment. It was a promise they made and a promise we kept.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Yesterday we heard from the London Health Sciences Centre, the hospital most affected by the diluted chemotherapy

drugs. Hospital officials told us they would never have knowingly used a non-regulated provider and that they trusted the safety of the procurement process.

There is ample evidence that the ministry has known about this grey area for years. Can the minister explain why her ministry did nothing for so long?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question. I just want to take a moment to say thank you to the people from the London Health Sciences Centre who appeared yesterday and I think gave very thoughtful and very thorough answers to the questions that were put to them. This has been a difficult time for everyone at London Health Sciences, and I applaud them coming and giving the answers that they did yesterday.

As I said to the earlier question on this issue, Marchese did approach the College of Pharmacists. The College of Pharmacists informed them that they did not have the authority to regulate that particular activity and referred them to Health Canada.

I think what is very important here is that we are taking the steps necessary, in collaboration with Health Canada, to ensure that this does not happen again.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Ontarians want to know exactly what went wrong and how this could have happened. For the almost 700 patients affected in London, the urgency is even greater. The hospital seemed to do everything in its power to protect its patients, but the ministry failed in its duty of oversight. Will the minister explain why she failed to protect patients in London when they needed the protection the most?

1130

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I agree that we—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to pass the test. The member from Lanark is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I completely agree that the patients affected and their loved ones deserve answers. That is why I have appointed Dr. Jake Thiessen to really do a thorough investigation so that we can get answers and we can take appropriate steps.

We're not waiting, though, to take steps. The College of Pharmacists and the hospitals are taking appropriate steps now, but we do await the more thorough review.

I also think it's important to note that Marchese could have chosen to deliver this under their pharmacy; in fact, the original contact was with the regulated pharmacy. They then chose to spin off a separate company that did fall into this grey area.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Our government really recognizes that bringing leaders together across sectors is one of the best ways we can drive innovation. Our province is home to world-class researchers, leading institutions and very strong private sector partners that have helped make this

province number six in the world for the quality and the impact of its research. This research creates jobs, generates economic growth, and it makes Ontario one of the best places to live and work.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Research and Innovation: What is our government doing to ensure that leaders across all sectors, including government, are collaborating to produce the best outcomes for Ontario when it comes to research?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Research and Innovation, I am proud to be part of a government that is forward-thinking and innovative.

Great advances can be made by sharing best practices, ideas and resources. Our government recognizes the importance of collaboration. Collaboration will translate into job creation, better health care, a cleaner environment and a stronger economy.

Recently, our government invested \$100 million in the Ontario Brain Institute. This investment will support a network of data on brain diseases across disciplines. Researchers will be able to turn information into clinical application and commercialization opportunities.

Data is an integral part of our knowledge-based economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I'm glad to hear we're investing in an institution that's doing important work in the area of brain disease.

I know that the minister was travelling in the Thunder Bay area recently to the regional research centre.

We all know in this House that collaborating and sharing information is critical. We can find solutions to our shared challenges if we do that.

Big data is a major trend in the technology and research communities, and it appears that's going to drive a lot of innovation. Some say that data is the currency of the new economy. Our ability to access, understand, search and organize information is important.

The work of the Ontario Brain Institute is a great example of the important work that can be done through sharing data.

Speaker, through you again to the minister: What other government investments are being made to ensure the sharing of data?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member again for that question.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of data sharing. With our contribution of \$7 million, IBM Canada was able to partner with leading universities across the province to create the IBM Canada Research and Development Centre. Using state-of-the-art computing facilities, this centre is focusing on solutions for climate change, gridlock and also on mapping of the human brain.

I recently attended the Think Conference organized by ORION, or the Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network, which focused on big data. ORION members

can access a global grid of research and innovation and educational networks. Students, educators, researchers and businesses across the province can access and explore data and share information.

I am proud to be a part of a government whose investments in innovative, collaborative and forward-thinking projects is—

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

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: My question is for the Premier.

Speaker, the government has “known from the outset” that the true costs of cancelling the Oakville plant are exponentially higher than \$40 million. The Premier knew. The minister knew. The cabinet knew. The Liberal caucus knew. The Liberal Party knew. This government is rotten to its core. It's morally bankrupt.

Premier, the time has come. Will you call the confidence motion so we can put your government out of its misery?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: This is a Premier who, when she took office, immediately offered a select committee to the opposition. They refused because they wanted to undertake a witch hunt against a former member of this Legislature. This is a Premier who asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation. As has been pointed out, the OPA brought a number of figures, a number of estimates, before the committee this morning and spoke about the complexity. Let's allow the Auditor General to do his work. This is a Premier who asked government members of the committee to come forward with a motion with the broadest search possible of government ministries and agencies to produce documents on gas plants, and they voted against it.

The fact of the matter is that we have a Premier who will appear in front of the committee this afternoon, as invited, and who has shown—

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

Supplementary.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again to the Premier: The NDP may be willing to excuse your failures and nine years of scandal, but the PC caucus will not. The Liberal government has lost the moral authority to govern. It's over, Premier. Call the PC want of confidence motion today.

Hon. John Milloy: We have media interviews talking about the commitment of the Progressive Conservative Party to cancel those plants. We have statements in the Legislature. We have press releases. We have the Twitterverse. We have the Leader of the Opposition appearing and starring in a YouTube video.

All we have asked is that PC candidates and the Leader of the Opposition come before the committee to explain their side of the story, the costing analysis that they undertook. So far, we've been stonewalled at every

turn. We asked the Leader of the Opposition to be there today, and he played calendar. We asked Progressive Conservative candidates to come forward, and they cancelled at the last minute or refused to come forward.

When will the Progressive Conservative Party show the level of transparency that the Premier—

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

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you will know, because you were Minister of Education at the time, that your government has followed an RFP process that has essentially put out of business small bus companies that had been operating for years in this province.

Just last week, we had the Minister of Education say that it was the perception of her ministry that in fact there were more small businesses in the bus business today than there were before. How does that square up with the reality of all those small businesses that closed down across Ontario, from central Ontario to northern Ontario and across this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, I'm pleased to respond. As the member knows, we've asked our school boards to move to consortiums so that they can consolidate the busing between the public and Catholic boards and provide a more efficient management of the service. Those consortiums then in turn have been asked by the Auditor General, who looked at this—and the ministry, I agree. But the Auditor General, when he did the first audit of school boards when we expanded his mandate, actually looked at school board procurement of transportation services and suggested that just having a contract that went endlessly on with no competitive procurement process was not an acceptable process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'll tell you what is not acceptable: when the government decides they're to put out of business people who have been operating buses in this province for 50 to 100 years. That's what is not acceptable. There are bus companies in Barrie, there are bus companies in Cornwall, in Timmins, in Elgin and across this province that have been shut down as a result of this policy. Why? Because this government decides only the big international bus companies should be in the business of providing services to those school boards and to our children.

1140

I say, again: Will you for once get the real perception and understand what you're doing is killing small businesses in this province, something that should not be done?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I think it's important to keep this in perspective, that since 2003 our government has increased the funding for transportation services by 34%. In fact, if you look at—because you mentioned small rural boards, we've actually provided, in this school year

that we are currently in, \$217 million in funding specifically to rural boards for transportation.

But you asked about what has happened with the procurement in those boards where they are doing a competitive procurement. In fact, where the consortium is doing a competitive procurement, we've seen the number of local operators increase their market share from 39% to 49%—

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

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Order. It's never too late to be warned, and it's never too late to have someone named—never. Thank you.

Member?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Our government was the first in nearly a century to strengthen the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, in 2009. This is something I'm very proud of.

In Scarborough Southwest, we have many animal rescue groups, and they are concerned about the well-being of all animals. There was discussion last fall about how Ontario could ensure that we continue to have the strongest animal welfare system in the country.

Speaker, can the minister tell us what our province is doing to further strengthen the protection of animals in Ontario?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from Scarborough Southwest for his question. I know that he's an animal lover.

After I announced a three-point plan, we consulted with many of our partners, including the OSPCA; the Canadian Council on Animal Care; the Ontario Veterinary College; the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies; various animal protection and advocacy groups, like Zoocheck; inter-ministerial partners; AMO; the city of Toronto; former employees from Marineland; and other animal organizations.

We have completed the consultations now, and we are reviewing the feedback. Our goal is the same: We want to start any required changes this spring, including possible legislative amendments, to better protect animals in Ontario.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order, Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. Earlier today in response to a question to the member from Halton Hills—and I would like to cite—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Order. That might be funny, but you still have to have decorum.

The member on your point.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would like to draw your attention, Speaker, to standing order 23(h): “Makes allegations against another member.” The government House leader made allegations that the Leader of the Opposition refused to come before the justice committee looking into the gas plant scandals that the Liberals have perpetrated.

I have in my hand, Speaker, which I will present to you as well, a letter from the Leader of the Opposition indicating to the committee his—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's enough, thank you. I will allow the member—and any member at any time can correct the record if they've made a statement that needs to be corrected. That is not my purview; it's the member's purview if they've made a statement that is not correct.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to introduce in the Speaker's gallery today a guest of mine, the mayor of Brantford, Chris Friel. I'm glad you're here with us, Chris.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing on a point of order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to correct my record. I stated earlier that the Oakville cancellation costs from the OPA were \$1.1 billion. I've just redone the math. I apologize; it's \$1.094 billion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My goodness.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Timmins–James Bay has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Education concerning bus contract RFPs. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

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

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome Pietro Sostegno and Shannon Neely. They're from Advocis and they're joining us this afternoon.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize and welcome members of the Federa-

tion of Ontario Traditional Chinese Medicine Associations, a traditional Chinese medicine group that has more than 2,000 members. They're here to voice their concerns regarding the one-sided negotiations the Wynne Liberals took to regulate a very complex industry.

This morning, the Federation of Ontario Traditional Chinese Medicine Associations held a press conference and an informational lunch reception here at Queen's Park for all MPPs and staff to educate members of this House on the complexity of TCM. They've also brought in 12,000 signed petitions of individuals who will be directly affected by the implementation of the new regulations.

I've had the chance to meet with numerous TCM practitioners now, and I appreciate the amazing work that they do, not just for the Chinese community, but for all Ontarians. Let's be reminded of their remarkable contributions to our health care system.

I ask the health minister and other cabinet ministers to re-engage with the traditional Chinese medicine community and ensure the new regulations are implemented in a fair and mutually beneficial manner.

CARNATION REVOLUTION

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's my pleasure today to rise in this Legislature and commemorate a historic event and important day for many constituents of Davenport. This past Thursday marked the 39th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal. On April 25, 1974, after almost five decades of dictatorship, Portugal threw off fascist oppression with a peaceful revolution. Citizens, soldiers and children celebrated this victory by pouring into the streets and placing carnations on the uniforms of army officers and into the muzzles of guns and rifles.

April 25 is now celebrated in Portugal as Freedom Day. Citizens, politicians and unions come together and march in the street to celebrate their civil liberties and political freedoms achieved after the revolution.

Last week, on April 25, I was honoured to welcome and recognize revolutionary Colonel Carlos Alberto Évora Maia de Loureiro in the Ontario Legislature. On Saturday, I had the pleasure to join the Association of the 25th of April to celebrate the anniversary and honour the colonel with our local Portuguese community in Davenport.

Speaker, the Carnation Revolution and Freedom Day are important reminders to people around the world that peace and non-violence are powerful tools of resistance. They are also reminders that democracy is something we must cherish and work for every day.

On April 25, we join our Portuguese brothers and sisters to celebrate Freedom Day and the brave Portuguese people who struggled for democracy and peace.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I would like to inform the House that schools throughout York region, including those in

the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, have begun campaigns to raise awareness for the need for new bone marrow and stem cell donors. Called Sarah's Drive for Hope, it was started by Mark and Leah Watkin when no bone marrow match could be found for their daughter Sarah, who was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia.

Because there was no match, Sarah had to endure an aggressive course of chemotherapy. Thankfully, the treatment succeeded, and she is now in remission.

Two teachers at Bur Oak Secondary School, Aileen MacInnes and Elisa McGann, and Aileen's grade 12 history class heard about Sarah's story and decided to take action. They hosted a donor drive at the school which was attended by close to 300 students and community members. A simple swab inside the mouth is all that it takes to enlarge the potential donor pool for all the families like Sarah's who are searching for a suitable match.

I'm pleased to report that the Bur Oak drive has already resulted in finding a match for someone in need. I commend the efforts of these two amazing teachers, their students, Sarah and her family, and everyone in York region who has participated so far.

To see how you can help, I urge everyone to go to the website onematch.ca.

VICTIM SERVICES AWARD OF DISTINCTION

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise in this House today to recognize and congratulate Dawn and Ed Novak from Utterson, in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, on being awarded the Attorney General's Victim Services Award of Distinction on April 25 right here at Queen's Park.

The Novaks have experienced something that no parents should ever have to. In May 2006, Dawn and Ed lost their daughter Natalie to a violent crime that was committed by a former boyfriend. Since this tragedy, the Novaks have made it their mission to raise awareness about the need for intervention in supporting victims of violence and speaking out on the issue of violence against women and girls.

Just this past week, Ed wrote a passionate, half-page article that was printed in local newspapers.

Many Muskoka high school students have seen their video presentation, *If Only ... Nat's Story*, which helps adolescents to recognize the signs of abusive relationships.

Dawn and Ed also speak at schools, telling Natalie's story and encouraging discussions on the topic of violence against women and girls.

Their important message has spread across the province. It will continue to resonate as community leaders and politicians recognize the need for action to be taken through efforts across the province and country.

I had the pleasure of attending the ceremony where Dawn and Ed received their award from the Attorney General. I would like to congratulate them and thank

them for their tremendous and continuing work to bring about changes to protect women and girls.

BANGLADESHI PROTEST

Mr. Michael Prue: Last week, April 24 was a rain-soaked day, and it was my privilege and honour to be outside with a group of Canadians of Bangladeshi origin as they met in a silent and peaceful protest on the lawns of Queen's Park.

They were mindful, and I was mindful, that their protest was directed to their previous homeland and that the protest more properly should have taken place in Ottawa, but they are from Toronto and this was the easiest and best place for them to get to.

On that day, they wanted the public to know about the destruction of minority communities in Bangladesh. They wanted the public to know about war trials that have not taken place in the 40 years since liberation. They wanted to know about the arrests of those who exercise freedom of speech.

At the conclusion of their protest, they wrote a letter, which I had the privilege of sending to the Speaker. I hope he has received it, will read it and perhaps take some action on it.

They had a moment of silence because, only about a few minutes before their protest began, they found out about the factory collapse in Bangladesh that we now know has killed about 340 people.

As I watched them, as I observed their demeanour, I have to say that I was very proud of the freedom they exercised and the responsibility they took in Canada, their new homeland.

PRÉVENTION DE L'INTIMIDATION

M. Phil McNeely: J'ai annoncé, le vendredi 26 avril dernier, une aide financière de 48 500 \$ de la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario au Centre des ressources communautaires Orléans-Cumberland. Cette subvention permettra de poursuivre, pour une autre année, le programme ESPACE : programme d'éducation et sensibilisation pour la prévention des agressions commises envers les enfants.

Ce programme est unique en son genre. C'est un outil essentiel dans les écoles pour faire la promotion des droits des enfants et pour prévenir les agressions. Il est tellement important que les jeunes qui se rendent à l'école à tous les jours puissent y retrouver un milieu d'apprentissage sécuritaire et inclusif. Il n'y a pas de place pour l'intimidation et la violence dans nos écoles et dans les foyers des jeunes. Je salue donc l'initiative du CRC Orléans-Cumberland de mettre en place un programme comme ESPACE.

Les ateliers d'animation permettront de donner les outils nécessaires aux enseignants, aux parents et aux enfants et ainsi contribuer à diminuer la vulnérabilité des enfants et des adolescents face aux agressions.

Je félicite donc les responsables du programme au centre, M. Joffré Malette et M^{me} Ketny Théogène, pour

leur dévouement. J'espère qu'un tel programme pourra voir le jour dans l'ensemble de nos écoles en Ontario.

1510

MICHELANGELO PROSTHETIC HAND

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Today's fantastic advances in technology, materials and design have put incredible possibilities within our grasp. That point was driven home by a recent procedure in which a 48-year-old London amputee was fitted with a life-changing prosthetic hand developed by Ottobock, a company whose Canadian headquarters is located in our riding of Burlington. The advanced device is called the Michelangelo hand and uses advanced software that increases speed, responsiveness and predictability of performance. Through electrodes, it is able to read electrical signals in the wearer's muscle and then send a signal to a processor that moves the hand accordingly.

The Michelangelo hand is the only prosthetic hand with a thumb that electronically moves into position, allowing it to function more like a human hand. Multiple-grip functions also allow users to master everyday tasks, whether preparing a meal or holding a loved one's hand, and the thumb can open to create a natural palm shape.

First supplied to US veteran amputees starting in early 2012, they have since become available to civilians. Ottobock released the Michelangelo hand in Canada last year.

I'm happy that these kinds of success stories come out of our riding of Burlington. I am thrilled that the remarkable work being done at Ottobock is able to help give amputees greater independence.

NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Mr. Bill Mauro: Last Friday, in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, NOMA held their conference, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association—by all accounts, an outstanding success. A record number of the members of NOMA were in attendance: Approaching 300 were there. I want to thank the cabinet ministers from our side of the House: nine of them, which was for certain a record in terms of the number of cabinet ministers ever attending a NOMA conference. So we had a fantastic turnout.

I also congratulated, and will again, new President David Canfield, the mayor of Kenora. David is not a new name to people. He's incoming and taking over from Ron Nelson, the outgoing president. Ron is an old friend of mine. He did a great job for a couple of years, and David Canfield will do an equally great job as well.

I congratulate Kristen Oliver—Kristen used to work for Lyn McLeod, my predecessor in this riding—the new ED of NOMA, and outgoing executive director Charla Robinson, who's taking over the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce.

During my remarks to the conference, I had an opportunity to invite the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Glen Murray, up, who reannounced something we had just put out previously, a short time earlier: a \$100-million down payment on roads and bridges for small, rural and northern municipalities. A further consultation will go on around that program to make it permanent.

As well, I was pleased to chair the first cabinet committee on northern Ontario during the NOMA conference outside of Toronto. As well, I want to convey that incoming President Canfield was very pleased to announce the support of our government for the Environmental Lakes area in northwestern Ontario, and he wanted me to convey his appreciation to the Premier on that announcement.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Some of our economy's best innovations come from the farm. Mark Brock of Shepherd Creek Farms near Staffa is one of those innovators. Mark was awarded the 2012 Innovative Farmer of the Year Award.

For over 15 years, Mark has been finding better methods for soil management. He has adopted conservation till and no-till farming techniques.

I also want to recognize another innovation in agriculture. Powerline Films is a production company from Stratford. Powerline recently made an important contribution to our agri-food sector. Their 23rd video about farming and healthy food debuted at Queen's Park last week. Their production, Growing Good Food Ideas, is a collection of unique stories promoting food and farming in Ontario. I congratulate Simon Brothers, co-founder of Powerline Films, and Luke Mistruzzi, co-founder, director and animator, for their successful series.

In recent weeks, I have attended and hosted various meetings about agriculture in Perth-Wellington. I met with the Perth County Federation of Agriculture at their annual MPP and MP forum. I hosted a round table on agriculture in Clifford with MPPs Lisa Thompson and Bill Walker. Farmers told us they are tired of red tape and duplication. They would rather be in their fields than behind their desks filling out paperwork. They wonder about the future of our risk management programs. They are concerned about wind turbines and the rising cost of hydro.

Mr. Speaker, farmers just want to farm. I'm so proud to support them.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I beg leave to present a report on the pre-budget consultation 2013 from the

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Flynn presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Very shortly, Speaker, yes.

We travelled to Windsor. We went to Timmins. We went to Ottawa. We went to Thunder Bay, and spent a few days in Toronto. I want to express my sincere thanks to the members from all three parties, the members of the public that appeared before the committee, the staff from all three parties and, of course, the wonderful staff in the Legislative Assembly that helped in the preparation of this report. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe Mr. Flynn moves adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND SAFETY AMENDMENT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES TECHNIQUES ET LA SÉCURITÉ

Mr. McDonell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 61, An Act to amend the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 61, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes techniques et la sécurité.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. The act establishes restrictions relating to inspection fees. It also provides that an inspector is not permitted to conduct an inspection under the act unless he has held an authorization under the act for a minimum of two years. This restriction applies beginning two years after the bill receives royal assent.

New subsection 16.1 of the act requires the minister to establish a self-inspection program for authorization holders. The minister has the power to make various regulations governing the program, including prescribing of procedures that authorization holders must follow while performing inspections and providing for inspectors to audit records and perform spot inspections.

New section 17.1 of the act requires the corporation to make available on its website any guideline or checklist that an inspector uses to conduct initial or periodic inspections. New section 17.2 of the act requires the corporation to give authorization holders the guideline or

checklist that will be used for the purpose of any inspection other than initial or periodic inspections.

The act provides that if any part of a code or standards ceases to exist, it will be deemed to continue to exist subject to certain conditions.

Under this act, a person may apply to the corporation to request that a director authorize the use of codes, standards, guidelines or procedures or changes to codes, standards, guidelines and procedures necessary to accommodate new developments or technological advances, or allow a variance from any regulation or minister's order made under the act.

The act also sets out what must be included in the application. The corporation must appoint a three-member panel. The panel's hearings must be open to the public. The panel must prepare a report and report back on whether or not a director should take the actions requested in the application, and the corporation must respond publicly within 15 days.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I assume that was the explanatory note.

PETITIONS

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for the member from Prince Edward–Hastings to entertain us with petitions.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that you send a couple of pages up, if that's okay. I have petitions here from thousands of Ontarians who enjoy and require the services provided by traditional Chinese medicine practitioners. I'd like to read those for you. There are 12,000 here in all.

1520

It's entitled, "Please Stop the Current Regulation on Traditional Chinese Practice.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario regulation 27/13 will effectively destroy the practice of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in Ontario, leaving countless patients with limited or no choice in managing their personal health;

"Whereas 27/13 requires that (a) TCM records and prescriptions must appear in English, French or Latin, resulting in miscommunication which could be harmful to patients; (b) more than 90% of common ailments can no longer be treated by TCM doctors; (c) TCM doctors cannot sell their essential herbal medications and supplements; (d) they must acquire an extensive knowledge of western medical theory, whereas western doctors 'qualify' in TCM after only dozens hours' training;

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

"We call on the government of Ontario to upload the long-held status, and value to the community, of verifiably licensed TCM doctors, and immediately stop

and review the current destructive regulation. At the same time, we urge an innovative and fair regulation designed to protect and benefit both patients and practitioners."

I agree with this and will send it to the table with three pages this afternoon.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I've got a petition signed by over 300 people, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the University of Toronto, with Infrastructure Ontario, approved a plan to replace grass with synthetic turf on its back campus field for the 2015 Pan/Parapan AM Games; and

"Whereas the back campus plan will degrade the fabric of the campus and destroy one of the most substantial green spaces in downtown Toronto;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly direct the minister responsible for the Pan/Parapan Am Games to withdraw his support for this project and seek a sustainable alternative venue to the back campus field. The back campus is one of the original features of the university and a cultural heritage landscape. Designed with restrictive specifications for international field hockey (FIH) pitches, the plan raises many social and environmental concerns. The government of Ontario and the University of Toronto ought to lead the world in designing sustainable open spaces for Canada's largest city."

I sign this petition.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition. I'll put my signature to it and I will give it to Gabriel.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition from residents in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the Ontario College of Trades has no clear benefit and no accountability as tradespeople already pay for licences and countless other fees to government; and

“Whereas Ontario has struggled for years to attract people to skilled trades and the planned tax grab will kill jobs and drive people out of trades;

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

“To stop the” Liberal “job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately.”

I gladly support this petition and will attach my name.

PAN AM GAMES

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

“Whereas the University of Toronto, with Infrastructure Ontario, approved a plan to replace grass with synthetic turf on its back campus field for the 2015 Pan/Parapan AM Games; and

“Whereas the back campus plan will degrade the fabric of the campus and destroy one of the most substantial green spaces in downtown Toronto;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly direct the minister responsible for the Pan/Parapan Am Games to withdraw his support for this project and seek a sustainable alternative venue to the back campus field. The back campus is one of the original features of the university and a cultural heritage landscape. Designed with restrictive specifications for international field hockey (FIH) pitches, the plan raises many social and environmental concerns. The government of Ontario and the University of Toronto ought to lead the world in designing sustainable open spaces for Canada’s largest city.”

I agree with this. I’ll put my name on it and give it to page Brendan.

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

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

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

“Whereas the residents of the community of Scarborough–Agincourt share unique interests; and

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

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

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

“Whereas ‘community of interest’ is a mandated consideration of the federal Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act; and

“Whereas the original proposal from the commission included a unified Scarborough–Agincourt riding; and

“Whereas the commission’s report would inexplicably divide the Scarborough–Agincourt community; and

“Whereas the residents of Scarborough–Agincourt should not be divided and the electoral riding should remain, in its entirety, with its north Scarborough neighbours;

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

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

I fully support this petition and I give it to Chedi.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

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

“Whereas the Ontario College of Trades introduced new membership fees on April 1, 2013, which hit hard-working tradespeople to the tune of about \$84 million a year;

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

“That the Liberal government stop this job-killing trades tax and shut down the Ontario College of Trades immediately.”

It’s signed by many people from my riding, and I’ll attach my signature to it and hand it to Megan.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from—I’d better say “Nickel Belt,” because it’s getting too heavy for her.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I could only carry half of them. This is as much as it goes; the other half is coming. Here it goes:

“Whereas Ontario regulation 27/13 will effectively destroy the practice of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in Ontario, leaving countless patients with limited or no choice in managing their personal health;

“Whereas 27/13 requires that (a) TCM records and prescriptions must appear in English, French or Latin,

resulting in miscommunication which could be harmful to patients; (b) more than 90% of common ailments can no longer be treated by TCM doctors; (c) TCM doctors cannot sell their essential herbal medications and supplements; (d) they must acquire an extensive knowledge of western medical theory, whereas western doctors 'qualify' in TCM after only dozens hours' training;

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

"We call on the government of Ontario to upload the long-held status, and value to the community, of verifiably licensed TCM doctors, and immediately stop and review the current destructive regulation. At the same time, we urge an innovative and fair regulation designed to protect and benefit both patients and practitioners."

Unfortunately, I didn't count them all, but thousands and thousands of people have signed this petition. I ask my good page Gabriel to do a muscle workout and bring it to you, Mr. Speaker.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly entitled "Leaves to Help Families." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to look after their sick or injured family members without fearing that they will lose their jobs at such a vulnerable time;

"Whereas the people of Ontario deserve to be able to spend time looking for a child that has disappeared, or take time off to grieve the death of a child that was murdered without fearing that they will lose their jobs;

"Whereas the federal government has recently extended similar leaves and economic supports to federal employees;

"Whereas the government of Ontario, and the Premier of Ontario, support Ontario families and wish to foster mental and physical well-being by allowing those closest to sick or injured family members the time to provide support free of work-related concerns;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, during spring of 2013, Bill 21, the Leaves to Help Families Act."

I support this petition. I will sign and give it to Benjamin to present to the table.

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 will sign this and hand it off to page—

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

UTILITY TRANSPORTATION VEHICLES

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the use of all-terrain vehicles ... is legal on schedule 2 highways in northern Ontario; and

"Whereas many residents of Ontario have switched to utility transportation vehicles (UTV); and

"Whereas the use of UTVs in schedule C of the Highway Traffic Act is allowed north of areas in far northern Ontario and unorganized territory....

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

"Therefore, be it resolved that the government of Ontario direct the Ministry of Transportation to enact legislation to allow the use of UTVs on class 2 highways throughout northern Ontario."

I fully agree and I hand the petition to Simon.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support it and I give it to Fiona.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: To the Legislative Assembly:

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

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

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

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

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

I'm pleased to sign and support this, and send it down to the table with Eve, one of the pages.

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Sarah Campbell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's mineral wealth belongs to the people of Ontario;

"Whereas the people who collectively own these natural resources should stand to enjoy their benefits;

"Whereas Ontario's Mining Act presently calls for resources mined in Ontario to be processed in Canada, yet allows cabinet to grant exceptions to the clause;

"Whereas these exceptions ensure residents of Ontario are told why our resources are being shipped elsewhere—information that can be used to better plan for infrastructure and job training needs to ensure a more competitive environment;

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

"To amend the Mining Act to ensure that people living in Ontario maximize the benefit of their natural resources."

I support this petition and give this to Benjamin to deliver to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 23, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les agences de recouvrement, la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.*

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It is a pleasure to rise again in this House and lead off on a bill relating to consumer protection. I will be splitting my time with the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, who will conclude the leadoff with valuable input regarding the real estate market.

This is an omnibus bill, just like its predecessor of the same number from the previous session of the 40th Parliament. An omnibus bill tackles several issues and enacts mostly unrelated issues to each other, usually under a common theme. Last year's Bill 55 was a budget implementation bill, an exercise in kicking the can down the road that we've seen this government do over and over again. While the province requires urgent fiscal action to reverse the disastrous course that we're on, the 2013 budget is still pending as we enter the month of May. This time, a new session brings us a new omnibus Bill 55, but dealing with consumer protection.

I would like to point out that whatever the Liberal government may say regarding its commitment to consumer protection, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, was tabled and enacted by the Progressive Conservative government. Moreover, it stood on the order paper of the third session of the 37th Parliament of Ontario under the name of the Honourable Tim Hudak.

The Progressive Conservatives have always been at the forefront of an open and trustworthy consumer market. I would like to lighten the mood for a moment and refer my honourable colleagues to the leadoff of what was then Bill 180. Our current leader, Tim Hudak, listed how the Consumer Protection Act would address the shift of consumption to the services sector and how it would ensure a solid framework for consumer protection for the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment.

Mr. John O'Toole: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I'm not sure there's a quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is there a quorum?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. You may continue.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you. I would like to lighten the mood for a moment and refer our honourable

colleagues to the leadoff that was provided on the then Bill 180.

Our current leader, Tim Hudak, listed how the Consumer Protection Act would address the shift of consumption to the services sector and how it would ensure a solid framework for consumer protection in the 21st century. We knew then, as we do now, that ensuring a tough environment for dishonest businesses was essential for consumer confidence, and we delivered on that commitment.

Following the leadoff, the House heard questions and comments and further leadoffs. The issues raised in that discussion were on gas prices, hydro rates, tanning beds and auto insurance. Fast-forward 11 years, and the issues and the names have hardly changed.

This assembly sometimes resembles the movie *Groundhog Day*, something that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound can relate to. He's not here today but has talked about that.

Speaker, there are 13 million Ontarians, and it stands up to scrutiny that none of them live under a rock or are completely independent of the society outside their family unit. This means they need to engage with others through a common system of exchange that has rules, guarantees and, sadly, the occasional rotten apple.

They become consumers, and it is the duty of every government to ensure that the presence of three factors that grease the engine of market economics: clear, universal, understandable and accessible rules. Consumers cannot be confused by a patchwork of regulations that force them to consult the e-Laws website on a regular basis.

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At the same time, businesses must know what type of environment they operate in and enjoy a good degree of certainty of what tomorrow might bring from this government. Too often, we see this Liberal government choose the power of regulation without regard for the consequences and, sadly, sometimes for their own financial benefit and at the expense of hard-working Ontarians.

I spoke about excessive regulation in the farming sector in my speech on the Local Food Act earlier this month, yet farming isn't the only sector government regulates without considering the consequences. Earlier this year, the government implemented an utterly useless change in its vehicle emissions testing system, against the recommendation of the Auditor General, that left thousands of Ontario consumers at risk of losing their perfectly clean-running vehicles. It took them more than two months to amend the policy, and it still caused unnecessary expense for the consumer.

Unlike acts of Parliament, regulations hit us the same moment that they hit the pages of the Ontario Gazette, without scrutiny or feedback from the opposition, who, it seems, does a much better job of consulting Ontarians in coming up with real solutions, as we've done in our white papers.

The second factor, Speaker, is recourse when the rules are broken. Our court system is not as slow as elsewhere in the world. However, a claim by a consumer against a less-than-honest business can take months, if not years, to process. This will inevitably cause skyrocketing legal costs; stress, with all of its health consequences; and, last but not least, a decrease in consumer confidence.

When consumers are not secure in the knowledge that their rights are protected, consumption diminishes and the economy suffers. This means the minister must have excellent enforcement and judgment tools and work in conjunction with our federal counterparts such as the Competition Bureau.

The third lubricant of our machinery that generates prosperity and tax income from government is information. This province has one of the highest-skilled and best-trained workforces in the world, an achievement it should always be proud of, and we must also strive to have the best-informed consumer market in the developed world. This can only be achieved through proactive and long-term plans of action and consumer education that goes beyond the occasional press release and good story in the Toronto media. We can have a consumer protection framework of the highest degree of perfection, yet it would be utterly useless without a consumer who is well versed in its workings.

Many things have changed since 2002. Then, the Liberals were blaming the Progressive Conservatives for high hydro rates, and the dollar was trading in the range of 60 cents US. Business was booming. Ontario was a place to work and set up business. After 10 years of Liberal government, we have yet to see an election promise that they've kept. Electricity rates are close to tripling. The provincial debt is skyrocketing—close to doubling—under this government.

But this government has been extremely diligent when it comes to finding new areas to cover their addiction of spending. They have more than tripled the unfunded liability of the WSIB, and pension plan shortfalls are reaching critical levels.

Let us not forget the huge tax increases. The health tax and the HST are just two of the over 100 tax and fee increases levelled at the Ontario consumer to try to fill their unquenchable thirst to spend.

Does anyone in this House remember what I believe was the first promise that this government made and broke? It signed a contract with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that it would not raise taxes. It not only broke the agreement with the Ontario health tax, the largest tax increase in Ontario's short 138-year history, back in 2003, but it had the gall to defend it in court.

Certain industries have evolved; others have sprung up, and the Consumer Protection Act needs to evolve to reflect these changes. We have before us a bill to amend three acts and address consumer concerns in three industries: debt settlement, water heaters and real estate. I'll begin by addressing debt settlement, because it is the most straightforward portion of Bill 55.

Pick up any free daily newspaper and look toward the end. One classified page is taken up by psychics, and the

next classified page is taken up by debt settlers offering their services. The sales pitch is always the same: Your bills are too onerous, your payments are long overdue, you are under pressure, and there is a way out. Often, this way out is touted as cheap, fast and easy.

I wish to point out that even on October 28, 2002, when what was then Bill 180 came into second reading, our leader, the Minister of Business and Consumer Services, Tim Hudak, said: "The first exercise is always to use common sense. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is, and we ask them to exercise caution." Often, for all you know, one might be calling the settler and then asking the psychic if it's going to work, because the industry is marred with quite a few rotten apples.

A vulnerable Ontarian who needs to tackle his or her debts will sometimes resort to a debt settler. They can be honest or less so, and there's nary a way of knowing. Ideally, the consumer would do some research and read reviews. Then the consumer would compare the services of some settlers and pick the most appropriate for his or her needs.

This isn't how it happens, unfortunately. The landlord is calling; collectors are calling; your employers are upset because there are persistent collectors calling your office; and the kids are crying. Your spouse is grumpy, and you feel that "bankruptcy" is a dirty word. The promises of getting out of debt fast, painlessly and cheaply are all too alluring to pass by.

While no settlement is ever painless, if you have ever had one, you can kiss your credit rating goodbye. We need to see some serious steps in the legislation to ensure that once a consumer—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —has resorted to a settler, he or she can kiss the collectors goodbye with equal measure.

If the bill strengthens the terms of this agreement to settle a debt and ban upfront fees, it will generate an incentive for the settler to generally pursue all available avenues for earning his or her commission.

Does this mean, however, that the settler now has the agency power for the consumer? When a collector calls the consumer, it is a contract with a settlement service guarantee that the consumer will be left alone. If this bill doesn't have that provision, it's missing an important piece of the puzzle.

Across this House, members share a common commitment to ensuring consumers are told the truth about businesses, both in advertising and privately. Not telling fibs has been part of our common codes of conduct and laws since before the times of Moses, and false advertising laws are in place throughout Canada.

If all of a sudden we need to prohibit the same practices in debt settlement services, I think we'll have to look at the false advertising framework across all industries, identifying the efficiencies that make this practice prohibitively necessary.

I also believe that the consumer needs to know, when he signs a contract, that the organization has his best interests at heart and that no conflict of interest exists with the organization that is providing the service.

I understand that this ministry has heard of issues around agreements between the lenders and the debt settlers that provided benefits back to the organizations. Minister, I want to refer you to an old saying: One cannot have two masters. Either they're working for the lenders or they're working for the debtor; not both.

The legislation must make any and all remuneration to the settling organization known to the debtor—no exceptions. For instance, some credit counselling service firms feature credit representatives on their board of directors. It doesn't take an expert in corporate law to understand that a firm directed by those to whom the consumer owes money will focus on recovering most of the debt rather than examining the consumer's financial situation and determining the most appropriate repayment schedule and amount.

According to some sources, consumers who resort to credit counsellors will end up repaying approximately 90% of their debt, while those who avail themselves of the services of a settler are more likely to obtain settlements below 50%.

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There isn't any magic involved. There is a question of interest. The consumer deserves to know, before entering into a contract involving his or her debt, the interests that are served by the company and where the company's income originates from. Credit counselling and debt settlement are two different approaches, and most settlement firms act as advocates for the consumer alone. They bring their experience and contacts to the service of the consumer's interests, since only a record of successful settlements will maintain them in business. The confidence of Ontarians in the ministry and its legislative remit must be fostered by enshrining principles such as full disclosure of the company funding and directorships to the consumer.

However, the minister chooses to defer such policy points to regulations. This can be problematic. With an act of Parliament, the opposition can identify the issues of concern and provide the government with advice on improving the legislation. Last year, when we discussed Bill 82, we highlighted our concerns with proposed wireless regulations and we were happy to see the government listen, at least in part. Regulations, on the other hand, are made behind closed doors and as such are much more vulnerable to influence than an act is.

We don't need to dig deep to find examples of bad regulations. Tire stewardship fees, Drive Clean tests, the Toronto G20 security regulations: The government has made all efforts to regulate first and ask questions next. This is why we would have liked to see certain mandatory disclosures enshrined in the Consumer Protection Act rather than an accessory act or, worst of all, a future, yet-to-be-determined regulation.

The minister raises an important issue that likely affects more industries than just the debt itself. An honest, diligent and experienced debt settler can be a godsend to a consumer in trouble. He brings a wealth of experience, contacts and alternatives to bankruptcy. I

hope that throughout this debate all sides of the House will concur that we must ensure the consumer has access to the goods and services that he wants or needs.

If I can read part of the Auditor General's report, where he talks about this in particular:

"A key requirement for the registration and licensing processes is to ensure that applicants meet standards for integrity, honesty, and financial viability, and that they comply with the consumer protection and business obligation requirements of the legislation for their industry. We found that the files we reviewed had little or no documentation to demonstrate that the business or individual met these requirements, including:

"—for collection agencies, debt collectors, and assistant bailiffs, whether the applicant's credit history had been checked;

"—for collection agencies and bailiffs, the information on whether the required trust account was established;

"—for collection agencies, whether financial statements were obtained;

"—whether criminal background checks on the principals involved were ever conducted; and

"—whether the applicant had supplied proof of citizenship, landed immigrant documents, or other documents showing eligibility to work in Ontario.

"We also noted that the ministry continued to renew collection agencies' licences even when they had been the subject of numerous past complaints. The Collection Agencies Act gives the ministry the powers to refuse to issue a new registration or to revoke or suspend an existing one if the ministry believes that the business 'cannot reasonably be expected to be financially responsible in the conduct of business' or its past conduct indicates that it 'will not carry on business in accordance with law and with integrity and honesty.' For example, we found about 20 collection agencies that had each averaged from 20 to more than 460 inquiries and complaints annually in 2002-03 through 2008-09. All of their licences were renewed and active over the last two years, even though there was no documentation of any follow-up during the licensing renewal process to assess the legitimacy of the complaints.

"The ministry informed us that it has revoked licences for serious and repeat violations, making these decisions on a case-by-case basis.... We agree with the ministry that the number of complaints should not be the only basis for revoking or withholding a collection agency's licence, because complaints might not be justified or be all that serious in nature.

"However, especially when the volume of complaints is significant, some follow-up should be required."

So we see there are issues here that he brought up that need to be addressed.

On water heaters, there was news in 2012 due to Direct Energy's negative-option billing action. It's upsetting that what should be a simple and straightforward industry in Ontario is instead marred by so many issues. We have to maintain the focus on what is wrong: the deliberate deception, hiding of costs, the exploitation of

customers' vulnerabilities by certain rotten apples in the door-to-door sales sector.

The minister is doubling the cool-off period for water heater rentals, which is one aspect of our ministry's remit. Why not other contracts, such as gym memberships or any other future performance contract? If the purpose is to protect the consumer from incurring onerous cancellation fees, the problem is the fees rather than the cool-off period. In this case, the bill is a treatment but certainly not a cure.

Once a new heater is installed, following 20 days, if the consumer hasn't sorted out the matters with the original supplier, they will face some severe penalties. Cancellation charges can run up into the hundreds of dollars. Moreover, the suppliers are free to charge outrageous amounts for damages such as small scratches on a 10-year-old tank.

Aggressive sales tactics are certainly a concern, but let's remember that consumers are taken advantage of in more than one way. The fact of the matter is that you cannot legislate away deception and vulnerability. We have many laws against undesirable actions; that does not mean people have stopped doing them. We need to strengthen the ministry's enforcement tools and ensure consumers have recourses beyond the court system, since often the ones who get into trouble are also the ones who can least afford a lawyer.

Doubling the cooling-off period and requiring plain language rests on one assumption: The consumer will both sign at the door and then do research and calculation. Remember, people tend to complain when things go wrong, which usually means they've received service and the cool-off period is long past. So whether the cool-off period is a period of 10, 20 or 100 days, until the problem materializes in a massive bill or shoddy customer service, the minister is likely not to hear about it.

Minister, you haven't mentioned anything regarding either full cost disclosure by the salesman or the cancellation fees and penalties. If, as I said, many consumers won't complain until the problem has materialized in their credit card system or bank account, this bill offers no improvement except column inches in print media. Consumers need clear rules, smooth transitions, open and fair competition, and minimum inconvenience. Some of these principles transpire in some form from the minister's statements and press releases.

One issue that, as I say, we highlighted were the cancellation fees under this bill, and the procedures—issues such as needing delivery to warehouses. The two largest players in the field are both under investigation by the federal competition board for steps that they've taken to make it very difficult to cancel long-term contracts. We've seen equipment that's been installed for longer than its renewable life. I guess you wouldn't reinstall it; the equipment is generally thrown away. But when the customer calls to cancel the service, he's either put on hold for long periods of time or he's tried to be talked out of it; scare tactics sometimes seem to be used. These companies have been charged in the past. They're under

continued investigation. I would have expected some words in this bill to address that issue. That seems to be a bigger issue, of the complaints that we've been able to ascertain.

So let's not forget: The two largest players in the industry are under federal investigation by the Competition Bureau. This bill has open support for at least one of those large players. I may be a lone skeptic, but when a company under federal investigation for supposedly anti-consumer actions suddenly talks about consumer protection, one has to wonder about the details, the consequences of the legislation.

So we'll be working through this legislation. We'll be looking for amendments on these two items to give the bill some teeth and to really get to the root of protecting consumers' needs in this province.

1600

As we talked about before, sometimes the people who need the help the most can't resort to some of the measures talked about, through the courts. They haven't got the financial abilities or the time to do such a thing. Sometimes the issue comes up and people just want a seamless contract that works, where they can go out and it's trouble-free. This bill goes some of the distance, but it has certainly some further room to travel.

I will pass the reminder of the time over to the member from Prince Edward-Hastings to discuss the real estate portion of it. Thank you.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate here this afternoon in the Legislature. It's interesting that we're talking about Bill 55, the Consumer Protection Act. Earlier today we had members of Advocis here. The members of Advocis will be holding a reception a little bit later on. My good friend Shannon Neely is here from the Quinte region—a financial adviser from the Belleville area. It's interesting that they're here on this day, because financial services and the industry have a term that they like to use—we heard the term earlier today in our meeting—and that is “raising the bar.”

It refers to setting a higher standard for professional conduct among its members, and it's a sentiment that pervades a lot of high-cost sectors of the economy. Financial advisers use it, so do mortgage brokers and, yes, even our realtors use it as well in Ontario. That's because they understand that there's a certain amount of trust that goes into transactions of that magnitude. Let's be clear: Buying a house and making a real estate transaction is one of the largest transactions financially that you're ever going to make in your life for most people out there, and it takes a great deal of trust in your real estate agent. I guess you could say that's what the second half of this bill is all about, and that's the real estate sector.

Members in good standing in any profession often feel like the actions of a few bad apples or bad members drag down the entire profession. The goal should be to get those bad actors out of the profession, get those bad apples out of the business, and the best way to do that is to set industry-wide standards for conduct. We've seen that in other elements of business and society as well.

As I mentioned, today we're lucky enough to have the representatives from Advocis who are here, and they are the province's financial advisers. They're here at the Legislature to talk to us about their issues. The standards that we're applying to the real estate sector are in the best tradition of raising the bar. We want a real estate sector that uses the best and most transparent and most accountable sales practices that we can have here in Ontario.

Anyone who has ever worked in a commission sales environment—and I'm fortunate enough to say that I never have worked in that kind of an environment, but I know a lot of people who do work in sales, whether it be broadcasting sales, of course, in my previous profession, or door-to-door sales or real estate. Obviously, as the small business critic and the critic for red tape for the Ontario PC Party and the official opposition here at Queen's Park, I talk to a lot of people who are in that kind of business on a day-to-day basis, and they know that the pressure they're dealing with is intense. I can definitely feel that, especially in a time like now where, let's be honest, the economy isn't at its best in Ontario. As a matter of fact, it's far from being at its best, and it's sagging behind the rest of Canada and in fact much of North America.

In that kind of a business, where you're in sales and commission sales, your paycheque at the end of every week or every two weeks or at the end of every month depends on how effective you are at selling whatever product it is to your customers. And when whether you eat depends on how well you sell, you'll have members of the profession who, unfortunately, sink to tactics or new lows that the profession would generally frown upon. But it's trying times. This is where the issue of the phantom offers comes in when talking about real estate transactions, and phantom offers have been a problem in some sectors of real estate in the province recently. What needs to be made clear is that no one out there approves of phantom offers; that's quite clear.

I have a few dozen small brokerages in my riding of Prince Edward-Hastings, which includes the Belleville region and Prince Edward county out into Lake Ontario, and then north into North Hastings as well. There are a lot of small brokerages there. There are some large brokerages as well in my riding, and realtors and brokerage owners are the same as any other small business owners in a community right across the province.

The success of the business is very much tied to the conduct of the employees in the community. Your brokers are ambassadors for your brokerage, and their conduct reflects on the business that they work for. So it's very important that if you own a brokerage, those who are out there representing you, trying to complete sales and make money for both themselves and your brokerage, are behaving properly and are raising the bar. As much as the principal at a brokerage may want to see their agents sell, they of course don't want to harm their business in the process, and that's where the ethics come into play.

Realtors themselves are small business people, and any small business person wants repeat customers, as

does anybody who's in a commissioned sales job. They want to have people that trust them, that know that they've done good for them in the past and that they'll be a repeat customer in the future. That's in financial advising, that deals with car sales and that deals with real estate, which we're talking about right now. That's tied to the quality of the service you deliver. If you're a good and upstanding real estate agent or real estate brokerage, then you're going to get that repeat customer.

It's not in the long-term interest, of course, of any of those people to lower the bar or employ questionable sales tactics. It's obviously not in the interest of the clients who are out there, and that's who we are looking out for in this bill. Inflating prices is how we create bubbles, and some may argue that we're in the midst of a bubble here in the GTA when it comes to real estate.

Phantom offers distort the market as well. If one agent pushes the price up on a bungalow in Scarborough or a neighbourhood in the GTA, they push up the price on all similar bungalows in that neighbourhood—no matter where it is in the province; not just here in the GTA, but anywhere in Ontario, for that matter. That doesn't help anyone. In fact, it's a general harm to the entire economy. Inflated prices lead to bigger mortgages, more household debt and also higher default rates. None of that is desirable.

You can look at the Ontario books right now and you can see that we're not in a very desirable place when you look at Confederation here in Canada. As a matter of fact, digging deeper and deeper and deeper into debt with every single hour that passes—\$1.9 million in Ontario is added to the province's already staggering and record debt. With every day that passes, we're adding millions of dollars onto our debt—\$23 million onto our debt, which is now at about \$265 billion. The debt in Ontario is at \$265 billion. That's doubled under the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals over the last 10 years. That's debt that's very difficult to get out of.

That's also debt that requires interest to be paid on it. You think about where we are right now—anybody who's out there buying a home knows that this is a great time to buy a home because interest rates are at an all-time low in Ontario. They've been there for some time, but eventually those rates are going to go up. Right now, this year in Ontario, because of the debt in Ontario at \$265 billion, we'll pay \$11 billion to service that debt in interest; \$11 billion is just gone right off the top. That's a staggering number when you think about it.

You talk about transit, and that's a big issue in the province right now, especially here in the GTHA, the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. You talk about \$11 billion and how far that \$11 billion that we pay in interest—that doesn't go to pay for anything except to service that debt—that money is just disappearing, but it could be used to put subway lines in to get people out of the gridlock that is slowing down the economy in Ontario. As a matter of fact, the Toronto board of trade says \$6 billion a year in lost commerce is occurring out there on our 400 series of highways.

That's money that could go to health care, and there are many people in this Legislature, in their own ridings, who are having difficulty or hearing the horror stories about people who can't get home care in their ridings or their hospitals are losing services. I have Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital in my riding, and Trenton Memorial Hospital in Quinte West, where services are being moved out of the hospital.

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And you think about where that \$11 billion could go that isn't going anywhere but to service this debt. Just imagine, Madam Speaker, if the interest rates start to rise. When they start to rise, we're in a world of trouble if we continue to have multi-billion-dollar deficits like we've seen in Ontario over the last five or six years under the McGuinty and Wynne Liberals. They were patting themselves on the back the other day, if you can imagine that, at the Economic Club for having a nearly \$10-billion deficit for the upcoming year. They're patting themselves on the back for that. It's incredible, really. Anyway, I digress.

The notion of commission sales, as I get back to real estate agents: It was put to me this way by a real estate brokerage—the owner of a brokerage here in the GTA: “In commission sales”—this is a quote—“you absolutely eat what you kill, but one lion doesn't have the right to feed a poisoned antelope to the rest of the pride.”

Going back to the bill here that was put forward by the Minister of Consumer Services, Bill 55: If we're going to get serious about business practices like this, then we need to raise the bar in this sector. We have to start to get serious about it and start to put some teeth into legislation. We've seen it time and time again in this Legislature. A bill comes forward and—what's the name of this one again? The Consumer Protection Act. It sounds great, doesn't it? We've heard the name of the local food bill. It has nothing in it that's affecting farmers. There's nothing in there. It's just a nice-sounding title to a bill. It's almost as if they say, “Okay, we need to put something out there to debate today and we're going to call it the Local Food Act. It won't have anything in it. It won't have any proposed legislation in it. We'll just throw it out there and it'll take up some time in the Legislature.”

The members of the opposition and the third party can talk about these bills and how important the titles of these bills are in their respective ridings, but at the end of the day, the government hasn't done any consultation to decide what actually should be in that bill before it hits the floor of the Legislature. It's almost as if they're waiting for us to put the details in the bill here on the floor of the Legislature, but then, even after we do that, they never call it to committee so we can put the amendments in it. That's kind of what this bill is all about, Madam Speaker.

I can tell you that many members on this side of the House in the official opposition have put forward private members' bills. The reason we put forward private members' bills, obviously, is because we're in the official opposition and we have many ideas as to how we can

make this province a better place to live, work and play. We come up with good ideas to put on the floor of the Legislature so that we can debate them and actually make a change in our own ridings and hopefully in the province. But none of them ever get anywhere. None of them ever get anywhere. It's as if this government just wants to live for tomorrow. That's their main objective: to live to see tomorrow and retain their seats and power and continue to have their ministries and continue to have their ministers' paycheques and their drivers and their limos. The objective should be to help our province prosper.

I can tell you that one of the private bills I put forward in this House, as the PC Party critic for red tape, was Bill 28. It was the electronic signatures bill. It would have allowed real estate agents to use electronic signatures, which would have sped up the process. It would have reduced red tape for real estate agents in Ontario. I'm happy to say that that bill, Madam Speaker, was warmly received by all three parties in the Legislature. I think they all realized that it made a lot of sense because, first of all, electronic signatures are available to real estate agents in the rest of Canada and 30 states and most of the UK and Europe. But for some reason, it still hasn't moved on at the committee stage.

We have programs already available that track offers on particular properties in other jurisdictions in Ontario—back to the bill here—and we can harness the power of software like that to track real offers that come in on properties or even if other offers have come in on properties, as part of a sincere crackdown on these phantom offers that are alluded to in this bill. If we can use the technology we have available to make real estate transactions more transparent and agents more accountable, then we'll start to put an end to these phantom offers.

It seems like a month never goes by without the Bank of Canada warning us about high levels of household debt across the country. We know that not all of this debt is mortgages—as a matter of fact, if you're going to have debt, a mortgage is probably the best place to incur that debt—but it is credit lines, it's credit cards, vehicle payments, and any number of other debts incurred by a household to meet expenses. As a nation that's been historically hesitant to run up big charges on the credit card, we've certainly been spending here in Ontario. If there are responsible ways of fighting growing levels of household debt without intervening directly in the market, then we have to explore that. We have to do more than pay lip service to it. And that's all that this bill really does, Madam Speaker. For those of you just tuning in, as I used to say in my broadcasting career, Bill 55 is the Consumer Protection Act.

In order to track phantom offers better and put appropriate consumer safeguards in place, we need to pass Bill 28, which is the bill that I put forward, in order to move real estate sales in the electronic age. We can then make it easier to crack down on phantom offers across the province.

There's also a second part to this bill, and it deals with the real estate sector as well. That's the ability to charge both a fee and a commission on a real estate transition. So you can charge both a fee and a commission on one transaction.

Earlier in my remarks, I talked about the high-pressure sales environment that many of our real estate agents find themselves in on a day-to-day basis. Part of fighting high-pressure and underhanded selling tactics can be fighting the motivation to use those tactics.

I know back in my area, in the Quinte region, the Quinte and District Real Estate Board puts out its stats every month, as all real estate boards do right across the province. I can tell you that March wasn't the best month that we've seen for real estate transactions in the Quinte region. There are probably a number of variables for that, including the weather that we experienced in March, which wasn't very good compared to March a year ago. April wasn't really that great, either. Real estate agents will tell you that part of a good market involves good weather: the feeling that spring is in the air and the daffodils are starting to bloom and the tulips are starting to sprout, and there's that feeling of optimism in the air, and maybe people are ready to start to sell their homes. I can tell you that there is that pressure there to have a good spring in the real estate market.

So what we can do is start to add some stability to how real estate agents are able to make money from their transactions. If we remove some of the pressure on the agent, then we'll remove some of the motivation to use these high-pressure sales tactics. The biggest question about this part of the bill is why the Ontario government has waited so long to move to custom pricing of real estate transactions in the first place. Ontario is the last province in Canada, again, to make this change. Ontario still hasn't made the change on the electronic signatures act, and we haven't moved in this area, either. We're the last to do it.

Why are we always at the back of the bus here in Ontario? We used to be the leader, not so long ago, in Confederation. So really, it's the function of certain government ministries—it's almost as if they're intentionally designed to be reactive instead of proactive. Why are we not out there in a proactive fashion trying to help each and every sector that we possibly can be as productive as it possibly can?

What we end up doing in the province—and keep in mind you're talking to a former news broadcaster here—is reacting to the big news stories of the day. At least this government is doing that: a knee-jerk type of response to events that are occurring out there. If there's W5 doing a big story on some kind of phantom offer scandal in the province, then we come out with this kind of legislation to deal with that.

What ends up happening is that you get more red tape and more regulation.

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Instead of going out there in a proactive effort to try to make it easier for real estate agents or any salesperson

across the province to make money—because if they make the money and they increase their wealth, the businesspeople that I know and that I've met over the last 18 months want to invest in their business. They want to hire more employees. They want to put more people to work. That's what it's all about. Obviously, one of the biggest beneficiaries of a small business person growing their business is the province, because then we are going to take our share—and you know we are going to take our share here in the province. But if our small business sector is shrinking in size and productivity, then we're getting less here in Ontario. The thing that boggles my mind most since arriving here at Queen's Park, as a relatively new MPP, is that we're not doing more of that. We're not taking these proactive steps to make business thrive in Ontario so that we can get back to being the leader in Confederation that we once were.

If you've got a CBC story that deals with bill shock—and I think we'll see some legislation in the next couple of days come back before the House dealing with cellular phones—then you've got a ministry that will come out with legislation to deal with that news story. If you've got a Toronto Star story that talks about the underhanded tactics of door-to-door salesmen, then you've got a ministry that comes out with legislation to deal with that news story. Eventually, you do need to take a proactive approach to governing. You need to stop legislating just to fight problems that come up in the media.

The last meaningful piece of legislation that the consumer services ministry actually passed—and I'm talking about passed, not just put forward or proclaimed—was passed 10 years ago, as my friend from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry mentioned earlier, when the current member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, Tim Hudak, was the minister. He passed this legislation 10 years ago.

If I could paraphrase the BBC for a moment—not the CBC, but the BBC—consumer services is the ultimate “yes ministry.” A story comes out, a piece of legislation comes out to respond to the story in the press, the government gets to appear as though it's actually doing something, and then the story will go away. It really is the ministry of smoke and mirrors, with all due respect to the minister.

This bill is an omnibus bad-news bill, really. It responds to bad-news stories and takes the approach of prying open vague areas of provincial jurisdiction to insert legislation to try to quell a scandal or bad-news story that's in the media. There are important measures in this bill, Madam Speaker, but they were important measures before the stories ever hit the airwaves or hit the press, and they'll be important measures once these scandals have passed.

We, as a party, will be supporting Bill 55 at second reading. But we do need to make these kinds of bills more than just scandal-management bills or bad-news-story-management bills. As I've said, we all want to crack down on things like phantom offers or predatory debt-settlement companies that are out there in our midst;

there are not a lot of them, but there are some out there. It is happening. It is a problem, especially in some sectors or some neighbourhoods in Ontario—not everywhere. It does no good for us to allow these types of predators to exist in our neighbourhoods. However, we need to have more than just a goal in mind.

That's one of the things that has been criticized about this government continually over the past 18 months that I've been here and prior to me arriving here: the fact that they're a government that sets some goals and aspires to do certain things, but they never really put in any concrete targets that they want to reach. They just want to aspire. They may do something; “may” is a word that we hear often from this government. That's the problem with proposing legislation to deal with a bad-news story as well. Instead of coming up with a comprehensive framework to actually address a bad business practice, we have legislation that just deals with or aspires to possibly, maybe, someday reach a goal. We need to put actual muscle into the legislation. It has to actually do something instead of just aspiring to do something, and we have the power to do that here, as legislators in the province of Ontario. Instead, for whatever reason, the government just aspires to do things. It doesn't actually do anything. We need an actual system for dealing with phantom offers. Instead of just saying that we're going to do something about it, we actually have to do something about it.

We need legislation that ensures that the chosen settler is the recipient of collection calls, which this bill doesn't do as well. Why doesn't this legislation deal with anti-competitive tank return when it comes to the issues that my friend from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry was referring to? Why doesn't it deal with anti-competitive tank returns and cancellation costs? It often makes the consumer responsible for high damage costs.

When you draft legislation to play for a headline or to sit on a failure, you're, by nature, drafting incomplete legislation. Consumer protection is important, but too often these bills are about the appearance of action rather than actual meaningful action. But that's a theme again that we've heard from this government in files ranging far beyond consumer protection.

As a matter of fact, right now as we speak, Madam Speaker, the Premier is testifying before a committee of this Legislature in the ultimate example of the appearance of action. She's appearing before the justice committee right now. She could have done something meaningful: She could have simply provided the House with all of the information that we had asked for. This has been going on for a long time now. Tomorrow is May. I believe it was May of last year when we actually started asking for these documents for the cancelled power plants in Oakville and Mississauga. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe it was May that the estimates committee actually started this hunt, seeking the information that the public should get on the cancelled gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga, one of the biggest scandals we've ever seen in the province of Ontario. She's making

it seem as if she's being transparent, but we all know that the game of hide and seek has been continuing. Documents haven't been turned over, and now we've had to require the Premier to come before a committee—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would remind the member to stay with the bill that's being debated. Thank you.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did stray a little bit. I tend to do that when you have a bill before you that—again I have to remind myself of what this bill is. It's Bill 55, which is the Consumer Protection Act. We're speaking for an hour on this bill this afternoon, so you can see why perhaps you might stray, especially when you look at the size of the bill. I don't have the bill in front of me, but there's not a whole lot in there, as was outlined again by my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

What we've seen from this government is really a lack of action. They have the opportunity to bring forward legislation that will deal with not just door-to-door salesmen—we get complaints all the time—and I'm sure my friend Mr. McDonnell does as well as the consumer services critic for the PC Party—from people who are trying to run their business. The TSSA—you know, nothing has come from this consumer services ministry dealing with the TSSA. It could include—

Interjection.

Mr. Todd Smith: We did actually, but the TSSA is out of control. They're charging increased fees at the TSSA, and they're running a surplus. Why? Why would we be doing that to our small business people? I can tell you, the Rosebush family, who operate a propane company back in the Quinte area, is wondering why the consumer services ministry isn't doing something about these fees. They have the ability, right? The TSSA falls under the mandate of the consumer services ministry. Why can't they step in and do something about this?

Last year, chip truck owners—and they're a small business, but these are the people that I try to represent as best I can here at Queen's Park. These are chip truck operators that are being put out of business because the ministry or the TSSA are out there putting these small business owners out of business by charging them exorbitant amounts to comply with legislation that really overlaps other legislation that isn't required. Red tape is the biggest problem out there for small business owners right now.

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We've talked about it in the farming industry when we discussed the Local Food Act, which is supposedly about increasing the demand and mandate to provide local food to our communities. It really doesn't contain much either. The Local Food Act isn't doing anything, really, in the bill to increase productivity for our agricultural sector; Bill 55 is doing very, very little to increase sales or help our small business people, who are out there trying to make a living, increase their business and increase their productivity.

When I talk to small business owners who are out there, and they say, "What can the government do for

me?"—well, the government can actually help me do business by acting in a proactive manner, not trying to constantly bury us in more and more red tape, whether it's the College of Trades—we've heard a lot about the College of Trades in this Legislature and what it's doing to our small business people out there. Some 88% of small business owners who are in the contracting line of work, whether it be carpenters or roofers, electricians, plumbers, drywallers, stonemasons or hairdressers, are all being hit by increased taxes. Let's be honest: That's what it is—a tax.

Instead of helping our small business people expand their businesses and create jobs and grow the economy, this government is doing whatever it can to heap more and more regulation on top of those small business owners, and I hear from those people all the time. That's why a few weeks ago at the Quinte sports centre, when I had the opportunity to sign the stop-the-trades-tax flyer that they had and their petition that they had, I did that, because it's smothering business. It's smothering growth. It's smothering job creation in the province of Ontario.

Bill 119, which was passed a year or two ago and came into effect last January, is costing our construction people an average of about \$11,000 or \$12,000 a year. Why do we keep penalizing the job creators? Home builders and those in construction have been the engine of our economy in a time when our economy has been struggling. Why are we penalizing those people by bringing in a WSIB tax like Bill 119 that's again costing the average business \$11,000, and many more than that? Why are we bringing in the College of Trades? Why are we doing that? They don't even want that—88% of those who are out there.

We need to be acting in a proactive manner to help our business people grow the economy, not just simply saying that we're going to talk to them, which seems to be the mandate and the mission statement of the current government, to have conversations and talk about it—talk about transparency, but do we ever actually see the transparency? Again, we go back to this fake transparency that we've been seeing from the Premier's office when it comes to the gas plant scandal. Why couldn't they just bring the numbers to us, Madam Speaker? They knew what the numbers were. Why didn't we bring the numbers forward—

Hon. Jeff Leal: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Although I've really enjoyed the speech from the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, I would just remind everybody—I believe it's section 23(b)—about directing his or her speech to other matters besides the bill that's currently before us.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. I would remind the member to keep in the spirit of the standing order.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to see that the member from Peterborough is paying attention. That's very nice. Thank you, Minister of Rural Affairs.

I would just like to conclude my remarks on Bill 55 and say, as I say, that when we talk about most of the government bills that are before us, there have been a few maybe that have had some kind of meat on the bone, some kind of an intended outcome, but it seems to me that Bill 55 and the Local Food Act and others that we've been debating recently don't really have any kind of mission except to occupy time here in the Legislature. When we're dealing with the kind of economic instability in the province that we're dealing with right now, little bills like this aren't going to do anything to get us back on track in Ontario.

We need some real, dynamic change. We need some bold, new ideas. We need some fundamental change in Ontario. Bill 55 isn't offering any of that change. It's great that we're protecting a few people, but really, there's not a lot in that bill that's going to change Ontario and get us back on track.

I'd like to conclude my remarks, actually, by addressing my colleagues in the third party, if I could. This bill is an example of a government that lurches from one news story to another, with no actual vision of how this province should be run. We may disagree on the direction that we'd like to see this province go in, but we both agree that actual vision is actually needed in Ontario. If we let this scandal-plagued, visionless excuse of a government continue operating in Ontario, then everything it does from this Thursday forward—budget day—will come with an NDP stamp of approval on it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your time—

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: On that note, Speaker, I'm pleased to contribute to the debate on this consumer protection bill. Most of the measures in this bill are very small steps. Many of the bills presented, as we've alluded to, are baby steps, small steps. The Local Food Act—again, there wasn't a lot of meat on those bones, and this is the same kind of theme of a bill. There needs to be a lot of work done on this bill, and I'm looking forward to sending the bill to committee, hearing testimonies from experts—from people who are in the industry—about how to make this bill stronger so that there is better consumer protection for those people that are buying a home.

First-time homebuyers, second-time homebuyers, inexperienced consumers—I don't necessarily mean that they're the ones that are going to use this bill; people who are experienced, who have gone through a house sale, can still come across a salesperson who perhaps might need to have these regulations imposed so that there is that professionalism on both sides and so that the consumer's interest is protected.

This bill is going to work for everyone, whether they're a new consumer, a senior, a young person or a repetitive consumer, because we have to make sure the people that are delivering their services have the best service policies and best practices in mind, so that when there are contracts signed, both parties know what they're

going to get into. The consumer, of course, has to know what they're paying for and what kind of services they're going to get back from their hard-earned money that they're putting out.

We definitely feel that one of our contributions that we'd like to see in this bill is, perhaps, we're suggesting that it needs to have an advocate, a strong consumer advocate, so that consumers have a place to go when they have complaints. They're going to be listened to and their complaints will be followed up on and addressed—not just having that sieve approach where there's a complaint, it goes through the sieve and nothing is ever done.

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

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Let me say I'm pleased to provide a few comments on Bill 55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013. It was nice listening to my good friend from Prince Edward–Hastings; he spoke with passion, but in some regards, I have to disagree with him a little bit.

To the comments from the member from London–Fanshawe: There are little things in this bill that will help all of us and help the consumer, especially, because the bill touches on many areas that consumers require protection in. It's about door-to-door sales, debt settlement services and phantom offers, as he talked about.

I remember when I arrived here just over six years ago. The Legislature was talking about the deregulation process in the energy sector and the door-to-door sales-people in the energy sector. We implemented consumer protection for the things that were happening then, but you know, if you deal with your constituents on a regular basis, that door-to-door sales is an ongoing problem, because it's a lot of people that are trying to make a living at the door, and they'll use any kind of sales tactic to get someone to sign on a document.

If you look at what's happening, the same thing is happening now on water heaters. It happened on furnaces, it happened on the resale of gas and hydro, and it will continue. I think protecting the consumer will be an ongoing business of this Legislature, because as people out there learn many different ways to bypass the system or overcome any regulations we put in place, they will continue to do these things. The minister is responding to this, and I think it's the right thing to do.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to join in the debate. I want to thank my colleague and friend the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and also my pal from Prince Edward–Hastings, for their comments about Bill 55, the consumer protection act. I appreciate the comments, the suggestions, the ideas about debt settlement, the real estate, the phantom offers.

But I want to pick up on what the member for Scarborough–Rouge River mentioned, and that's the door-to-door sales. I remember that when I first got involved in municipal politics 30 years ago, there was the issue of the

hawkers' and peddlers' licence. I remember issuing the hawkers' and peddlers' licences, and a huge issue being door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesmen. I remember, as a mayor, getting some angry calls that I should revoke the hawkers' and peddlers' licence and get that put out of the way, so it's just interesting that we're talking about door-to-door sales.

But you know what? We also, as politicians, are involved in door-to-door sales when we go out and campaign. I'm going to tell you a little story that happened in last fall's election. I was canvassing on Montrose Street.

Mr. Todd Smith: What were you selling?

Mr. Steve Clark: I was selling myself, but I appreciate that. I was getting a pretty good response, but I had a couple of people who, when I came to the door, looked like, "Oh man, somebody else knocking at my door." So finally, the third door I knocked on on Montrose Street, a buddy of mine said, "Clarky, listen. We've had the hot water salesmen boys running up and down the street this morning. We had the city knocking on our door looking for unlicensed dogs. You're the third to the door. I'm afraid somebody is going to kill you just because you're the third person knocking on the door. We love you to death, we're going to vote for you, but pick another street that hasn't had the hot water kids and the city looking for dog licences." So I appreciate that door-to-door sales can be trying. We've all knocked on a few doors in our time.

I appreciate the comments from both of my colleagues. I look forward to the debate, as I always do, and I look forward to speaking—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to speak on behalf of my constituents in Timiskaming–Cochrane, and for my first shot at G55, stronger protection for consumers. Once again, it's a great title.

It is easy to say that there is nothing in this bill, but there are a few little things in this bill. One thing I'd like to comment on is something that the member from Prince Edward–Hastings said. There are little things in this bill—this bill could make it a little bit stronger—but some of these little things make an incredible difference in people's lives. It's not just the province that has to deal with debt, but it's also people who have to deal with debt, and when somebody gets ripped off on a water heater or gets ripped off on Direct Energy sales or gets ripped off by a realtor—it's fine to talk about the province's debt, that's really important, but you have to also talk about people. I have people in my riding who got ripped off, and that makes a bigger impact in their lives because they have to pay for months and years.

My problem with this bill is, it just picks a few things, and what it has to do when it goes to second reading is actually make a difference in as many people's lives as it can. This is a really good template for a start. Maybe it happens on Montrose Street, but it happens in my town, and they target seniors, they target people who they know don't have a really high education level, who are just busy trying to make a living. They target them and they

pressure them. If this bill can do something to help those people out of that situation, then we should put it to committee and we should make it stronger so that it actually helps people.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to thank the members from London–Fanshawe, Scarborough–Rouge River, Leeds–Grenville—my good buddy from Leeds–Grenville—Timiskaming–Cochrane, and the comments from the member from Prince Edward–Hastings during the main part of the bill.

I think it's interesting that we've brought up this issue. People talked about the door-to-door sales that have happened over and over again. The legislation by this government, obviously, has not dealt with that because we're back at it.

I think, as the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane said, it's a bill that doesn't have very much in it. It's hard to talk about it for very long. It talks about a couple of small issues, but it should go further. If you're going to deal with the credit and debtors, for example, why not deal with all of the issue?

We have issues where we have, for want of a better word, kickbacks from some of the lenders to these organizations. Clearly, if they're receiving revenue from both sides, there's a conflict, and I think we need to address that.

Why are we last in this country, again, with grasping new technology that makes our industry more competitive? We used to like to think of Ontario as a leader. Once again, it's an example of being in last place. It's time to move ahead.

I know that industry in this province does a good job. Sometimes there are bad apples. We may have to look at that. But, if we're going to bring out legislation, if we're going to do it piecemeal—it's like whack-a-mole, like the member from Prince Edward–Hastings said: When we're reading an article in the paper, let's hit that industry. Let's look at overarching legislation that deals with the whole consumer services area instead of just picking off one or the other.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much to my friends from the PC Party over there.

Mr. Steve Clark: We want to get you started good, there.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you. I appreciate that. It's a good start. I feel warm; I feel welcomed.

It's my opportunity to speak on Bill 55. Before I get into the details of the bill itself, I think I just want to start off with a little bit of preamble. Much like the bill starts off with some preamble, I've got some preamble as well. It's about stronger protection for consumers, and I actually want to build on the comments from my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. He's absolutely right in the sense that sometimes we address issues here in

Parliament, or here in Ontario, and they are big issues with a big broad vision of what we can do to shape the province, and we talk about how we can make this province a better place on a broad lens.

Sometimes you do that. But, in a lot of ways, what impacts people more than that is actually what impacts them on a day-to-day level. What impacts them when they're going out and they're purchasing items? What impacts them in their pocketbooks and their bills? Those are no less important to an everyday person. In fact, in a lot of ways, people are more impacted and are more concerned about what impacts their lives daily, directly. It's important for us not to lose sight of that. Consumer protection is something that will impact people on a daily, regular basis.

My preamble is that consumer protection is an essential component of what we do here as government, as elected officials. We need to ensure that we implement different policies and legislation and laws that protect consumers, because many times consumers are vulnerable. There are some who are particularly vulnerable: those who are either in a socio-economic position which makes them vulnerable, or whether it's lack of education or literacy. Sometimes folks have language barriers, physical barriers, physical disabilities. These are all barriers that may cause more problems in life. Particularly where it comes to being a consumer, they may not know their rights and what they are entitled to and what information they require to make an informed decision. It's important that we protect the rights of consumers. That's why the ministry exists.

One underlying theme that I want to bring up is that in addressing the protection of consumers, there is a strong need for someone who will be advocating and promoting awareness about issues that consumers face, because many of the problems that people face when it comes to consumer issues—it's simply because of a lack of education. People just don't know. They don't know what they should be looking for or what they should be doing. They don't know what it means to sign a contract and what the obligations are or when they can or can't or how they can get out of it. Many of the problems that people face could be dealt with if they knew there is protection out there for consumers. They can return items that they're not satisfied with. They have rights that go beyond what the company you purchase from tells you, what the retailer tells you. There are consumer rights that exist beyond what a company's policies are. There are a number of protections out there, but people just don't know about them and how they can engage in them.

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I'll come back to this, but the concept of an ombudsman for consumers is something that we've talked about as a party, and I think it's an idea worth considering. If you have issues and complaints in the province of Ontario, you complain to the Ontario Ombudsman. Similarly, what if there was a dedicated position regarding consumer issues, someone that we could contact to get information in an easy-to-understand way, dealing with consumer issues? It's something to consider.

The bill deals with three major areas: debt settlement services, real estate issues as well as water heaters. Overall, yes, there are some small steps. I think, though, they provide a bit of a framework where we can address some of the things that need to be addressed. Let's look at it as a starting point, not necessarily a destination, and we can go through and see what areas need to be addressed more, what areas we can strengthen, and what areas are good as they are.

I'll begin with debt settlement services. One of the things that I've noticed about debt settlement services is the way it has been portrayed. If you look at the context, you have an individual who has either purchased items through their credit card or has a loan—whatever the way, they've overextended themselves, and they're in debt. Whether it's with a credit card company or a bank, either of those institutions will then transfer that debt to a collection agency. We have a collection agency whose goal is to recover as much as possible—or the bank directly wants to recover as much as possible, or the credit card company wants to obtain as much of that debt as possible. That's their goal.

You have the consumer who has racked up that debt and is in a position where they have money that they have to pay back. There's an agency that banks and credit card companies can turn to; they can outsource to a collection agency. What can a consumer do? What are the options for a consumer? The consumer can consult a lawyer, perhaps, but lawyers are quite costly and difficult, sometimes, to hire. If you're already in a situation where you're in debt, you may not have the ability financially to seek legal advice: What are your rights, what are your obligations, and what can you do? So who do you turn to? What are your options?

One of the options that are out there is debt settlement services. When we're framing the discussion about protecting consumers, it's a bit troubling to me that there's a lot of focus on debt settlement services and not on collection agencies. If you're a consumer, you know for sure that collection agencies aren't in your favour. They're not trying to help you. They're trying to help the banks they work for or the credit card companies they work for—which is fine; they're doing their job. Who's going to help the consumer? Debt settlement services is one option, and there are many debt settlement services that actually provide a great service, that actually help consumers. The fact that we're putting so much emphasis on debt settlement services as opposed to the collection agents, who are in fact the ones—if I'm a consumer, I'm more worried about the collection agents who are trying to get money from me, as opposed to the debt settlement services who ostensibly are trying to make my debts easier to pay back or to settle them for me.

There are some debt settlement services that provide services that are troublesome, that have some practices which we need to address and, I think, need to be fixed. But if you look at the good companies that are doing debt settlement services and what type of impact they have on consumers and compare that to the credit counsellors,

debt settlement services often can provide 40% to 50% on the dollar, with regard to debt. That means that if you owe a dollar of debt, debt settlement services—some of them, the good ones—are able to get you a deal where you only have to pay back 50% of that, which is great if you're in a bad situation. If you're in a tough situation and you don't want to file for bankruptcy and you want an alternative, that's a great alternative. That's a pretty decent savings for someone who might be in a bind.

Credit counsellors—if you look at their track record, it's closer to 80% to 90% of the debt, so 80% to 90% on the dollar. That means if you have a dollar of debt, they're trying to get you to pay back almost all of it, with maybe a minimal savings.

Again, when we're looking at legislating or regulating or protecting consumers, we have to look at the results, and it looks like, in many instances, debt settlement services are actually providing a good service for some folks and they're helping people out.

Why I bring up the contrast between these debt settlement services versus credit counsellors: It's interesting to know that credit counsellors are non-profit, not for profit, many of them, but if you look a bit further and look at their source of funding—and this was brought up by the initial speaker, who's not here now. He initially brought up this point, and it is a great point, that 80% of the funding—this is very important to note—almost the entire funding of credit counsellors comes from the financial institutions, whether it's credit card companies or banks. So their independence comes into question.

If you're getting most of your funding, if the majority of your funding in terms of not-for-profit charitable donations is coming from financial institutions, and your job is to help people settle their debts to financial institutions, then your independence becomes questionable. And if your independence is questionable, if it's uncertain whether you're actually being employed by the consumer or if you're actually working for the financial institution, then the advice that you give—obviously, if you're working for the banks, if you're working for their credit card companies, that's no fault of your own, but if that's the fact, it's probably going to be the case that you're going to encourage someone to pay back as much as possible.

I don't fault them for doing that, but I do fault them if they don't make it very clear and disclose that they're primarily funded by credit card companies or banks or financial institutions. If they don't make it clear that they have ties that question their independence and that their goals may not be to find the best deal possible for the consumer, their goal may be just to get them to pay back as much as possible. If that's the case, a consumer should know that going into it. If a debt settlement service says very clearly, "Our job is to work strictly for the consumer. We're working for you. You're our client. We're trying to get you the best deal possible," that's also important to know. So when making your decision about who you want to go to, you go to the person you think is going to do the best job for your circumstances. That's something that we need to look at.

Some of the points in the bill which make sense and I support and are legitimate: I think transparency is always a good idea, making sure that the contracts that are laid out between these service providers and the consumer—obviously, that's very straightforward and I think that makes a lot of sense, making it clear what the fee will be, how much is being charged for what service and a clear contract between the funds that you are contributing and where they're going and what the settlement will be, and at the end of the day what your fee will be for that settlement being reached.

That's the type of transparency I support. It's a good idea, and I think all members, all stakeholders, everyone involved in this, whether it's consumer advocacy groups or the debt settlement services themselves, would support that. So I don't think that's an issue.

Some of the details that the bill talks about make great sense. They include the name of the consumer, the debt settlement operator, the person that you're dealing with and anyone else who's dealt with you at the company. Those are all things that should be clearly laid out in the contract. It makes sense, and no one would deny that.

As I indicated, an itemized list of the services and all the fees that are paid, the details of the debts and the agreements that are set out—that is all appropriate. It's also important to include some sense of when the deadlines will be, when there's an anticipation of this being settled and how long this is going to last. Those are some essential ideas that make sense. One of the difficulties is that it's hard to predict when things will get settled, so some leeway in that area would make sense.

I also think that the idea of having a cooling-off period—if you do decide to choose to go with a debt settlement service agency, having a cooling-off period makes a lot of sense. Why not? If you're dealing with a company and you decide, "You know what? I've made a mistake. I want to go with someone else," having a 10-day cooling period I think is a sensible thing.

One of the other issues actually that I support is, I mean, misleading advertising—it's difficult to regulate that, and questionably, many people have misleading advertising across many industries. I support the notion that—

Mr. Randy Hillier: You see it in politics every now and then.

1700

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My friend mentions that we see it in politics sometimes. I think that's true as well, that misleading advertising may be some of the reason why folks have lost their confidence in public institutions and in the political process. I think we all have an interest, as politicians and as consumers and as folks who are producing items and goods and are providing services, in making sure that your advertisements are legitimate and you back them up and they are not misleading.

Some of the areas, though, that are of concern, where they shift the balance of power between the debt settlement service and the consumer versus a collection agency, are that these are not to be paid out until a settle-

ment is reached. Why I question that is that it impacts the independence of the settlement service agency.

For example, if I'm working diligently and I provide transparency about what I'm doing and I have a clear contract about all the services that I'm providing and I'm working hard to try to get a good deal for my client, and on the other end the collection agency is just not agreeing—they're not going to settle and they are delaying their settlement; they're saying, "We're not going to settle for this amount," and they've put their foot down and are being stubborn—if I know that I will never get paid until this company agrees, then I may not work as hard to get the best deal possible. I might cave in to the pressure and say, "Okay, whatever. I'll increase the amount that we'll settle for," because I know that at the end of the day I'm not going to get paid until this company agrees. But if I know that I'm going to get paid, for the time I put in, a reasonable fee that makes sense and that's up front and transparent, then I'll put in the effort and I'll fight hard to try to get the lowest and the best settlement possible, and I know that my fee is not contingent upon the debt being settled but on my efforts and my attempts to make that happen and my advocacy for my client. I think there has to be a little bit of an understanding that we need to allow people to charge for the services rendered in terms of the time put in, and I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing.

I think that having some requirements that if you don't settle the debt, there might not be a full payment of your services because you haven't completed the task—but there should be some accounting that you put in the time, you put in the effort, you tried hard to get a service done for your client and you haven't necessarily achieved it.

Sometimes in law, as an example, it happens that you fight hard for your client but you don't win the case. You don't get paid if you don't win the case. If you still put in the time, you still put in the effort, you still prepare the case, I think it makes sense to have some payment, but the amount of payment can certainly be subtracted if the case is not completed. I think that makes sense. But again, it shifts some of the balance and the onus towards the collection agencies and it weakens the negotiating power of the debt settlement services.

Again, looking at the industry, I think there have been some complaints from some consumers. I've received some complaints from constituents that they've approached the debt settlement service and they felt that their situation became worse because there wasn't transparency and it wasn't clear what the agency was doing. It turned out they were putting money into a fund, but the credit company, the collection company, was increasing the amount that was due and there wasn't a clear sense of what the debt settlement service was actually providing in terms of a service, and their situation became worse because their debt just continued to increase. So there are circumstances like that.

I think what we need to do is make sure we have more extensive consultations with the community, with constituents, with both stakeholders, and figure out if those

are the anomalies, those are the exceptions, that it happens only once in a while where there are these problems and that, by and large, people are being benefited. Because if it's the case that people are being benefited, more so, then I think that this legislation may be misguided somewhat. If it turns out that, by and large, debt settlement services are actually helping people out, then we need to take a careful look at the way we regulate them to ensure that they continue to be able to do the good job of providing that service for people.

I think we need to do some further consultations, both with all the stakeholders involved and with the constituents that we represent, to make sure that we're actually doing something that's going to help people out and not hamstring folks who are trying to use a service that might help them out.

A bigger question that comes to mind when we're talking about these debt settlement services, before I move on to the other areas of this bill, is that I think it should cause us to pause for a moment and reflect. The fact that there's such an increase or such a rise in the use of debt settlement services means that we should question what the circumstances are in Ontario that are causing this to happen. Why are people having to rely on debt settlement services in the first place? What is the financial environment?

I think we'll see that much of it is due to difficult financial times. People are losing their jobs, they're not getting good employment, and they're in tough times. Part of it, though, will come down to proper use of credit. People are not very financially literate, and it's not their fault if they don't have—that's not a part of our curriculum; that's not a part of our education. We give someone credit cards and financial tools to borrow and you lend to them, but we don't provide them with the necessary tools to use that effectively and appropriately.

What if we had consumer protection that, any time we gave someone a credit card or a loan or any other financial tool, we had to, as an obligation, specifically explain, "Listen, just so you know, if you're taking out this much in terms of debt and you're only making this much, it'll take you 10 years to pay that off. So you need to reconsider if that's an option for you. If you are spending that on something that's like a car that's going to devalue anyway, that's probably not a sound decision"? There should be some advice up front so people know what they're getting into because many people don't really think about the repercussions of it.

While we are looking at debt settlement services as the end case when you've exhausted everything and you're in debt and then you need to get out of it, we can also, on the front end of that problem, give people some advice upfront, let them know what they're getting into upfront, let them know how to effectively use this credit and loans and these tools in a way that doesn't get them in the position in the first place.

When I talked about the issue of the credit counselling agencies versus the debt settlement services, they're both providing a similar service, and people need to know and

be educated and aware of who is working in whose interest. I think, again, this bill should involve some regulations that also cover credit counsellors, because they're not covered in this bill, and I think we need that to be a piece of this legislation. Where do they fit into the puzzle? They should certainly be regulated, along with debt settlement services—and disclosure and transparency about their affiliations. Like I said, the credit counselling agencies often are not-for-profit, but their business or their income flow—the majority of their revenue is generated from tax-deductible donations from creditors, calling into question their independence.

Debt settlement services are regulated right now under the Collection Agencies Act. That act, actually, has no details about debt settlement services in it. It talks all about the collection side, but it actually doesn't include anything about the debt settlement services side. If we want to regulate the industry, the act itself has to include something about the services they provide. I think that's a step that we should—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: That's an amendment.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Yes. That's definitely a step we should include. I notice the minister is giving me an assurance that that will be included, so that's great.

The other thing is that if we regulate debt settlement services, once they're regulated, they're licensed—they're recognized as being a licensed facility—they should also be given both responsibilities that they have to maintain—the responsibilities would be an ethic and a moral responsibility to provide the best service possible to their client within the legal limits of that ability to do so—but also, once we give them those responsibilities, they have to maintain a certain level of ethics and professionalism.

We should also infer or confer upon those services, those agencies—the debt settlement services—some benefits for being licensed. If they're licensed, on the one hand, there has to be a responsibility that they have to uphold a certain level of professional standards. On the other side, they should also be given some benefits for being licensed, and one of those is—as it stands, if a collection agent contacts an individual, that can be one of the most stressful things that someone goes through. Personally, I sometimes don't get it; it's just a voice on the other end of the phone. But to some people, that is the most stressful thing they can go through. They have physical reactions to that stress: They start to sweat, their voice starts to stammer, they feel nervous, they feel intimidated, they feel pressured. That is something that's very difficult for many people. To receive a letter in the mail from a collection agency saying, "You owe this money and you have to pay it or you'll be sued," that can just floor someone. That can simply just put them in a position where they don't know what to do; they feel hopeless.

1710

One of the things you can do if you have a lawyer representing you—a lawyer can contact the agency and say, "I'm representing this client. Please refrain from

communicating with them." By law, the collection agents cannot contact them further. But if you're from a debt settlement service and you do that, send that letter, that's not recognized. In fairness, if we are going to license and regulate this industry and confer upon them some responsibilities, they should at least get the benefit of being recognized as a service providing a service for their clients. If they indicate that they're now representing their client, a collection agency should stop contacting them, the same way they would if they were hired by any other organization.

Those are some of the issues and concerns that arise around the debt settlement service area, and I encourage the government to look at those concerns and those areas of improvement. At the end of the day, I think we can certainly craft something that will protect consumers and give them the tools they need to deal with some of the most difficult questions that people can face financially, which is, if you can't afford to pay your debt back, what are you supposed to do?

The second portion of the bill, schedule 2, talks about providing legislation for door-to-door sales, specifically with respect to the delivery and installation of water heaters. I think that this was a response to a concern—a real concern that exists in the community, exists in Ontario—so I recognize that the government has taken a step to address a real concern that people face. It is something that I hear about. I've actually experienced door-to-door salesmen that were quite aggressive on this issue, and luckily I was aware of my rights and aware of what I could do, so it didn't turn into a problem. But I know many people find themselves in positions where they don't know what to say. It seems as if the salesperson is representing themselves to be someone from the government, and it feels like this is an official transaction that's going on and they kind of feel compelled that they have to comply with the situation. They sign their signature not really being fully aware of what they're signing their name to. So, it's certainly a good idea.

What I'm concerned about is that it seems limited to the water heater issue. There are many door-to-door salespeople, and if we want to limit it to energy providers, it could be the water heaters but also the actual natural gas and energy providers. I think that would be a natural fit. To expand that not just to be the water heaters—which is certainly one part of the problem—but a natural fit would be the energy, whether it's hydro, electricity, and the gas. I think that's a natural fit; it all works together. Your water heater uses electricity and uses gas, so I think that's a natural fit. I think it should be at least expanded to that area so we're covering off that entire envelope of issues. That's one suggestion that I think is an easy suggestion that could strengthen this bill to make it more useful where it comes to consumers. I think that's a real issue that people face. We could certainly help out people in their day-to-day lives that way.

The cooling-off period, I think, is essential, and the fact that it's suggested to double it to 20 days from the 10

days is a good idea, a good starting point. I may even suggest increasing that a bit further. Sometimes you sign on something quickly and you want to find out, "Did I do the right thing?" It takes a couple of days for you to call around and get some advice. You're a little bit nervous; you're not sure. Giving a little bit of a longer time period to give that cooling-off period—we all live busy lives, and it's difficult to get to our tasks. Creating a bigger cooling-off period wouldn't be difficult to do, and I think it's something we should look at.

Whatever we agree to by hearing the concerns of the people—if this bill gets to second reading—during second reading when we hear from the deputants, we'd like to get their input and figure out what the best time is. But certainly during the cooling-off period, there shouldn't be any delivery or installation of any water heaters or any other items; there shouldn't be any changes to your contract, whether we include hydro or natural gas. There should be no changes during that cooling-off period so that it gives the consumer an opportunity to rethink their decision, to make sure they did the right thing.

Again, what we have to consider when we're looking at this protection is who is at home and who is being impacted by this aggressive sales tactic. Often when we're talking about the aggressive tactics of the door-to-door salesperson, we have seniors who are at home, who are retired, elderly folks. There may be people at home who are not in the workforce, so if they're not in the workforce they may not be in the workforce for a number of reasons. It may be because they're providing primary care for their children or their families. It may be because they are not as employable as their partner, and if that's the case, there may be a connection with that person having some barriers in terms of language, literacy or other issues. These folks who are at home may be more vulnerable people, and so it's more incumbent on us to make sure we give them more protection so that they know what their rights are and what they can and can't do. If we regulated some of the practices, some of the aggressive tactics that take advantage of these difficulties or barriers, we'd be doing the right thing.

Certainly, speaking to the language barrier, I'm speaking for many ridings across Ontario, I'm sure, but particularly in my riding that's certainly a barrier or a circumstance that people are facing and are more likely to be taken advantage of. In my riding, many times there are extended families, and both parents are working, the husband and wife are both working, and they have elderly grandparents, the children's grandparents—their parents—at home providing care for their children or just being taken care of by their children. Either way, we have elderly individuals in the home who don't have the best language skills, who aren't often as literate and aren't aware of what their rights are. If someone comes up and says, "I'm with the government. You need to change your water heater. Sign here," they may end up signing, not knowing exactly what they're signing up for. So I think it's very essential that, alongside this notion of

protecting consumers with regulations and banning during the cooling-off period, we have to have a strong education campaign to let people know what their rights are, what to expect, what they can prevent and what they are entitled to do, and that would address a lot of the concerns. Again, when I started off my comments, I said many of the problems, when it comes to consumer protection, can be addressed with education.

I have received a number of complaints from constituents who were approached by aggressive door-to-door salespeople who said that they were doing a government-mandated safety check, and they went in to check the safety of the water heater and said, "Listen, doing this government-mandated safety check, it turns out that I have concerns about the safety of your water heater." That makes people get alarmed and concerned, and it turns out the water heater is fine, there's absolutely no problem, but this aggressive tactic tricks people and takes advantage of them, and they think that they have to comply and they have to sign along and pay the extra fee.

So some of the things that I recommend to my constituents and some of the things that we could perhaps implement in an education policy: always ask for the salesperson's name; ask for the company, the company address and contact information—you can always ask to see company identification—and always, always feel free to take your time to consider your options. If someone tells you at the door, "You have to make a decision right now, that's it," chances are you're being had and you should not make the decision on the fly. There is no obligation to allow anyone into your home. If you feel uncomfortable letting them in—people don't know sometimes; they think that if it's a government-mandated check they have to let them in—you're absolutely not required to let anyone into your home. That is your sanctity, and you have charter rights which protect the security of your person but also protect you from having unreasonable access to your property or to your home, so you certainly can exercise those rights.

I certainly think that it's important to address this area. I think it's an important area to provide consumer protection. I think it should be expanded, so my criticism and my issue with the bill, as is, is that it's too narrow. It easily could be expanded, and it could provide a very useful tool to protect consumers across Ontario. I'd like to see that as something that we perhaps include in our discussions if this bill gets to second reading.

1720

The third area of the bill talks about real estate brokers. I think that's an area that also requires some attention. Again, some of the comments that were made by my colleagues to my right, talking about how this bill doesn't help small businesses, doesn't help provide bold, new ideas to get the province moving along—in fairness, the bill is consumer protection, so it's not going to do that. It's about protecting the consumer. We certainly need other bills and other initiatives to make small businesses flourish here in the province, and the NDP supports those initiatives, particularly when it comes to

enhancing our small businesses. Supporting farmers and supporting local Ontario businesses is something that we support wholeheartedly. But again, this bill is about protecting the consumer, so those are issues that we can address at a different time, just in response to that concern.

There are a number of issues with real estate brokers that I think we can do to help out the industry—that need support. One of those things was mentioned today, and I've been contacted by brokers in my riding, in my constituency, who have indicated that they want to be able to sign electronically. That's something that many jurisdictions across Canada and across North America are able to do right now. It's a simple thing. We have the technology. It would provide easier, quicker ways, more efficient ways, of conducting transactions, so I certainly think that's something we should do. Again, this bill is about consumer protection, so that's not something that will necessarily be addressed in this bill, but that's certainly something that I think the brokers have a right to.

There's also an issue about brokers wanting to incorporate themselves and their inability to do so at this time. I certainly encourage laws that would allow them to do that. If a broker wants to incorporate and expand his or her business, we should make that easier to do and not make that a barrier.

Talking about what is going on in the real estate industry: One of the problems that is a reoccurring theme is transparency. We want transparent governments that don't waste our money, we want transparent medical services that efficiently use our money and we want real estate agents that are transparent and disclose exactly what's going on. Transparency is a theme in all areas of our lives. We want to know what's going on. That's a human instinct, to know what you're getting into and wanting to know, that curiosity, but also it's a fairness piece. Transparency leads to more fairness, leads to more equity, leads to more justice. In this circumstance, though, ideas are not as lofty as justice, but it's a simple issue of not being misled to think that there are numerous offers on a home when there may not be, and not being led to increase your offer because you're concerned that you might lose out because there are all these other offers. Certainly, having transparency is a great idea that would protect consumers.

Particularly, if you look at the context, there's been a lot of talk about the bubble, the housing bubble, the economic bubble. I recently read—there are discussions that because they're printing off too much money, there might be not just a limited housing bubble but there might be an entire global bubble. The entire economy we are moving towards is inflated because of printing too much currency. These issues of inflation and these issues of not knowing exactly the true cost of something are things that are global, but just to bring it back down to our own communities and our own areas, in Toronto and other areas, if housing prices are inflated because the real estate agent makes it sound like there are multiple offers on a property and you really want that property, you

think, "Okay, listen, I have to increase my offer," and it turns out there weren't any offers on it, you've now just paid a considerable sum more on that property. Given these difficult economic times, every dollar counts, and you've just been put in a pretty financially disadvantaged position. I think we need to, in the broader context, make sure we're vigilant to protect people, and consumers deserve that protection. Having that transparency is good.

The way the bill reads is that they have to present offers to potential buyers in writing, and they'll be prohibited from suggesting or claiming that a written offer exists when one doesn't, so it would require having some clear transparency about the existence of the actual number of offers that are received. It would require having the Real Estate Council of Ontario work with the seller's brokerage to actually keep track of each property, and the offers that are placed on that property, so that you can, as a consumer, know legitimately if there are multiple offers on a property or not. I think that's just a fair way of giving consumers a fair chance at making a good deal on purchasing—one of the most expensive and meaningful purchases in your life is your home, right?

The other amendment that's brought up, and I question it because—in terms of its usefulness for a real estate agent and other brokerage firms, I'm sure they would see a benefit from it—so, providing a way for real estate agents to charge a combination of a percentage and a fixed amount. On the surface, I don't have a concern with that. I think it just creates multiple ways of getting paid. But it doesn't really directly benefit the consumer, and I think it might be somewhat misplaced in this bill. Giving the real estate agent the right to charge in a different way doesn't really help me out as a consumer. I don't care how I'm being charged—whether it's a percentage or a fixed amount, I'll be charged whatever I'm charged, as a consumer. The suggestion is that it might make it easier for online realtors to bundle their services, and other agencies—for example, staging, when you want to stage your home—a way to have a fixed price for the staging separate from the percentage price for the sale of the home. In that sense, it would certainly assist the real estate brokerage, and I think there's some merit to doing it, perhaps. But why it has found its way into a consumer protection bill, to me, seems a bit misplaced. I don't think it really adds up.

Just a real example about the bidding wars that can sometimes happen—although our housing is in a bit of a state of flux, there are still certain areas that are in high demand. Certain neighbourhoods are hot neighbourhoods, where people really want to purchase a home. In those neighbourhoods, bidding wars can sometimes be sparked without any real bidding war—it's almost like you're having a war with yourself. There have been significant complaints to the Real Estate Council of Ontario, also known as RECO—thousands of complaints of this nature where the buyers and the sellers were involved in this. There's a limited supply of homes that are in areas where people really want to live. In those areas, the realtors created a perception that there were multiple bids, and the family members were left trying to

increase and increase the amounts of their offers, and it turned out that there weren't actually multiple offers on those properties. RECO has been contacted about this issue. It is a real issue, that people feel that they're sometimes forced into a bidding war when there's actually no real—the demand is inflated. Again, it suggests the idea that transparency is something that would assist a consumer, and it's something that I certainly support.

In general, if we look at the bill—it has been said that it's a small step. Sometimes small steps can be good, if they're good small steps. Some of the steps here are beneficial to the consumer. I think they help. Some of them, though, need to be broadened and expanded so they can be more meaningful, and some of them need to be rethought.

The areas that need to be rethought—the first part of the bill, again, coming back to the debt settlement services. We need to rethink our goal. If we do further consultations and we find that the debt settlement services are actually helping out consumers, by and large; if they're actually benefiting people by providing them with a good service, then we need to rethink our approach to regulating them. If these services are actually helping people out and regulating them would hamstring or prohibit them from doing the good work that they've been doing, then we've done a disservice, and then this bill is actually not helping people; it's hurting people. So we have to be really careful about that.

On the face of it, I'm very, very concerned that credit counsellors have been left out of the regulation. When credit counsellors are primarily funded, 80% funded, by the credit card companies and the financial institutions, and they're not being regulated at all, but the debt settlement services, which, clearly, their goal is to provide services just for the consumer—there seems to be a bias, and I'm troubled by that. If we're going to enact legislation that protects the consumer, it should be very clearly in favour of the consumer and not in favour of the creditors by default or almost by subterfuge.

1730

We need to make sure that that's not happening here, and again I call for transparency of whoever the institution is, whether it's the debt settlement services or whether it's credit counsellors. Who is funding them? If they're not-for-profit, what's their primary source of revenue or primary source of funding, and does it impact their independence? Because if I'm in a difficult time and I'm in debt, I want to know that I'm turning to someone whose only interest is reducing the amount I have to pay back, whose only concern is making the best deal possible for me. And if their concern is that they're trying to get the most money returned because they're working for the banks, then we need to know that. That's on the debt settlement services.

With respect to the water heater issue, we need to expand that portion. Schedule 2 needs to be expanded. We need to deal with more than just water heaters. It has to be the energy sector, or the door-to-door energy sector, broadly. That's what we need to do in that area.

Then, thirdly, with the real estate agents, the transparency piece is certainly welcome, and it's a good piece to address.

The other issue about the mixed payments, the fixed and percentage, why that's in a consumer protection bill—I still question that.

What we have is an attempt to create a bill that's to protect consumers. So, when we're talking about protecting consumers, we need to look again, sometimes, at the bigger picture. One of the things that comes up time and time again is that consumers in Ontario are not well versed in what their rights are, so we need to have a broader strategy to educate consumers. We have a ministry that's directed toward consumer services, and it's incumbent on that ministry to do more than just present a bill, to also have a clear plan about awareness and education for the broader consumer.

One strategy to address this broader education and awareness would be a consumer Ombudsman. We can consider that in other areas of Ontario. If there's an issue, if there's a concern, you can complain to the Ombudsman. They can investigate, issue reports, delve into the issue and delve into the problems.

Similarly, for the consumer, we need to have a strong advocate that's independent, that's separate from government, that can investigate issues, that can provide advocacy on issues, and so that might be something that we should consider.

We know that there are a number of barriers for consumers; one of those I indicated before. A number of those are illiteracy, lack of language skills and perhaps physical disabilities. Another barrier is that if you are trying to get help or assistance when it comes to consumer affairs issues, and perhaps the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke might be interested in hearing this—people who want to actually initiate a claim, to go to Small Claims Court, need to get legal representation. If they're already in a difficult situation, they might need some legal aid. Right now, legal aid does not fund people for Small Claims Court situations, if they are faced with a water heater that they didn't want and it's thousands and thousands of dollars and they want to challenge that in court and say, "Listen, I didn't actually know what was going on," or, "I actually wanted this to be rescinded," or, "I wanted this to be taken back. That's going to be a \$10,000 water heater in my home; I can't afford that. I can't afford to pay for that."

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sue me.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We're going to sue some people.

But the person who might be in this position in the first place, who signed a contract for a water heater that they realized they didn't need—they didn't realize they were signing it—might not be the type of person who's as comfortable initiating a lawsuit, initiating a claim in Small Claims Court to get the money back. For those folks who show the financial need and show a case where they've been put in a position where they're financially very disadvantaged, we should, as a province, provide them with the tools to actually get a remedy. So that

means we've got to give them the way to get a lawyer. If we live in a system of rule of law and if you want to get a remedy, if you want to get the money back, the only way to do it is to go to court. If we don't provide people with the tools to get to court, then we're not really meaningfully protecting consumers. So along with an Ontario ombudsman, along with a campaign for greater education so consumers know what their rights are, what they're entitled to, what they can do and what they can't do, we should also have a mechanism so that if people are put in an unfair position, if people are put in a financially disadvantaged position, they can have access to a lawyer to help them out, to help them get out of that position.

Legal aid funding is something that's a problem in many areas. Whether it's the criminal justice system and the lack of funding for legal aid there, whether it's legal aid clinics in our communities which provide great services to our community members across Ontario, whether it's the refugee law clinics or poverty law clinics in general that are funded by Legal Aid Ontario and that provide very essential services to people who are some of the hardest-hit people in our society, legal aid is a way of balancing that equation. We have corporations and banks and businesses and the state, the government, who have all the resources possible and imaginable, and you have a consumer, a refugee, someone wrongfully accused, someone accused, with no resources and no access to justice. The small step we can take to limit and to balance that unequal equation is to provide legal aid funding. While it already exists for those other areas, some of those areas need to be bolstered and strengthened.

One other area is the notion of consumer legal aid. In certain circumstances, if you're hit in your pocketbook and you are down thousands and thousands of dollars and you are living paycheque to paycheque, having a lawyer to represent you to get some of those funds back could mean the difference between making your next month's payment for rent or not. It could mean the difference between having food on the table or not. So though we're talking about consumer services and a consumer—it may not seem naturally like something where you'd want to have legal aid protection, but it is an area that could certainly help people out in a real, meaningful way. So I ask the government to consider continuing to strengthen and protect the existing legal aid services, but also to give thought to creating a consumer service or a consumer legal aid across Ontario so that people who are in a tough situation can actually have access to a legal remedy.

One of the areas that we talked about when we talked about the Local Food Act and the idea of promoting local food was about educating children about the importance of nutrition, the importance of health, and how eating locally grown vegetables and produce would help them and make them healthier and more successful in school because they are able to focus better. Similarly with consumer services, we could start with young folks. As soon as children start to become consumers, as soon as they start to get out and buy things at the mall or buy things online or purchase items wherever they purchase

them, we should include in our curriculum some education for students. It should be a part of our education. We need to make sure people are more financially literate, that they're aware of what they can do, that they are aware of what credit cards are—that if you buy a bunch of stuff on a credit card today and it's fun and you get out there and you spend a lot, tomorrow you might have to pay those bills, and it might be very difficult. With 20% or 19% interest rates, that purchase that you bought for a certain amount might turn out to be double that if you don't pay that bill back.

We could start awareness of good financial literacy, of consumer awareness and protection, in our schools and make sure we have a curriculum for that so that children know how to use their monies properly, they know what credit is and how to use it, and they understand how to manage their consumer activity. I think that's something that we could do. Again, the idea is that if we put some education up front, if we teach people how to use credit and how to be financially literate—if you purchase something and you don't like it, what are your rights? Can you return it? For how long can you return it? What if the company says there's no return policy?

Well, the Consumer Protection Act actually says there is always a return policy. Even if a company doesn't advertise a return policy—people don't know this, but you can actually return goods if they're not used. In certain conditions, you can actually return things, but many people don't know that. If we start teaching that in schools so that kids know that, so our children and youth know that, they would grow up being educated and aware consumers, and it might prevent some of the problems of debt settlement services from happening in the first place.

1740

Another issue when it comes to the broad picture of consumer protection is that if there is an area of concern, a market failure or marketplace misconduct—there's something that the marketplace does wrong, something that a particular type of industry does wrong or hurts people—there has to be a stronger and a quicker way for government to remedy that or to respond to that. If we're seriously concerned about consumer protection, we have to have a quicker way of identifying problems and then solving them and remedying them.

For example, we've known about the water heater problems. We've known about the aggressive sales tactics when it comes to energy and when it comes to hydro and gas. We've known about these for years. As members of provincial Parliament, I'm sure everyone in this House has had constituents complain or have issues with that. The fact that it's taken so long to get the government to respond to this issue shows that we don't have a very robust mechanism to deal with this. It shouldn't be that we need to take this type of time to respond to issues that we've known about for years and years. We need to have a stronger way to identify problems and then to react to them, to fix them, so that the consumers are protected in a meaningful way. These corrective measures can be legal and involve refunds and

other remedial measures or corrective actions, but they have to be done swiftly because if you are in a dire situation economically, financially, and it takes months and months to get a remedy, the impact has already been felt. If you're living paycheque to paycheque and you're in a difficult situation, and your remedy for a marketplace misconduct, something they've done wrong, takes a year, you're already out a year. That's already going to devastate your life for that year. So it has to be quick and it has to be swift.

Again, when it comes to this bill, one of the things that we talked about in this House a number of times is the need for consultation. When it comes to some of the issues in this bill, I think that there wasn't sufficient consultation, particularly with the first piece, schedule 1. If we had an aggressive, wholesome, comprehensive outreach campaign to get input from the community and input from the people of Ontario, we could have a sense of whether this is the right thing to do or not.

I think, if Ornge and the gas scandal and the location of these power installations are any indication of how important it is for us to have good consultations—we need to know what the community wants before we deliver it. We need to know what the issues are before we try to answer them. As a government, as elected officials, as people in this House, we have to make sure that we have a better way of gauging what people want and what people need. If we do that in all areas of this government, whether it's consumer protection or health care or infrastructure or energy, we would do a much better job in this House—if we obtained the input from people in this province and meaningfully developed laws and enacted legislation that actually addressed their concerns directly.

The reason I bring that up is, again, good, thorough consultation with the public would have clearly brought up the issue that water heaters alone are not the issue. We needed to have expanded that to energy and to natural gas. That would have been an easy thing to obtain from the people if you had a good consultation process.

Debt settlement services: Again, I'm very concerned that there seems to be a bias against the consumer in this case. If we had a good consultation process that obtained input from the community, from the public, that this actually is helping us and not hurting us—and then finally, with the broader protections for the consumer—public consultation will tell you what we already know, that we need better education, better awareness in our consumers and in our public about what their rights are, and if we do that, we can make sure that their rights are protected and they are not taken advantage of.

Finally, in closing, I want to leave you with this: that if we're serious about consumer protection, one is the idea of providing education and awareness, and that education starts with our youth, with our young people. We can begin in schools by making sure our youth, our consumers, are aware of their rights and are financially literate. All too often, we notice that people don't have those basic skills. Even in university, they don't know how to manage their affairs, manage their money. That can be something that can be addressed in schools.

In addition to the actual education component and providing that throughout life—through media campaigns, through easy and clear literature, through websites, through accessible phone lines, call centres or help lines—and educating our youth, we also need to have a process for remedying the problem. If there is a problem and if there is an issue where someone feels they've been taken advantage of, if as a consumer their rights have been violated, there has to be a way for them to get a remedy, to get a fix for that problem. In our society of rule of law, that fix often comes from the courts.

If we want people who are down and out and who are in a tough situation and want to get a remedy and want to be able to get a refund or fix their financial difficulty as a result of a consumer rights violation, then we have to make sure we have some legal aid funding for those folks. Implementing a province-wide legal aid strategy to provide legal aid funding for consumer affairs and our consumer issues would be a meaningful way to complete the picture with education, legislation and a legal remedy through having access to the courts.

In conclusion, there's a lot of work to be done, but we can certainly make this province a better province for consumers by taking these approaches. Thank you very much.

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

Hon. Mario Sergio: Just a couple of comments on the remarks from the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton—indeed, he has made a number of good, positive suggestions, which I appreciate.

I have to say, first of all, congratulations to the Minister of Consumer Services for bringing forward Bill 55, which aims to bring some changes to the Collection Agencies Act, the consumer act and the real estate and brokers act—all areas that I think need to be revisited and some changes are required so that we can offer more protection for our seniors.

The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has made a number of good points, especially with respect to further education and public awareness. It's unfortunate that sometimes what we do in this House and what results from some of this good legislation does not reach out to the people. Especially in my capacity as minister responsible for seniors, I know that many seniors are often taken by scams and con artists, if you will. They do need protection; there is no question about it.

The bill, I hope, will travel. I hope it's going to come back. I hope it's going to be a stronger bill and, indeed, we can offer more protection for all our people, not only seniors.

The three areas mentioned: collection agencies—I think it's a very active agency working in the public; the Consumer Protection Act; and, real estate—I think those are all areas that are important, that we take another visit for the interests of our people.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: First of all, I want to pay respect to the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton for speaking

for one hour on a bill that—there are more words in his speech than there are in the bill, actually.

That being said, I think it's important to look back and say that earlier today the member, our critic, from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry spoke. He shared his time with the member from Prince Edward–Hastings. I think for the viewing public here today, it would be worthwhile looking up their comments online in Hansard.

There was a compliment to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. He did spend a lot of time on a bill that's generally a feel-good bill. There's not too much to criticize.

1750

The question then becomes the detail: Does it go far enough? I think the NDP critic mentioned in his remarks, for one hour, which I did withstand—it's a long time to speak, and I commend you for that. But, as a lawyer, you did add some content that actually had some resonance in it. I liked the part about the debt servicing group, the debt settlement group specifically, what they offered compared to the credit counselling group. With the credit counselling, you have to look deeper and see how they're funded. They are actually funded by the financial institutions, as you know, the credit card companies, so they have a bias, if you will, coming into it.

But even at that, most companies, credit card companies included, on the credit counselling part or on the whole issue of debt, there's a whole bunch of terrorists out there in the marketplace, technically. They sell the debt. Whether it's Sears or Costco or whoever it is, they're selling the debt. They sell it for probably 50 cents on the dollar to these agencies that collect it. Now, if the agency can collect 80%—and they have no restrictions. There needs to be more clarity in some of the rules. I hope to be speaking on this sometime tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I also want to say what a great job the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton did for an hour. He actually spoke to the bill with wonderful insight, stayed on the bill and what the content of the bill was. So thank you for your contributions. It's always wonderful to listen to what you have to say.

I think the theme of the bill or the idea of the bill is that Ontario consumers need protection. So this is the thrust of the bill, but what consumers also need is some serious oversight, like a watchdog, if you will. For some time now, that's what they've needed, because if a consumer in this province is scammed, for lack of better words, by some kind of predatory company, what are their recourses and where can they go? Right now, consumers have to fend for themselves. It's buyer beware.

Ontarians are busy raising their families or taking care of their elders, they're dealing with hard economic times, and they're also expected to protect themselves from companies, with far fewer resources than they have available to them when they are being scammed. At least

this bill is going to look at the debt agencies, the collection agencies; it's going to look at door-to-door sales and it's going to look at real estate. So those are three huge components of consumers' everyday—well, we don't want the collection agencies to be everyday transactions, but the sales door-to-door and often the home purchasing. So having the protection implemented in this bill is a good idea. But as we talked about, we need something to go a little further, and that consumer advocacy piece is going to go much further to help consumers so that they can have some recourse when they are in that vulnerable position and find themselves owing an astronomical amount of debt or in a contract from door-to-doors when they didn't realize what they were getting themselves into.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise today and pass comment on the comments from the member from Brampton–Gore–Malton. Let me start from the outset to say that sometimes I've been in this House when listening to somebody speak for an hour has been absolute torture, but listening to the member speak today, I actually found his speech interesting. I know how hard it is to talk about anything for an hour, and perhaps we should do a bit less of that maybe in the future. But I did get the key points coming out of the speaker's comments, and I think he did a very, very good job, because in the province of Ontario, we have such economic opportunity, and people come from all around the world to participate in that economic opportunity, but at the same time, some people in our society find it necessary to cheat people. Some people find it necessary to be dishonest, to be deceiving, to try to trick somebody into buying something they don't need. When you look at the points that are covered in this, I think the speaker did a very good job of talking about water heater rentals, for example, and the debt settlement services. When people are at their most vulnerable, people come in and prey on them. I think that's just wrong.

Also, when you talk about one of the major points in your life, having a baby, getting married, those types of things, buying a house is one of them. When you're participating in that economic exchange and you're not sure if the person that's representing you as an agent is deceiving you, there's something innately wrong with that and we need to do something about it.

I think the speaker was honest. He said we could do more, or we should be doing more. Perhaps he will have some suggestions for that at the committee stage. But I think all members of the House should agree that this should move forward. It's a step forward in three important areas. There's probably more out there. I would hope it would receive the support of the entire House, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I thank all the members that spoke. The minister responsible for seniors, thank you

very much; the member from Durham, my own colleague from London–Fanshawe, and the member from Oakville. I appreciate the glowing compliments. Please keep those coming. Thank you so much.

It is difficult, obviously, to talk about a bill for an hour. It could be the greatest bill in the world sometimes, but if the bill doesn't have that much substance, it's a lot of time to talk.

Interjection: But you did well.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I appreciate that.

In closing, I think I just want to reiterate so that it's clear that in those areas, the area of most concern, or the areas of most concern, are, first, the debt settlement services. Again, we have to really look carefully at whether we're actually protecting consumers or not. That requires us to look at what debt settlement services do and get input from the community, get input from the public, and if they're providing a better service or a good service, then the way we regulate them has to be different. If they're actually preying on people and hurting them, certainly our approach will be different. But from what I understand, they provide a great service, and in many circumstances the good ones are actually getting a better settlement than the credit counsellors. The credit counsellors also need to be regulated as well.

The second issue is, if we're looking at water heaters, we have to expand that, because it's a natural fit to add in the energy and the natural gas. Those are aggressive door-to-door salespeople and tactics as well. They need to be covered. It's a natural fit. Let's include those in that discussion.

Finally, if we're serious about consumer protection, there has to be advocacy, which involves education. Let's begin that with our youth, with our students in schools, and let's end that with having a legal remedy by affording legal-aid-funded representation to people who are financially eligible so that they can actually get a remedy in court.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed having been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

PAN AM GAMES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Barrie has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given last Thursday by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The member has up to five minutes in which to make his remarks.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): If you wish to wait a moment as people leave, we'll do that.

I'd invite the member from Barrie to begin.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, we're here today because the last question I asked in the Legislature to the minister

received a pre-written response from recycled briefing notes from an answer that was actually given the week before.

I asked the minister to explain how a deputy minister of a duplicated organizational structure of the Pan Am Games, specifically the Pan Am secretariat, has received a 140% raise over the last three years. This comes at a time of supposed wage restraint that this government continually talks about whenever we ask for an across-the-board wage freeze for our government. I don't think a 140% increase over three years represents any wage restraint.

I compared this rate of increases with other managers in the Pan Am secretariat. Other managers and other high-level officials in the Pan Am secretariat received between 1% and 18% pay increases over a period of three years, which is the same period of time that this deputy minister actually received a 140% pay increase.

1800

I find it really difficult to believe that any person, especially this deputy minister, has performed 120% better than his peers. In fact, his peers have sent brown envelopes to me. They're the ones who alerted me to this—his own peers, his own bureaucrats within this same structure, expressing their outrage. That's where this came from: from his actual peers. To quote the public servant who notified me of this: "This place is a mess, and it will be the next big boondoggle." As if this government needs any more boondoggles than it already has. Worse still, "many bureaucrats have raised red flags, but senior leadership doesn't listen and is completely ineffective."

I would hope that the minister is on top of this. I know that the minister is very capable of keeping an eye on this duplicate bureaucracy.

We can be fairly certain that these uncharacteristically sky-high raises that this DM has received are not likely performance-based. That's my concern. I want to see the minister and the ministry actually justify this raise and tell me, please, that it's performance-based and how it's performance-based, Minister.

I suggested that the multiple thousand-dollar donations to the Liberal Party and getting a job through Liberal friends, specifically Jean Chrétien, or volunteering on Liberal election campaigns, may have factored in. I hope that's not the case, but it seems to me that that is the case, and that's a cause for concern for me.

The response last week on this question just reiterated pay schedules as an excuse. I understand there are pay schedules. I can't believe that any pay schedule would actually advocate for a 140% increase. I don't blame the deputy minister for this increase. If someone offered me a 140% pay increase, I'd probably want it, too. I'd probably take it, too. This is a direct result, I think, of mismanagement and lack of actual oversight for this ministry. This minister is new. He's got a chance to make it right.

This was followed by an answer recycled last week prior to when I asked why we have a second bureaucracy

organizing the games totalling 62 people. TO2015 is in charge of organizing the games. Why do we have a second bureaucracy in the secretariat of 62-plus people, many of them on the sunshine list, making a lot of money? Even people in TO2015 are wondering why there's a bureaucracy duplicating the very work that they're doing. It doesn't make any sense.

We're in a time of fiscal restraint here. We have an opportunity for these games to actually bring to Ontario and to Toronto specifically, and the greater Toronto area, a lot of highlighting on how this country, this province and this city can be a world-class representation of what Canada's really about, not a showcase for Liberal waste.

My question about whether the minister thinks it's appropriate that a well-established Liberal partisan lead this duplicate bureaucracy and receive an actual 140% pay increase over three years went unanswered. I think the minister probably does have an answer, and I'd love to give him a chance to actually come up with an answer on, hopefully, why there's a duplicate bureaucracy and why the person running that bureaucracy, the deputy minister in charge of that bureaucracy, has been given a 140% pay increase over the past three years, compared to his peers in that same secretariat, who only got between a 1% and 18% pay increase. What is it that defines him as a 120% better performer than his peers?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you very much for the question. The people of Ontario are proud and honoured that we are hosting the Pan/Parapan American Games in 2015.

It's because we won the bid for the games that the member opposite's federal cousins are investing \$500 million in sport infrastructure to support them and to support Ontario. These are big investments for a big legacy. Just like the federal government, we, too, believe in the games, and Ontarians want the best of the best when it comes to overseeing them.

Just like the federal government's secretariat through Sport Canada, we have our Pan/Parapan American Games Secretariat, and just like the federal government's hard-working public servants, along with members of TO2015, we also have dedicated people who are working to bring the games to Ontario.

Speaker, Deputy Minister Paul Genest is one of those people. He was appointed to our secretariat because we believe he is the best talent for the job. I do not know why the member opposite attacks him, and, in doing so, attacks everyone working to bring these great games to Ontario.

Deputy Minister Genest was formerly the Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and associate secretary to the cabinet from 2009 to 2012. The member holds degrees in English and philosophy, but—perhaps intended—failed to mention he has one bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, a doctorate degree and has also completed the advanced management program at Harvard Business School.

Not only is Dr. Paul Genest the Deputy Minister of the Pan/Parapan American Games secretariat; he is also currently the deputy minister responsible for francophone affairs, and I think it is wrong for the member to attack him.

Speaker, we are very, very proud to host the games, which will be a key economic driver in the region over the next few years, creating 15,000 jobs and a further 5,200 jobs related to the athletes' village.

Two weeks ago, on April 16, the member opposite announced his Pan Am accountability tour. I am really very interested to hear what his thoughts are on our progress because, on the same day, our province hosted a delegation of the Pan American Sports Organization for a three-day tour of the games' venues. The feedback we received from this international commission was overwhelmingly positive. Mario Vázquez Raña, the long-standing president of PASO, was quoted as saying this will be "the best Pan Am Games ever."

Speaker, the member has attacked the people and the games numerous times, but I really want to encourage him to be responsible and do diligent research when speaking about them. The member has made statements which require clarification. For example, the member recently claimed that additional costs were added to the athletes' village. In fact, the overall project costs for the village have not increased. It's a project with tremendous significance, and it's moving quickly, creating jobs now and after the games. There will be a new, vibrant community, which thousands of Ontarians will call home.

The member opposite also recently claimed that funds were wasted on developing lands for a velodrome in Hamilton. To be clear, provincial funds were not used, and the town of Milton is, in fact, excited that it will be getting the world-class velodrome.

Today, all the games capital projects are on or—listen to this—under budget. It's one thing for the member opposite to criticize and attack myself and this government for ensuring that we, as a province, deliver the best Pan and Parapan American Games ever, which we will do, but it is completely wrong to attack a hard-working public servant.

I want to thank Deputy Minister Genest and everyone—paid employees and volunteers—who have been working tirelessly to bring the games to Ontario.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Timmins–James Bay has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Listen, we know that government over the past number of years—starting with the then Minister of Education, which was Kathleen Wynne—decided to turn busing for children in this province around on its head. We used to have a system where school boards had a list of people who were competent,

who knew how to run the business and provided services that were not only safe but also very cost-effective to the people who they had to transport. That system worked well for a number of years, and for years in this province we had a busing system that delivered services at the best possible price, and, at the same time, making sure that our kids were safe. Guess what, Madam Speaker? It really supported the small business industry in this province.

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The Liberal government decided, “We’ve got to change that. We’ve got to turn everything around.” So they moved to a new RFP system that essentially says that now, when you are bidding on a bus contract in order to get runs to deliver children within a particular school board area, there is a process that has become so expensive and onerous and difficult for small businesses that many of them have not been able to bid on the system for the contracts, and those who have bid have been at a disadvantage compared to the larger multinationals who have come into the market to provide those services to the students across this province.

Well, we’ve seen what has happened, and here, a couple of years later, the only reason we don’t have a complete decimation of the industry is because the independent bus drivers have filed a lawsuit, and that lawsuit has put a hold on that policy for the time being. But what we have seen is bus company after bus company close its doors in this province as a result of this particular policy. We know, for example, that in Cornwall the Trillium bus company has gone under. They closed why? Because they did not get contracts under this new system. In Timmins we saw the Kamiskotia Bus Lines, the Schumacher Bus Lines and others close their doors and close down businesses after 50, and another one after 100, years because of this system. We saw that in Barrie, Allandale School Transit lost 60 runs and as a result had to close their doors and are now closed and out of business; Stinson Bus Lines the same. The list goes on and on.

The question I was asking the minister today is, in an interview that she did with the Toronto Sun, with Christina Blizzard, she essentially said that’s only the perception of the ministry, that in fact small and medium-sized lines are receiving more contracts as a result of this particular policy. Well, that’s not the case. We’ve had over—what is it now? I know over 30 bus lines have shut down as a result of this policy, and what we’ve got now is more and more of the business being done by the large multinationals. The problem I have as a New Democrat is, who speaks for small business if it isn’t this Legislature? We shouldn’t be creating laws and regulations that essentially say we give everything and the largesse to the larger multinationals. In fact, we should do the opposite. We should try to find ways for mom and pop operators across this province, in ridings like Timiskaming, mine and others, to be able to stay in business and do those things that they do well.

Now, I know what the minister is going to say because I talked earlier to one of your colleagues in cabinet whom

I am not going to name, who said that in fact the complete opposite is true. I’m being told, “Oh, my God, all of the contracts are now going to the medium-sized businesses and they’re not going to the large multinationals, and the proof is in the pudding.” She’s going to get up and say that everything is wonderful in Ontario Liberal land. Well, it’s not. The reality is that you have shut down bus lines across this province by at least 30 firms. That is what’s happened. That is the record. You can’t run away from it. What we’re saying to the government is that what we’ve learned with privatization of winter road maintenance, what we’ve learned with the privatization of other initiatives in this province, is that once you’ve pushed out the small independent operators and you’ve given it to the larger entities, what they end up doing is jacking up the price when they become the only deliverers of the service, and then we end up paying more for a service than we would have ever before.

I’m just saying that this government should take heed and should put a halt to this policy. In fact, what they should be doing is looking at a way we can continue to make our system as competitive as it was, to make sure that it is as safe as it can be, and that we actually favour those small businesses that have been operating—family businesses—for generations in this province, that have been delivering a safe, reliable and affordable service to the people of this province. I call on the government to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you. I am very pleased to respond.

I think we need to sort out our history here. When this whole business around school buses and school boards came up, the issue was originally raised by the Auditor General. When the Auditor General had his mandate extended to go into school boards, one of the first things he looked at was procurement. In particular, one of the first things he looked at was the procurement of school bus services from private operators. Remember, we have always been talking here about procuring services from private operators. And he said that the school boards, almost uniformly, had totally non-competitive ways of procuring school buses.

As you know, I used to be a trustee, so I do have some knowledge of how this system used to work, and how it used to work was that you had your retinue of operators and you sat down and the retinue of operators came and told you how much they thought it would cost to operate the service and how much the bill was.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no. Then the school board said, “This is how much we’re paying.”

Hon. Liz Sandals: There was more give-and-take to it than that. What there certainly was not was a competitive procurement. There were a whole bunch of operators sitting there saying, “This is how much we’re going to charge you, and if you don’t pay what we want to charge you, we will withdraw the service collectively.”

Interjection.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I've been involved in the conversation. Don't tell me. I've been sitting at the table, okay?

The auditor had some truth to what he said, which is that this is not a competitive situation. So the direction was to have a competitive procurement. Has it worked perfectly? No, it hasn't. It was a new way of doing things, and there have been some hiccups.

Having said that, when you look at the data and you look at the boards that have gone through some form of competitive procurement, and you look and you say, "How many of the local firms held the routes pre-competitive procurement?"—39%. Then you look, post-competitive procurement, at how many local firms and what market share—49%. The market share of local firms actually increased.

As I say, we know there have been some challenges. In fact, at one point we asked Coulter Osborne—and you have been around long enough to know that he was the former Integrity Commissioner. We actually asked Coulter Osborne to head a task force on competitive procurement. He set out some guidelines for the way that it should work. He recommended the use of a fairness commissioner. We totally agree. He suggested bundling routes—not in huge bundles, but grouping the routes; here are 10 routes; here are five routes in this direction; here are another 15 routes in that direction—rather than doing great, big blanket procurements. We agree with that.

He suggested that there be time built into the system for questions and clarifications so people know exactly what the expectations are around how they're going to be scored and the details that are required in the procurement. We agree with that.

He suggested that there should be market share limits in the procurement to limit the number of routes that any one operator can hold. I totally, totally agree with that, because if a board does that properly, they can set limits that no one operator can hold more than 10% of the routes or 20% of the routes or maybe 25% of the routes. If you do that, which is to set a limit on market share by any one operator, you in fact can prevent the takeover by the big firms and some sort of the fear of a local monopoly.

We will continue to work with the school boards and with the consortiums because we agree that the process needs to be improved for both the boards and the operators, but that doesn't mean that we should go back to a system where the taxpayers' interests were not protected.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much.

There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1819.

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France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
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Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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