



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 1 May 2013

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 1^{er} mai 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 May 2013

Mercredi 1^{er} mai 2013

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

WEARING OF UNIFORM

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to allow me to wear my Algonquin Regiment dress uniform for a one-hour period this afternoon for a member's statement and a petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing has asked for unanimous consent to wear his uniform during members' statements and petitions. Do we agree? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

NON-PROFIT HOUSING
CO-OPERATIVES STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LES COOPÉRATIVES DE LOGEMENT
SANS BUT LUCRATIF

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 25, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 14, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of non-profit housing co-operatives and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 14, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne les coopératives de logement sans but lucratif et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I rise to speak to Bill 14, the Non-profit Housing Co-operatives Statute Law Amendment Act. I want to again acknowledge all the members of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada who are, indeed, here today. We did have a chance to speak beforehand, as we have on other occasions, and I am pleased to speak to their bill. We did have occasion to go to Burlington with the member from Leeds-Grenville and the member from Burlington and visit with Harvey and the

gang—I hope you don't mind my casual nature, Harvey—and saw the important work that is being done by the Co-operative Housing Federation.

A little later in my speech, I'll be talking about the housing co-op in North Bay, specifically, in my riding of Nipissing.

This legislation would amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, and the Co-operative Corporations Act to move most co-op tenure dispute cases from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board. It also aims to streamline the internal dispute resolution process in non-profit co-ops, to clarify that hearings before the LTB—the Landlord and Tenant Board—and courts will be determined based on the merits of the case.

It should be noted that our party and our caucus supported this bill when it was introduced last year by the then Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, now the Premier. However, it fell victim to Dalton McGuinty's prorogation, and it should, quite frankly, already have become law. The delay created by the Liberals' own doing has potentially cost co-op members hundreds of thousands of dollars in unnecessary court costs, as the rules the bill was intended to fix still remain in place.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Contrary to the Premier's stated desire to work with the opposition, this new bill contains an unnecessary amendment that will open the floodgates to nuisance applications to the Landlord and Tenant Board, causing turmoil in a system that is already horrendously backlogged. This amendment will harm both landlords and tenants, as it will further hamper the LTB's ability to hear cases in a timely manner.

Let me first discuss how this bill would move tenure disputes from the court system to the Landlord and Tenant Board, where all other housing disputes are actually settled. While not without its own problems, clearly the LTB is the appropriate venue for housing disputes. These disputes include rent arrears, late payment of rent, willful damage, and illegal activity by tenants or interfering with other tenants' enjoyment of their property.

The ministry estimated the cost of resolving these co-op disputes in the courts at \$3,000 to \$5,000 each, and pegged the annual legal cost to co-op members of the approximately 300 cases heard in the courts every year at about \$1 million.

Some disputes not provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act would still be resolved between residents and co-ops through the courts, including violation of no-pet provisions or failure of a co-op member to perform

duties such as clearing snow or cutting the lawn. The act would affect 125,000 Ontarians who live in the province's 550 non-profit housing co-ops.

The new bill also contains an amendment to allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive the \$45 fee for low-income tenants. In a briefing, ministry staff could not say who would qualify as a low-income tenant, as this would be a determination made by the Landlord and Tenant Board on a case-by-case basis as now happens in the provincial courts.

Obviously, Speaker, it's disturbing that a one-sided amendment to the Landlord and Tenant Board would be considered without widespread consultation. Landlords are certain to cry foul, and justifiably so. From their perspective, this will open the door for every minor dispute disgruntled tenants may have to the LTB. The dispute resolution system could very quickly become overwhelmed, which serves no one's interests.

These hearings would only cause further delays in the already backlogged LTB system. Speaker, this is bad news for landlords and tenants who have legitimate cases before the board that they need resolved in a timely manner. Further, the fee is a cost recovery for the board's operation, which means that Ontario taxpayers, or higher fees for landlords, will be called on to subsidize revenue shortfalls.

Speaker, I'd like to take a few moments now to discuss the rental housing situation in my riding of Nipissing, and how Bill 14 could potentially impact landlords and tenants in the communities I represent. For years, Nipissing—specifically the city of North Bay—had no housing constructed. When I ran for mayor back in 2003, the summer before there were only seven houses built. During the heyday in my term we had 107 houses built.

0910

During those years of seven houses a summer being built, we found ourselves with a tremendous shortage of housing, not only single-family housing but all types of housing. From there, we found in our social service board studies that we had a need for 1,000 affordable housing units. That was an alarming statistic, a very scary number to be told as a sitting mayor.

One of the problems is the fact that we had no rental housing—virtually none. It was less than 1%, as it still is today. Because the economy turned around back in the early 2000s in the city of North Bay, that housing, those few houses that were built, was taken up quickly. Housing prices soared. Very, very few rental units ever came available, because the prices were rising, and we had less than 1%—it was a fraction of 1%—of rental housing available on the market and very, very little turnover.

One solution we saw was our co-op housing. I want to speak to the good work of Mr. David Lee, the director of the co-op housing organization in North Bay. Back when I decided to run as an MPP, I campaigned. I was invited to and was the only candidate to show up at the co-op housing forum. My wife, Patty, and I spent the better part of the day with them. We had a lovely time learning about the co-op housing work that is done. I found it to be very

enlightening. I as mayor had an understanding of our co-op housing situation in Nipissing, but this put it on a personal level, to sit and barbecue with the families, to play ring toss and the balloon games we had with the kids, and to understand the pride they took in their housing. To go with the member from Burlington and the member from Leeds–Grenville into Burlington, to the housing co-op, and talk one on one and share lunch, a beautiful luncheon, with the members of the co-op housing organization there was a real experience. I encourage all members of the Legislature to get out of the Legislature and into the co-op housing throughout Ontario and learn for themselves the importance of this housing.

In closing, this bill merits support on second reading, because province-wide hearings are needed on the amendments contained in this bill. I expect landlords and tenants will have plenty to say surrounding Bill 14's recommendations surrounding the LTB. At the end of the day, we want a system that is fair and works for all involved. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We New Democrats want to see this go to committee quickly. We would like to see the debate ended. All that should have been said has been said. Quite frankly, right now our friends to the right of us, the Progressive Conservatives, threaten this bill from even getting through the session, because if we don't pass it quickly it might get stalled by the whole budget process, and who knows what happens after that? We really need to move on this. That's why we're not going to take our whole time in the New Democratic Party. We want to see it go to committee today.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to recognize some of the people that are in the gallery this morning from the Ontario region of the Co-op Housing Federation of Canada: Harvey Cooper, manager of government relations; Diane Miles, manager of co-op services; Judy Shaw, program manager of co-op services; Simone Swail, program manager, special initiatives; Keith Moyer, program manager of communications. They have been here relentlessly. They want to see this bill passed. It will help a lot of people, a lot of vulnerable people. We've debated this bill for 13½ hours. Let's send it to committee today.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I really want to pay some respect to the member from Nipissing for his thoughtful and sincere remarks with respect to the importance of social housing in Ontario. In a climate of a housing shortage—at least affordable housing—it's an important component of that supply mix.

Both the NDP and the Liberal Party are making the point that they want to rush this to committee. I should say that the reason it's stalled here, I think the members from the co-op community should be aware—this is the third bill that has been debated here. The reason it wasn't

already in committee and out is because of the previous action by Premier McGuinty to prorogue the House, where all the business of the House failed. Now, I know that they know that, but I know the people of Ontario don't know that.

The reason is that this is a very important and timely bill. I would put this to you: There's a very good chance that it may not get to the statute level again. This government is disingenuous in many respects to the energy file that we were dealing with yesterday, so I have little confidence that this indeed will get to committee.

The committees themselves are basically dysfunctional now. The ones dealing with Ornge as well as the gas plants are perfect examples of a government that cannot manage its legislative agenda.

The member from Nipissing and we ourselves want to do the right thing and want to put a voice to this legislation. That's why we're using our time to make sure that the people of Ontario understand who's really holding it up. They're the government. They have the rules, Mr. Speaker, to make the changes, to time-allocate this bill and put it into a committee. If they really want to do that, they could do it. So don't blame it all on Tim Hudak and the Conservatives for actually speaking to the content of the bill, as the member from Nipissing did. I think it's an important bill.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I also want to welcome the co-op folks here once again. It's always great seeing their smiling faces. I know that, once we get this bill to committee, I will miss those faces being around this House. But again, welcome. We hope we can get this through. We know it's important legislation. There's no sense in blaming the co-op folks for everything the Liberals are doing. Let's get it moving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing has two minutes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to thank the additional speakers for their thoughts.

When I spoke about the co-op in North Bay and Mr. David Lee, I basically suggested to all members that they get out of the Legislature once in a while and get into the real heart of Ontario. I would highly encourage each and every member to visit a co-op; get a better understanding. Many communities don't have co-ops. I would suggest to them that they find a riding that does have a co-op and go and visit with them. Go and visit with the families and have a better understanding.

I found, the day when I went with my wife, Patty, that we really learned a lot about the need for co-op housing. I would never have imagined that that was part of the mix. But after seeing it face to face, you have a better understanding of the importance and the role that co-op housing plays in Ontario.

We have, as I mentioned, a wide variety of housing in my particular riding, but a severe shortage of housing, which caused housing prices to spike in the city of North Bay, which then caused housing prices to spike in the

surrounding areas—Callander, East Ferris, Mattawa; all the communities in my riding. We have, as I mentioned, a need for 1,000 affordable housing units in the city of North Bay.

Nestled right in between is this beautiful housing co-op with wonderful families who take unbelievable pride in the housing. It is a spectacular site. I would hope that each member would indeed follow up on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Chatham—

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

0920

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Speaker. You were close.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to offer my thoughts on Bill 14, the Non-profit Housing Co-operatives Statute Law Amendment Act. The act amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Co-operative Corporations Act to move most co-op tenure dispute cases from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board. The act also streamlines the internal dispute resolution process in non-profit co-ops to clarify that hearings before the Landlord and Tenant Board and courts are determined based on the merits of the case.

Speaker, as an aside, I would like to point out that I feel like this House is duplicating efforts on a daily basis. Over and over, we are seeing bills being recycled and put through the same legislative process as they were prior to the prorogation last fall. If the government wanted to debate the same legislation, then there really was no need to prorogue this House, chain the doors closed and keep MPPs from doing what we were elected to do. If the government wanted to keep debating the same bills, it just proves that their decision to prorogue was another short-sighted, politically motivated decision.

Take, for example, Bill 65. This was legislation that was very similar to this bill, Bill 14, that we're debating here this morning. Consequently, Bill 65 died with the government's decision to prorogue Queen's Park last fall. If the government had not prorogued this House, then Bill 65 may already have been enacted into law.

If this Liberal government had not prorogued the Legislature last fall, we could be putting this time to better use, such as getting to the bottom of the politically motivated gas plant scandal or passing legislation that will help create jobs and grow our economy. Instead, we are repeating what has already been done in the past. I think the people of Ontario would be shocked and dismayed if they learned that the work we're doing now, the bills we're debating and the legislation we are passing, as in many cases, are the exact same or very similar to legislation and work we already did back in the fall.

I know that folks at home will be sure to send their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the current member from Ottawa South, the mentor to our current Premier, and by that I'm of course referring to MPP Dalton Mc-

Guinty. Speaker, I think you can understand my frustration and my colleagues' frustration with the repetition of work as a result of the politically motivated and totally unnecessary prorogation that took place last fall.

Nonetheless, I'm happy to discuss this piece of legislation in the House as it is an important issue that needs to be addressed in the province of Ontario. The PC caucus is generally supportive of this piece of legislation. I am supportive of a more efficient system, and this legislation will help create that.

This bill will move tenure disputes from the court system to the Landlord and Tenant Board, where all other housing disputes are settled. Now, no structure is perfect, but clearly the Landlord and Tenant Board is a much more appropriate place for housing disputes to be resolved than through our court system.

Late rent payments, rent arrears, willful damage by the tenants, even interfering with other tenants, are all issues of concern that landlords face on a daily basis. It is important that there be an efficient mechanism in place to resolve these issues in a timely and effective manner.

As I am sure everyone in this House is aware, going to court can be a very costly endeavour. Seeking resolutions has cost co-op members thousands and thousands of dollars. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing estimated the cost of resolving co-op disputes in court ranges from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per case. We are looking at approximately 300 cases per year, so the annual legal cost to co-op members of the approximately 300 cases heard every year in the courts is about \$1 million annually. This act will help to reduce these costs and allow the money to be spent more wisely on behalf of the co-op.

It is also important to note that the act would directly affect the 125,000 men, women and families who live in the province's 550 non-profit housing co-ops. Speaker, you can see that instead of wasting money and resources that are better used elsewhere, referring disputes to the Landlord and Tenant Board is a more affordable and potentially more efficient option.

I'm not in agreement with everything that is contained in this bill. One thing that is a bit concerning and may result in a less efficient system is that the bill also contains an amendment to allow the Landlord and Tenant Board to waive the \$45 filing fee for some tenants. This is an aspect of Bill 14 that was not included in the original Bill 65.

It is important to note that there was no consultation and no advocacy on behalf of stakeholders or associations for this change. This was just added to the bill. It looks like it was merely an arbitrary Liberal idea. We know how these types of ideas have panned out in the past, ideas that have been dreamt up at the last minute—no real thought and, again, no consultation. Too often that is how this Liberal government chooses to govern and chooses to make decisions: last minute, on the back of a napkin, with no consultations and absolutely no planning.

Something that is even more concerning is that we don't know the cost of this decision. In a briefing, the

ministry could not reveal who will qualify for the waived fee. The concern is that it will allow for disgruntled tenants to take every minor dispute to the Landlord and Tenant Board, causing further delay in a system that is already extremely backlogged.

Speaker, you will also know that in the past, this fee was used as a cost recovery mechanism for the board's operations. This means that Ontario taxpayers and landlords will be on the hook yet again to subsidize the shortfall in revenue. This is something that will cost both landlords and tenants in the long run. It is like the Liberal government is robbing Peter to pay Paul. It doesn't work; someone always gets stuck paying the bill.

After the gas plant scandal that has cost Ontario taxpayers close to a billion dollars for a politically motivated decision to save a few Liberal seats, you would think that this government would stop dumping their debt on the people of Ontario. It is time that the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals actually solve some problems, rather than just appearing to solve problems.

Another concern that I have with the waiving of the filing fee is that it's certainly going to result in a backlog. Both landlords and tenants with legitimate concerns that need to be resolved sooner than later will be subject to long, drawn-out delays. The \$45 filing fee is completely unrelated and an unnecessary amendment to this legislation that almost defeats the purpose of the bill itself. In essence, we would be moving the cases from one backlogged court system and creating another backlogged system.

Obviously, it's disturbing that a one-sided amendment to the Landlord and Tenant Board would be considered without any consultation. It makes you wonder what the rationale behind the decision was. Landlords are certain to be upset, justifiably fearing that the door will be open for disgruntled tenants to take every minor dispute to the Landlord and Tenant Board. The \$45 fee acted as a bit of a deterrent and tended to keep disgruntled tenants from taking every issue to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

While I would like to think that the Landlord and Tenant Board is a better option for these disputes—they have the potential to be less costly and more efficient—there are some serious concerns that I have with this piece of legislation.

I will be supporting it, though, and look forward to getting to it in the committee so that we can work on some of the concerns that we've raised in this House. Since the Premier opened the debate on this bill for now the second time, I would like to urge her and her caucus to begin province-wide hearings on reform of the Landlord and Tenant Board so we can best determine, in a fair, transparent and open way for all involved, what is working and what is not.

So I will conclude that we're seeing a track record by the current government—we've seen it over the last 10 years—that there's just a real lack of consultation. Whatever the bill is, whatever decision, they make these decisions from Queen's Park without determining what effect they're going to have on the people in the province of Ontario.

With that, I'll be happy to continue the debate. Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I listened intently to some of the comments that were made by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, and I have to say that I respectfully disagree with what you were saying, especially with regard to the \$45 fee. I don't think that, by waiving a \$45 fee, the floodgates are going to open and every single person living in co-op housing is going to just have this huge onslaught on to the Landlord and Tenant Board, and say, "Ah, we've got all these problems!" I don't think that's going to happen.

I think it's a matter of respect for all people living in Ontario. I just wanted to say that. I really only wanted to stand up and say that we should move it on to committee, but it needed to be said.

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

0930

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I say again to you: Stay here, because this party doesn't want the bill to go to committee, and when it will go to committee, they will change it. So stay here. Come at committee. The two parties, the NDP and us, we want this bill to go to committee as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a privilege to support my colleague from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex with his stand with regard to Bill 14. Again, we're going to support this bill, but we do have some legitimate concerns with regard to this bill.

I disagree with the colleague from Rainy River—

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Kenora–Rainy River.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: —Kenora–Rainy River; forgive me; I'm sorry—because in fact, this provision of waiving the \$45 fee opens up the opportunity whereby minimal disputes will perhaps backlog more important issues. That's all we're concerned about. There is that potential for that, okay? It's not as though they're going to come running and screaming with all little things, but there is a potential for that, all right?

Again, we do in fact like the fact that the disputes will include such things as rent arrears, late payments of rent, willful damage and illegal activity by tenants, or interfering with other tenants' enjoyment of their real property.

Again, it has been estimated that in the past, when these disputes would have to go to the courts, the cost was anywhere from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Let's get that out of the courts. Let's get it to where it can be handled more quickly and more readily, although we do know there are some disputes that are not provided under the Residential Tenancies Act, that will still have to be resolved in the courts, such things as violation of pet provisions and so on.

I see my time is almost up. Again, on behalf of the four co-ops in the wonderful riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, we're here to support that as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm pleased to join the debate. I'll keep it brief. Obviously, we support this bill. I'll remind people that it's May 1, which means that your rent is due. Rent in this province is way too expensive, which is why we need more co-operative housing and more affordable housing. It's also International Workers' Day. Happy May 1, everyone.

We're sitting in a House where these people want chain gangs and workfare, and these folks bring in Bill 115. We've got a lot of work to do. Keep up the struggle, everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has two minutes.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thanks to the MPP from Kenora–Rainy River, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex, and the member from Davenport.

Speaker, the Ontario PCs supported this bill when it was introduced last year by then-Minister Wynne. However, as I said in my remarks, it fell victim to the Dalton McGuinty Liberal prorogation. The delay has actually cost co-op members potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in unnecessary court costs, as the rules the bill was intended to fix remained in place during that time.

Contrary to the Premier's stated desire to work with the opposition, this new bill contains an unnecessary amendment that will open the floodgates to nuisance applications to the Landlord and Tenant Board, causing turmoil in a system that's already horrendously backlogged.

As I said in my closing remarks, the government just has to do a better job of consulting. For years, we've seen many decisions that have been made, and they just don't consult with the people of Ontario. I think that sometimes they forget where they came from. They've been in power for 10 years, and we're seeing them become more and more out of touch, whether it was the politically motivated decision to cancel a couple of power plants, one in Mississauga and one in Oakville. The people of Ontario, I know, were concerned when they opened the newspaper this morning and saw that the bill is going to be upwards of a billion dollars, just to save a few Liberal seats in the last election.

Interjection: It's shameful.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It really is shameful. So again, when it comes to this bill, I just urge the government to reach out, to consult and quit wasting taxpayers' money. The people of Ontario are tired of the waste, scandal and mismanagement of the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals.

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of privilege.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of privilege, the member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Davenport accused, without any motive, the Conservative Party of being in favour of chain gangs. This is labour day. I think

that's completely inappropriate and I would ask him to accept and withdraw what he said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, I can't have him withdraw what I didn't hear. It's not really a point of order or a point of privilege, so I will rule that out of order.

Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 14, the Non-profit Housing Co-operatives Statute Law Amendment Act. I too want to welcome the members in the gallery from the co-op housing authority who are here to hear the debate this morning.

Currently, in order to deal with disputes, tenants and the boards of co-operative housing need to go through the courts, which is a time-consuming and expensive process. This bill will allow them instead to go through the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Mr. Speaker, for those who aren't aware, I want to provide a little history on this bill. It was first introduced as a private member's bill. Then the Legislature was prorogued and it died. It was reintroduced as a government bill, to die again when the Premier prorogued the Legislature last fall. Instead of spending four months waiting for the Liberals to choose a new leader, we could have been debating bills like this one. We could have been in the Legislature working for the people of Ontario, dealing with this type of bill. It's not just the time lost in the Legislature; the Premier prorogued the Legislature in the evening, with very little planning. He didn't bother to bring forward a motion to carry over bills like this, which means they had to start right over from the beginning, and that's why we're here today—just like my private member's bill, which has now passed second reading three times, but through proroguing we have to start over each time.

Mr. Speaker, our job as members of the opposition is to look at legislation and point out where the government is missing the mark, where this bill doesn't reach its intended goal, as in the case with the Local Food Act, or where it will have consequences that they haven't addressed in this bill.

We support the idea of moving the disputes at co-op housing from the courts to the Landlord and Tenant Board, but there is nothing in this bill that ensures these complaints will be put through the Landlord and Tenant Board in an expedient way. I often hear from constituents about concerns with the Landlord and Tenant Board. I hear that it takes too long and that they can't get disputes heard. If we add more to it and send more disputes there to be resolved, then obviously we'll have to make sure that the capabilities of the board are increased so we don't see this slowing everything down in the province. In fact, we want to make the system work better, not drag it down to not get anybody's job done. We hope that will be done, and that the government will see fit to do that to make sure we don't have the backlog that we presently have.

I've heard from numerous landlords that when they go to the Landlord and Tenant Board to evict the tenant,

they have to resign themselves to the fact that it will take at least three months. During that time, the tenants are living in the apartment rent-free. In fact, it has gotten so bad that I ran into a landlord who said he was taking matters into his own hands and was just going to change the locks because he was so frustrated with the system. I don't believe he did that, but his frustration sure was strong.

In February 2011, the Federation of Rental Housing Providers report, called *Justice Denied: Ontario's Broken Rent Dispute Process*, talked about the challenges with the Landlord and Tenant Board. The report said, "Ontario's rent dispute process is broken.... The rent dispute process in Ontario is excessively long, and is unjust to landlords." This is from that organization: "It typically takes 90 days in Ontario for a dispute to be finally resolved, and costs the landlord about \$5,200, not including administrative costs, lost time and productivity." The report also says, "That's only the typical process. If a 'professional tenant' is involved, he or she uses requests for internal board reviews and appeals to the Superior Court to add even more delays; these tenants easily use Ontario's system to bilk landlords of up to one year's rent, suffer no consequences, and cause severe financial and emotional distress for landlords." This is quoted from that report.

Mr. Speaker, we need to look at ways to make the system work better for landlords and tenants. I received an email from one landlord who said, "Landlords are only allowed to collect one month's rent deposit. But the eviction process will usually take several months for total vacancy. If the tenant opposes the eviction, asks for new hearing dates, knows how to delay the system with fraudulent claims and then simply refuses to move (forcing a sheriff to be hired at the landlord's expense), the process can take many months...."

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If the landlord is losing three months' rent whenever he goes to the board, all the other tenants—the good tenants—end up with higher rents because the landlord has to cover their costs. That's on top of all the other increased costs that result from this government's policies, like green energy, that have caused massive increases in hydro costs. This is going to be especially true in co-ops, where the tenants are landlords and will all end up contributing to the cost of delays and rents that are not paid.

This version of the bill also allows the board to waive the \$45 fee for low-income tenants. I have two concerns with that: first, that there seems to be very little detail around it, such as who would qualify as low-income; and secondly, that it may lead to nuisance complaints, which could result in further delays and increased costs for tenants and co-op members. If the tenant is successful at the board, the fee is often returned to them anyway. We need to ensure that we're providing protection for those who cannot afford the \$45, but at the same time, ensuring that people who do not fall into that category do not take advantage of the system. Both of these changes will likely lead to an increased volume of disputes coming

before a Landlord and Tenant Board that is already overburdened.

If the government is increasing the volume going to the board, the responsible thing to do would be to also make changes to the board to streamline the system to add capacity. Otherwise, we can all see that this legislation is going to lead to longer delays and is going to make the situation worse for everyone. We need the protection for both landlords and tenants. Co-op members, as owners, are both, and so I believe that ensuring they have the protection of the Landlord and Tenant Board—I believe they should have that protection to reduce the court costs.

Government members often seem to take time in this Legislature to stand up and tell members of the opposition to stop debating bills, to stop bringing forward our concerns, to stop trying to make legislation better. In the debate on the Local Food Act, government members started saying that we should shut down the debate less than a week after the opposition had their first opportunity to speak. First, I wanted to say that we will never stop trying to do our job to improve legislation to ensure that it works for the people of Ontario. Secondly, as I was reading the debates on this bill, it struck me that the reason this bill is being debated today and is not in committee is not that it has had excessive debate; it is that the government has chosen not to make it a priority in the debate. From March 20 to April 15—almost a month—this bill was not called for debate once.

As I mentioned earlier, this bill has been introduced previously by our now Premier. It was introduced on April 16, 2012, and was not brought forward to debate until October 2, 2012, almost six months later. It was debated for three days and then the Legislature was prorogued.

We heard that going through the courts instead of the Landlord and Tenant Board costs co-op members \$1 million a year. That means that they have wasted \$1 million because the government just didn't call this bill for debate last spring. To a government that can spend \$1 billion cancelling two power plants, \$1 million may not seem like much. But I can assure you that to the people in my riding who live in co-ops like Trillium Place in Woodstock and Adam Oliver in Ingersoll, \$1 million is a lot of money.

I want to thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this bill. I hope that the government will address the challenges with the Landlord and Tenant Board so that we will be able to handle the extra volume of co-op disputes and get rid of the backlog so it will work for tenants, for landlords and for all co-op housing members. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to put these few comments on—

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's my honour to stand and talk to this bill. I don't want to delay it any further from it moving ahead.

I do always respect the views of everybody in this House. I'll sit here every opportunity that I have and I

will listen to both the government and to the Conservatives, because I think that's my job. Not only do I have to debate bills, I have to actually listen to the message. However, in order to move this forward, I would encourage my friends in the Conservative Party—we all have our speaking notes; we all have those. Can we not skip through those notes and just get to your local issues so I can hear exactly how this is affecting your constituents back home and I can understand that? I would appreciate that.

We're all in agreement that this is a good initiative, and we should look at moving it forward. Having said that, again I will sit in my seat, I will participate in this debate and I will do more listening than talking.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: My constituents in Ottawa Centre, especially those who live in co-op housing, want this bill to go to the committee. Let's get this to committee.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: The words of our member from Oxford defined very clearly what the problems are, what this bill does and the solutions. I support his words completely and thank him for his thoughts on this problem.

Co-op housing provides a valuable service in the province of Ontario. We all appreciate that. There are 125,000 people who live in the 550 co-ops across Ontario. There are many co-op housing units in my riding of Carleton—Mississippi Mills.

We had a downturn in our economy about 12 years ago, when the high-tech sector took a major hit. Nortel crashed; 45,000 people across the world, and the centre of it was in my riding, lost their jobs as the company failed, not to mention the spin-off companies and spin-off jobs. Sometimes it's not very far from the top to the bottom, so some of the people who had good jobs with good incomes went to having no income, and there were no other jobs to be had. I have had people come into my office with PhDs in engineering, who worked for Nortel and other high-tech companies, looking for a job and who can't find one. These people, unfortunately, sometimes after a period of time run out of money and need the services offered by co-op housing.

This is a good bill. We support it. It makes changes to streamline the process of solving disputes and some of the other minor wrinkles that are out there in co-op non-profit housing. It's unfortunate that this government chose to prorogue last fall and derailed the whole process. This could have been done six months ago. This party will do everything we can to speed this process along. We are here to support this bill. It's a great idea. We look forward to going to committee and making the necessary changes. We're here to do the right thing.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We have 17 House sitting days left—that's assuming we don't immediately move to an election in some way, shape, or form—in which to get

this bill to a committee and back here for third reading. That's why we're not speaking to it. That's why I would appeal to my friends to the right that just blaming them for proroguing is not enough at this point; they now are stalling the bill.

Let's get on with it. Let's pass it. They're costing co-ops money. We don't want co-ops to have to pay any more money. Let's get on with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oxford has two minutes.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much. I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, the Minister of Labour, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills and the member from Parkdale-High Park for their comments. I agree with them that we need to get this bill into committee and get the changes made that need to be made to make it a better bill and to get it back in.

As I mentioned in my remarks, the amount of money that's being spent by co-op housing today to deal with these disputes is just unacceptable. It's great for government and for us here to spend a lot of time talking about it, but the longer it takes to get it into play, the more money they will be spending.

Having said that, I think there's a very important issue that needs to be dealt with. If this bill goes through and the changes I spoke about at the landlord and tenant protection board are not dealt with—and that's not in the bill. That's something the government needs to do before this actually starts going through that process. If that's not done, it will bog the whole system down. Not only will the co-op housing movement have the same costly process to go through that they have now, but they will not be able to go through it because they will have to wait first in line for the landlord and tenant protection board to deal with the issue.

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So I think it's very important that we make sure that the government is listening to this debate and look at the process that they are putting the people through to make sure that it has the capacity to deal with the complaints and the challenges as they are coming forward—not to have a waiting line and in fact the whole system draws to a halt. I think that's very important, that the government is listening to this debate and that this debate is being had, and to get on with it so they can use the system that they are entitled to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? I believe the member has spoken to this.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I don't think so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay. The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 14, the Non-profit Housing Co-operatives Statute Law Amendment Act, is a good bill and I will be supporting it.

As a caring society, we have a moral obligation to help those who need help, whether it is long-term help for people who have disabilities or short term for people

who are down on their luck. Surely in Canada, which is a compassionate society, which is a land of plenty, we can help people to get the basic necessities of food and shelter so they can live with dignity. Non-profit housing co-operatives do just that. They help people who need help. They provide affordable housing at a rental rate that matches the ability to pay.

There are many co-operative housing developments in my riding. I find them to be very attractive. They are creatively designed, well built, well maintained and well kept by residents who take pride in their homes. They fit in well with the rest of the community and are a welcome part of the community.

I suspect there is a need for even more co-operative housing as a consequence of the economic downturn of 2008 from which Ontario has never really recovered. There is high unemployment—600,000 people have no jobs; pay freezes or lack of pay increases because of the slow economy and scarce or reduced company profits; manufacturing job losses because of many plant closures; increasing cost of living caused by rapidly rising electricity costs; rising gasoline and home heating costs; rapidly rising property taxes; rising user fees and charges on services and products that consumers use every day.

The government is taxing people more and more. They are desperate for money, and they are desperately looking for more money. Where are they getting it? From the taxpayer—the taxpayer who is tapped out. They keep going back to that same well again and again and again. The government is making people poorer.

Let me give you a couple of examples of this government's desperate acts in their desperation to find more money and where they are going to get this money from—from the taxpayer, of course. In the spring of 2012, Agricorp sent letters to 4,500 farmers telling the farmers to repay the money given to them by the government in 2003—that was 10 years ago—to help them survive the mad cow disease disaster. After 10 years, they think it is okay to send a letter and say it is time to give the money back. I don't think so. Imagine the gall and indifference, the disrespect and the insensitivity. That is a sign of a truly desperate, uncaring government. This is wrong.

This spring, the government is thinking about amending the Highway Traffic Act to collect unpaid traffic fines going back up to 40 years. Can you believe it? They're once again extracting scarce dollars from the same tapped-out Ontarians—another desperate act by a desperate government. Again, it is wrong. This is morally wrong, this is morally corrupt, and, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing so disrespectful and immoral as a corrupt government. In that context, Mr. Speaker, this wonderful and historic place of governance, Queen's Park, could sadly be referred to as a den of iniquity.

The intent of the changes offered by this bill is good. The bill will move co-op tenure disputes from the court system to the Landlord and Tenant Board, where all other housing disputes are settled. The Landlord and Tenant Board is the appropriate place to resolve housing dis-

putes. These disputes will include rent arrears, late payment of rent, willful damage and illegal activity by tenants, or interfering with other tenants' enjoyment of their property.

The ministry has estimated the cost of resolving these co-op disputes in the courts at \$3,000 to \$5,000 each, and pegged the annual legal costs to co-op members of the approximately 300 cases heard every year in the courts at about \$1 million. Some disputes not provided for under the Residential Tenancies Act would still be resolved between residents and co-ops through the courts, including violation of no-pets provisions or failure of a co-op member to perform such duties as clearing snow or cutting the lawn. This act will help the 125,000 people who live in the province's 550 non-profit housing co-ops.

There are a few shortcomings in the act, and these should be addressed at committee after the bill passes second reading.

(1) It would seem reasonable to me that simple problems like no-pets violations and failure to shovel snow or cut the lawn could be more appropriately resolved at the Landlord and Tenant Board rather than go to court. Surely that common sense change could be made.

(2) I think it is unreasonable to charge a filing fee of \$45, or any amount, to a person who lives in co-op housing. People live in co-op housing because they have low income. People that have low income need all their scarce dollars for other necessities, such as groceries. It is therefore not reasonable to charge them a fee. The fee should be done away with for these tenants.

(3) Landlords' rights must be considered. Protection against nuisance complaints should be provided. Nuisance complaints could increase what is already a backlog or waiting list, to get to the Landlord and Tenant Board for resolution of disputes. Waiting a long time for a resolution of a dispute is a problem for tenants and landlords. It is important that disputes be resolved in a timely manner.

(4) Bill 14 changes the way a co-op's board of directors relates to its members, most notably how the board of directors revokes membership and occupancy rights of its members. At the moment, membership and occupancy rights may be terminated only by a majority of the board of directors of the co-operative at a meeting of that board. Bill 14 changes this provision by reducing the complexity of the process. Under Bill 14, a member of a co-op could have their membership or occupancy rights terminated by only a resolution of the board, and this resolution could be passed outside of a meeting of the board of directors. Further, as proposed, there is no appeal to this decision of the board of directors unless the board of directors has a specific bylaw that allows for appeal. This means a member of a co-op could be kicked out by a minority of board members voting by email, with no appeal of that decision. This is certainly a change, and a change that could mean that a member of a co-op who faces eviction may not have due process or a chance to defend himself or herself.

These problems can be discussed at committee. Hearings should be held—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Rural Affairs is having a little chitchat with the gallery. We know that's unacceptable. And I notice the three members in that area are becoming very loud, so you might want to cut it back a little bit. Thank you.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Thanks for your co-operation.

Go ahead.

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Mr. Jack MacLaren: These problems can be discussed at committee. Hearings should be held so both tenants and landlords can make presentations to committee, with their concerns and recommendations. I am sure these small problems can easily and quickly be resolved.

It is ironic that it is the prorogation by this government that stopped this bill last year, when all three parties supported it and wanted to pass it six or eight months ago. This government has prevented much of the needed changes included in this bill from being delivered to the people who have been waiting for it, who need these changes, the people who live in co-op housing. What a waste of time by this government. It is pure selfish political opportunism at its worst. What a shame. It is time to end the shame. Let's get the job done. Mr. Speaker, I support this bill.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I can't help stating what I think is the obvious. I think it's a bit rich for the Conservative Party to say that this bill could have been passed already if it weren't for prorogation—something I agree with—but then to only continually stand up and delay, delay, delay. I think it's a bit of a contradiction. I think it goes to show—the member is talking about the Agricorp program. As important as that program is, I fail to see the relevance when we are talking about co-op amendments. So I would encourage the Conservative caucus to maybe stick to the relevant parts of the debate and then to pass this along, because it sounds like all members of this House want to see this passed on. There is an opportunity for us to provide all sorts of amendments and input, and by no means does this mean that the bill in its current form will necessarily become law. I wanted to remind the members of the Progressive Conservative caucus of that. I hope that they will wrap up soon so we can pass it along.

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

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I think the member from Kenora–Rainy River has made some very excellent points that the PC Party should take into consideration.

I also want to thank Harvey for all the good work they do. Thank you for coming out to my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East and heightening the importance of the discussion around Bill 14.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I think it's an important discussion this morning. We have stood four speakers this morning, and I think the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has made a very passionate plea, some that was on topic.

If I look at the legislative calendar ahead of us—Mr. Speaker, it's important to put this in context—Bill 14 is a bill, but there is Bill 6, which is on the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River basin, introduced in February, and it has never really been debated to any extent; Bill 14, of course; Bill 21, which is An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act by the Minister of Labour—a very important bill that should be debated here, and it has not been called. Bill 30 was talked about yesterday; that's the one regulating the tanning parlours. I think that bill is also one that the member from Nickel Belt has done such a marvellous job on, and the government has just copied it—plagiarism, really.

Bill 34, the Highway Traffic Act amendment, collecting for past offences—I think the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills mentioned that. Bill 36, the Local Food Act, is basically nothing. But Bill 51 is the Public Works Protection Act amending the Police Services Act. That bill is another bill by—the minister is here this morning. I think that should be called. Bill 55, the collection agencies consumer protection bill—there has been some talk about that, but really, again, if I look at the legislative calendar here, what this government should be talking about is the truth.

We'll see that tomorrow in the budget, and we'll see the NDP joining them at the hip. There's no question about it. There's a consolidated unity amongst the left wing here, and they're—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me. Have a seat. Thank you very much.

Mr. John O'Toole: You're using my time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, I'm using your time, because you're off-topic. You have exactly—oh, sorry, your time is up.

We'll now go on to another comment: the member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. John O'Toole: I should have that time given back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You might want to have a seat.

Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I think of my earlier message I was sending to my friends over at the Conservative caucus. We really need to focus on the issue. This is a good thing. We can talk our talking notes and look at them, and we can say, "There's an old barn," or "The barn is old," or we can dress it up and say, "That barn in the field in the sunset is old." We're still talking about the same barn. This is a good bill. Let's just move it forward, and let's just get to it.

I really do appreciate the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. I did like your constructive comments

as they relate to your riding. Thank you for sharing that with us. That was really effective and good. However, I'm kind of figuring where—the points you brought up about the traffic act and what the Liberals have done and what they have not done in regard to how it relates to this bill. I appreciate the points you're trying to make, but let's try and keep it focused, and let's get this barn built so we can get the bill to the committee stage.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has two minutes—and a little order would be nice.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I would like to thank the following members for their comments: the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the member from Pickering–Scarborough East, the member from Durham, who is always so eloquent, and the member from Algoma–Manitoulin.

We all agree this is a very worthwhile bill. It should pass. It will pass second reading; it will go to committee. We'll discuss the various little problems, which are very minor, and we'll fine-tune this and make this bill as good as we possibly can.

We need to have input from tenants and landlords about a few points, like nuisance complaints. A little thing like that could become a very big issue for certain people, so we need to address that. That's very important. We will do that at committee. We will invite landlords to come in and speak to us. We'll invite tenants' representatives or associations to come and speak to us. Harvey Cooper will always continue to advise us, I'm sure, on what the right thing to do is, and we will get there.

But one of the problems is, this government prorogued and stopped this process from happening. That's terrible. Yesterday, we were watching in committee about—we heard about this gas plant scandal, where they're wasting a billion dollars of money. It's terrible. There are people in need out there. We need more co-op housing. This government is wasting time and they're wasting money, and they are out of money. They're cutting nurses in hospitals across Ontario. They're cutting physiotherapy from seniors so that seniors won't have—this is going to fill the hospitals up with even more people.

My daughter is here today. She's a nurse in a hospital. She knows there are sick people out there. She knows there are cutbacks. It's terrible. There are cuts to Community Living. The CUPE union was in to speak to me the other day, complaining about what you're doing over there. You're cutting money out of Community Living, and it's terrible.

Interjections.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, I think it's just a shame we've had to go through this lengthy, unneeded process, and we'll support this bill—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. I guess we're going to further debate. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. It is a beautiful morning in the greater Toronto area. The sun is shining, and I just had a fresh bottle of milk from the

Dairy Farmers of Ontario. It was served in a glass bottle, if you can believe that. It was like stepping back in time—kind of like this bill is. It's like stepping back in time. It's like we've done this before. As a matter of fact, it was probably in late fall last year that we were debating this bill. I think it was known as Bill 65 at that time.

It's great to stand here in the House today and speak to Bill 14. This, of course, is a rehash of Bill 65 from the last session of the House. It was one of the many bills that were wiped from the order paper. As my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has mentioned many times, it was wiped out when the government decided to put the interests of the Liberal Party ahead of people who are interested in settling disputes like there are in the co-op housing industry right now.

The decision to prorogue the House and wipe the slate clean has set us back to where we were back in the fall of last year, and it was all to put the Liberal Party priorities first and to cover up gas plant scandals that continue here in the Legislature today.

So we're living through this again to make up for the fact that we have a government so mired in scandal that most of the time we spend in the House is to try and make sense of the convoluted web that the Liberals have weaved. As a result—

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

Mr. Todd Smith: What word was it? I'm curious.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, I'm curious too. Maybe the member would like to stick to the agenda of the bill and not go through all the myriad of errors by the government. Thank you.

Mr. Todd Smith: So tempting, Mr. Speaker, but thank you very much.

As a result, most of the government bills that have been introduced this session, including Bill 14, are re-treads. They're bills that have come to us before, and we're just recycling the ideas that the McGuinty government had. That's because nothing really has actually changed on the other side of the House. It takes more than a new coat of paint to make a car new, and it takes more than a new voice to make a government new.

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I actually can't believe that we're here debating this again, but we will talk about Bill 14 because that's what we're here for.

There are some good measures in this bill, as the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills indicated in his 10 minutes. Moving disputes for co-op tenants to the Landlord and Tenant Board is undeniably the right move to make. That's where tenant housing disputes are supposed to be settled, at the LTB.

Now, as many of us know, there is already a logjam of cases before the Landlord and Tenant Board. What we need is a more comprehensive dispute resolution process, but that's for another bill apparently, not this one. It could have easily been included in this bill as well—a comprehensive dispute resolution process.

While we're talking about the Landlord and Tenant Board, this bill does waive the \$45 filing fee for low-

income tenants. The problem is that it also lacks definition of who qualifies as a low-income tenant. That, however, should be a change that's easy to make at the committee stage, when we get there.

The last thing we want to do is add further backlog to a system that's already backlogged. Tenant disputes need to actually be resolved, and the more complicated we make that system, the less it actually helps tenants or landlords.

The simple fact is, as we mentioned earlier, that this bill should actually already be the law. If not for the four-month prorogation in the Legislature, this bill would have already been to committee, and it already would have come back for third reading, and it would have come back for royal assent, but I digress again.

In the intervening year, while the government tried to run out the clock on the gas plant scandal and played a bit of musical chairs around the cabinet table, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been wasted by co-operative tenants trying to resolve these disputes through the court system. The more we lean on the courts to do this kind of work, the more expensive it ends up being for everybody involved. That's why we need to go to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

The member from Nipissing actually stated earlier, and many other colleagues have stated in the House when debating this bill, that the average cost of resolving these disputes in the courts is between \$3,000 and \$5,000. When we consider that around 300 co-op cases are heard every year, that's a lot of wasted economic activity being flushed down that legal sinkhole here in Ontario.

There are co-operatives all over the city of Toronto; there are a few in my riding, in the Belleville area. It's increasingly becoming a preferred tenancy option in urban Ontario. For many, the sense of community that they get from co-operative housing is an incredible benefit that's gained from a simple rental agreement, though there are many tenants who would say there's no such thing as a simple rental agreement these days. As co-operative housing increasingly becomes that preferred option, we're sure to have more need of this bill because the number of co-operative tenant disputes that go to the courts will only increase. The amount of money wasted in that system will also be increasing.

But as I stated earlier, this bill should already be law. We supported it in the last session here, and it's the intention of the PC Party to support it again at second reading in this session of this House. For any member of the Liberal Party to suggest that we're the ones who are hanging up this bill, or even for the members of the third party to indicate that we're the ones who are hanging up this bill, is rather disingenuous because of what I said earlier. This was making its way through the stages here in the Legislature. It was obviously headed toward committee, and it was obviously headed for royal assent because all three parties in the Legislature were supportive of this bill. I just can't believe that the government continues to put the blame on the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario for a decision that they made purely out

of self-interest, to prorogue the Legislature last October 15 to try and make a couple of scandals disappear.

That's the thing, Mr. Speaker: A lot of the committees that are currently operating here in the Legislature today and this week are operating in dealing with Liberal scandals. We saw it yesterday at the justice committee—hours and hours tied up dealing with a Liberal scandal; public accounts committee, same deal. It's dealing with a Liberal scandal there. We have gas plant scandals; we have the Ornge scandal; we have—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will sit down. Thank you.

It being 10:15, this debate will resume when the order is called again for another day.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to welcome the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, who are here today to update us on their industry. In the galleries are Ron Versteeg, Steve Runnalls, Henry Oosterhof, Patrick Hop-Hing, Murray Sherk, Ralph Dietrich, Wes Lane, David Murray, Norma Winters and George MacNaughton.

I hope that the members will take time to meet with them today and to come to them this evening in the legislative dining room, where they will have a reception.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome my former colleagues from Dairy Farmers of Ontario to the Legislature today. They're here lobbying for milk. In particular, I'd like to welcome Steve Runnalls from the great riding of Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd also like to welcome the dairy farmers, the board members: Ron Versteeg, Steve Runnalls, Henry Oosterhof, Patrick Hop-Hing, Murray Sherk, Ralph Dietrich, Wes Lane, David Murray, Norma Winters and George MacNaughton. Welcome, all, to the Legislature.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to welcome my daughter, Alexis MacLaren, who's in the members' gallery. She's a registered nurse at Queensway Carleton Hospital.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd like to introduce my constituent Mr. Michael Addario, visiting us today. Welcome, Michael.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to say hello to one of my constituents, Ralph Dietrich. He farms with his wife, Jayne, a Holstein operation near Mildmay, the gateway to the Bruce.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to introduce a constituent of mine from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, Norma Winters, who I met with this morning, from the Dairy Farmers of Ontario—doing a great job; a strong industry, employing a lot of people in this province.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It is my pleasure this morning to in fact introduce to the Legislature Josh Varghese. He's a portfolio manager and investment analyst at CI Investments right here in Toronto. I had the pleasure of meeting not only he but also his father at a 100th birthday celebration in Chatham on the weekend, and it's my pleasure to welcome him to the House this morning.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'd like to welcome Sin Barrett to the Legislature. She's here from Ottawa, and she's the parent of one of the hardest-working legislative assistants, the talented Jennifer Barrett.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'd like to welcome the dairy farmers here today, but particularly this afternoon, I will be meeting with them. Will Vanderhorst, of course, is a dairy farmer and a director from my riding of Peterborough. He has a wonderful operation just south of the beautiful community of Norwood, Ontario.

Mr. Steve Clark: I know he has been introduced a couple of times this morning, but I just met with my good friend and constituent Henry Oosterhof, who's here with the dairy farmers. I just wanted to welcome him to Queen's Park.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I also would like to welcome the Dairy Farmers of Ontario and a constituent of mine, Dave Murray. He farms near the town of Mitchell, which happens to be the host of the 100th anniversary of the International Plowing Match this year.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I would be remiss if I didn't introduce my constituent Ian Harrop, who is here with the Dairy Farmers of Ontario—a good friend of mine, and it's great to have him here today at Queen's Park as well.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'd like to welcome, on behalf of my honourable colleague Bas Balkissoon, the Islamic Foundation School from Scarborough. I believe he's busy trying to find them.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We have some visitors from Sudbury and Nickel Belt this morning. I would like to introduce Rick Bertrand, who is the president of USW Local 6500, Mr. Mike Bond, Mr. Roger Lafontaine, Mr. Nick Larochelle and Derek Teolis.

We also have, formerly from Sudbury but now working in Toronto, Mr. Myles Sullivan, John Stevens, Al Hedd, Mrs. Sylvia Boyce and Gerry Leblanc. Welcome to Queen's Park.

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

Interjection.

PUBLIC GALLERY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins—James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order: We have in our gallery today members from the Steelworkers who are wearing essentially what is their logo on their clothing, which is USW Local 6500. They're not being allowed to wear those particular jerseys. It would be no different than my walking into the galleries as a guest wearing something that says Easter Seals or Toronto Sick Kids or whatever it might be. I would ask, Mr. Speaker,

that you allow the members of the Steelworkers to wear their clothing and not for us to turn them back and not allow them to wear what anybody else is allowed to wear in this place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If I could have everyone's attention, please, so that I can bring clarity to this particular issue. I point out to the member on his point of order that, first, there is a standing protocol that no identification of any sort is supposed to be used in the House, and security takes it upon themselves to make that judgment.

The second thing that I think I might be hearing from the member is seeking unanimous consent for that to happen, but I would rule in favour of security's decision because that is a standing practice that they use. I will allow the member to engage in a follow-up.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'll be there with a camera taking pictures of T-shirts that say all kinds of other things, but I would ask for unanimous consent to allow the Steelworkers to wear their T-shirts in the members' lobby.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay has asked for unanimous consent in this particular case to allow the Steelworkers to wear their shirts. Agreed? Agreed.

Further introductions?

MEMBER FOR ALGOMA–MANITOULIN

Ms. Cindy Forster: I would raise a point of order as well.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Last night there was a reception here in the dining room and one of the participants was choking. Our member from—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Algoma–Manitoulin.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —Algoma–Manitoulin actually performed the Heimlich and saved a man's life.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for that point of order. I offer my personal congratulations and thanks, and take the moment to remind all of us that all staff are trained—most people in this place who have been elected have gone through some training of some sort throughout their life or their career—and to bring attention to the fact that you have a button that goes off in your head that says “fight” or “flight.” In this case, the member from Algoma–Manitoulin's switch went off the right way. Congratulations to the member. I thank all of our staff for being attentive to health and safety in this building.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is directed to the Premier. Premier, your testimony yesterday at the gas plant

committee was highly evasive. It strained the bounds of credibility and was obviously deeply disappointing to all of us. In fact, Premier, you've lost the moral authority to govern when you conduct that kind of performance on such an important issue.

1040

One of the many items that was far from clear in your answers—I want to make sure you have a chance to answer it today: When did you first ask for a briefing from Colin Andersen of the OPA to get a full cost of the cancellations of Oakville and Mississauga, and who ordered the cover-up of information around those costs? When did you ask, Premier, for that meeting?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I did—I spent an hour and a half with the committee yesterday. I answered all the questions that were directed toward me. That was and has been part of my commitment to be open and transparent. I told the committee exactly what I knew and when I knew it. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will check Hansard because my answers are recorded there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, I want to give—I know the Premier has been highly evasive on her answers with respect to the cancellation of the gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga. So I do want to give her another opportunity—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, come to order.

Interjection.

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

Leader?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Unfortunately, true to recent form, you avoided my very simple question just now, Premier. So I'll give you another opportunity, please, to be direct with us. I would like to know exactly when you asked for a full briefing from Colin Andersen of the Ontario Power Authority, in your capacity as Premier of the province of Ontario, on one of the biggest scandals in our province. Surely, one of the first meetings you called for was a full briefing, a thorough disclosure of the costs and who ordered the cover-up. Premier, exactly when did that meeting take place?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I disagree with the language that the Leader of the Opposition is using. I don't accept the premise of his question. I said I was at the committee yesterday. I answered the question. I tabled the documents that I had received from the OPA. From the time I was in this office, I was in conversation—from the time we were sworn in—with the Minister of Energy. The information that we were receiving through the OPA, I tabled yesterday. The reason that the Leader of the Opposition is asking these questions is because I tabled those documents yesterday. I brought them to the committee; I made them available.

The OPA estimates were different from what we had previously been told. In fact, yesterday there was another number. The information was different again. That's why

it was very important that the Auditor General write his report. That's why I asked the Auditor General to write his report, and I believe that it's important we wait for that report.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, your leader wants to put the supplementary question. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, Premier, respectfully, you're not answering a very simple question. It seems to me that the very basic first meeting you'd ask for, as a new Premier, would be to sit down immediately with Colin Andersen of the Ontario Power Authority and ask him for the full costing of the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants, and ask him who ordered the cover-up. This seems to me fundamental.

Yesterday, in committee, you did say you didn't know—"We didn't know." But respectfully, Premier, it's your job to actually know—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's your job to know the facts.

Premier, you wanted the job. You campaigned for the job. You asked for the job. I ask you, respectfully, why aren't you doing the job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very much—

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very much looking forward to the opposition leader's testimony about his costing. I'd like to know what his thoughts are about what they expected the costs to be. I look forward to that. I don't know exactly when he's going to appear before committee, but I've been there. I told the committee what I knew. The reality is that the numbers kept changing and keep changing. That is the reality. That's why we need to wait for the Auditor General's report.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Unfortunately, I did not get an answer on if the Premier did have a briefing from Colin Andersen, and—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: —why she was woefully negligent—to the Premier, Speaker—in not addressing that as one of your first meetings. I would think that would be the basics of the job. Yesterday, you were supposed to clear the air; you left a lot more questions unanswered.

Speaker, I didn't get an answer to my first question of why the Premier was woefully neglectful in her duties as Premier to get to the bottom of that. Respectfully, it is

your duty, Premier, to know those answers, not try to cover them up.

There was another important distinction there at committee. Colin Andersen basically said yesterday, in the morning, that everybody knew the cost of the gas plant. You say that's not true. A very basic question: Who is telling the truth—you or Colin Andersen? Who is telling the truth, Premier?

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

The leader is—

Interjection.

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

The leader is using language that is tightrope-walking in terms of some of the things he said, so I'm just going to give him a caution now, that if it's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I need everyone's attention.

I would ask the leader to be cautious of that type of language.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that the complexity of calculating the costs of the relocation of these plants has meant that the costs keep changing in terms of the information that I received from the OPA. I had briefings with energy officials. From the time I came into this office, I was dedicated to making sure that we had a process that was going to open up the opportunity for the members of the opposition and the third party to ask the questions that they needed to ask. I made it very clear that I was going to appear before committee. I have done everything that I could since I came into this office to make sure that the process was opened up.

The reality is that the calculation of the numbers has changed. The information that we have gotten has changed, and it changed as recently as yesterday morning. I tabled documents that made it clear that at one point there was one number and there was a different number yesterday. That's why we need to wait for the Auditor General's report, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker, and I appreciate it. I am trying to walk that line. It is a difficult balance, but I think you understand the seriousness of this issue and that the credibility of the Premier of the province of Ontario is at stake.

Premier, now you say that the numbers kept changing. I think you're basically saying that you never asked for a briefing to get finality on those numbers. You decided to look the other way or you knew and you refused to tell us. Either way, that undermines our ability to put confidence in you to lead this province of Ontario.

You stood here in the Legislature and publicly said the costs were \$40 million, and all the while you knew the costs were far in excess of that \$40 million. If you're willing to say something that you know was not in keep-

ing with the facts, why should we have any faith in you to be honest to the taxpayers of Ontario when you, yourself, were involved in covering up this scandal over the cancellation—

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

Interjections.

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

Now I will ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the contention, the assertion of the Leader of the Opposition, is simply not true. I appeared at committee yesterday. I talked about the cabinet meetings that I had attended. I talked about the information that I was given. I made it clear that the information that I was given changed, Mr. Speaker. The numbers changed. The OPA appeared at committee yesterday and made it very clear that the numbers had changed, and the information they had—

Interjections.

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

Please finish.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The OPA made it clear that the numbers that had been given to us were not the same numbers that they were bringing forward yesterday. There is nobody in this Legislature who wants the information clearly on the table—nobody wants that more than I do, which is why I've done what I've done for the last number of weeks. I will continue to do that work no matter what the Leader of the Opposition says.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Willful blindness.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Respectfully, Premier, ignorance is no excuse; willful blindness is no excuse. You are the Premier of the province of Ontario. You have the ability and you have the responsibility to compel an answer. It should have been one of your first meetings. Quite frankly, you say the numbers changed—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: —your answers changed—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order.

1050

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think, quite frankly, Speaker, that means it's time for a change in the province of Ontario to get us down an entirely different path.

Premier, your answers today, and your answers at committee yesterday, were highly evasive. They strain the bounds of credibility. Quite frankly, you've lost the moral authority to govern.

I will ask you respectfully to put before the Legislature a confidence vote when it comes to the Liberals continuing to put their interests ahead of taxpayers'. Will you call that confidence measure for a vote today?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I answered the questions yesterday. Now I'm looking forward to a very large confidence issue coming before this House, and that would be the budget. We are focused on youth unemployment. We're focused on investing in roads and bridges—infrastructure around the province. We're focusing on a fairer and more prosperous Ontario. We're focusing on investing in the music industry. Those are the issues that will come before us. That will be the confidence issue that we discuss. I sincerely hope that the opposition members read the budget, that they determine whether they want to support that budget based on the merits of the budget, because I believe that those issues touch the people of Ontario every single day. That's what we're going to focus on.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Would the Premier agree that our job here as elected members is to put the public interest—the needs of the people who elected us—ahead of the interests of well-connected insiders or the political interests of our parties?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely, and I would suggest that everything I've done as an elected official—and certainly everything that I've done in this office as Premier—has been directed at making sure that we do act in the best interests of the people of Ontario. That's what government exists to do. That is why we have government: to act in the collective interest, the best interests, of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Jeez, even spending \$10 billion on gas plants to save Liberal seats? That doesn't sound like the public interest to me. That sounds like the Liberal interest, Speaker.

Yesterday in the committee hearings, the Premier admitted that as a cabinet minister she herself signed off on the cabinet decisions scrapping the private power deal in Oakville without asking any questions at all about the cost. As co-chair of the Liberal campaign, the Premier didn't even ask any questions about the cost of cancelling the private power deal in Mississauga.

Why didn't the Premier ask a single question on behalf of the people who would be stuck paying the massive bills for those decisions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I answered these questions yesterday at committee. The reality is that the relocation of these plants was the subject of a negotiation. I was a member of a cabinet that was implementing that decision that the third party and the opposition had agreed needed to happen. We were implementing that; there was a negotiation. The reality is that those numbers were not available. We did not discuss the specifics of the negotiation that was happening at the table. I would expect that the leader of the third party

would understand how negotiation works, and that it actually needs to be a confidential process. Not every member of the cabinet had access to those specific numbers.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What I understand is, regardless of what happens in a negotiation, people have an estimate—a ballpark idea—of what they're going to have to spend when something like this gets decided. During the election campaign, I was asked whether I would commit to scrapping those plants, and I wanted to. I wanted to, since the Liberal government's decision to sign that private power deal in the first place was the wrong decision. But I would not make that commitment because the government refused to make the documents public. They refused to make the contracts public, and we have been asking for those contracts time and time again. I didn't know the cost, and the Premier had the same opportunity as I did to ask for the costs. She decided not to ask any questions at all, but to simply do whatever her party said she should do.

Why can't she admit this was the wrong decision?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party is intent on having it both ways. She suggests that she would not have cancelled the gas plant contingent on the costs, but we heard in committee yesterday that her candidates were out saying that they would cancel the gas plant. So I'm sorry; that high ground has been ceded a long time ago. She cannot have it both ways, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is all parties said that they were going to cancel the gas plants. That was the position that everyone took. We implemented that decision, and I was quite clear that I regret that there were public dollars that had to be spent in the way that they had to be spent. But the reality is we made that commitment, we listened to the people of Mississauga and to the people of Oakville, and we made good on the decision that was agreed to by all parties in this House.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I find it quite disconcerting that the Premier of this province doesn't know the difference between a candidate and a leader. I don't know how they run their campaigns, but in our campaigns, it's what the leader says that everybody else follows.

My next question is to the Premier as well, Speaker. In tough economic times, these issues—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Order, please. Okay, so let's start mentioning individual ridings.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You really aren't helping. Please. Thank you.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is for the Premier. In tough economic times, it's these very issues that matter and they matter a great deal. People are worried in these times as well about falling further and further behind. Now, the Premier tells everybody in this province that the cupboard is bare, and she's telling families that they're going to have to be paying more—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize for the interruption. Please stop the clock. The Minister of Community and Social Services will come to order, and the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've got the seats memorized, thank you very much—Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

Leader.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yet the government is moving ahead with a new corporate tax loophole worth \$1.3 billion a year while public sector CEOs' salaries are climbing everywhere from the OLG to hospitals. When is the Premier going to see that this is the wrong direction, and it's people that should be coming first?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm just going to draw a line between a comment that the leader made before she asked that question to say that I'm part of a team. That's how I work. The difference between candidates and leaders, for me: Leadership is about working with candidates, working with all of the members of the team, and being on the same page and understanding exactly what it is we stand for as a collectivity. We are part of a team.

So I believe that when the candidates who thought they were part of the NDP team were talking about cancelling the gas plant, they thought that that was the position, Mr. Speaker. We know that the people of Oakville and the people of Mississauga understood that that was the position of the NDP. We made good on that promise.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't believe it's my final.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, sorry; I apologize. I was quite excited, so I forgot to check it off.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I guess the people will decide what kind of leadership they want in this province. I think the people want leadership that takes responsibility for their team and actually provides the lead, which is what we do in the New Democratic Party.

But you know what? The Premier had a chance to ask questions about the gas plant costs, and she didn't ask a single question about something that was going to cost the public over a billion dollars, or almost a billion dollars. I don't know what she has to say to the people of this province, because she certainly didn't say it yesterday in committee.

People are struggling right now. They're worried about their jobs; they're worried about health care; they're worried about the cost of everyday life—and today they see in the paper that their government once

again gave away more than half a billion dollars to make a political problem disappear for them. Now they are planning to ask them, those very people, for more and more money when they're already having a strained budget.

1100

Does the Premier think it's fair that a government spends billions of dollars on CEO salaries increasing, on corporate tax loopholes and on cancelled gas plants while asking people to pay more?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just make that connection I said I was going to make about being a team and we're all in this together. The reality is that the budget that we will table tomorrow speaks to the needs of the people of the province. It speaks to the needs of making sure that we have a fiscally responsible budget in place, and at the same time that we invest in the things that we know are going to make people's lives better. That means making sure that home care is in place, making those investments; making sure that the infrastructure that's necessary for economic growth in small and rural communities, the roads and the bridges, are dealt with, because I know that municipalities struggle with that; making sure that young people have access to placements, to co-ops, so that they can find their way into the workforce.

Those are the concerns. I understand that. I know that the leader of the third party agrees that those are issues we should be focused on. That's what will be in our budget.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats have been very clear: Now is not the time to be opening up a brand new, \$1.3-billion tax loophole so that corporations don't have to pay their HST. We've been clear as well: These are tough times, and we shouldn't be making it tougher for families by asking them to pay more while corporations pay less.

My question to the Premier is: Will Thursday's budget close the brand new \$1.3-billion corporate tax loophole or will we see the same old status quo that leaves people falling further and further behind?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Finance has answered that question many times, in the sense that he's working with the federal government, there is a federal government component and responsibility to this, and we are working to close some of the loopholes. What the leader of the third party is talking about is not exactly a loophole; it's a constraint of the tax regime. But the reality is that he's working on that.

Underneath her question is an issue around building transit for people in the GTHA. The reality is, we believe that it's very important that we have a plan to build that transit going forward. We don't have another 40 years to wait, and the single moms who are trying to get their kids to school and trying to get to work don't have time to wait either. We need to get on that, and I would expect that the third party would be right with us, and the member for Trinity-Spadina leading that—

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

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This morning my question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday at the justice committee we had sworn testimony from the Ontario Power Authority's CEO, Colin Andersen, that "everybody" in the government knew that the cost of the Oakville gas plant cancellation was more than \$40 million. Despite you and your entire government clinging to the \$40-million number all these months, you finally admitted to the justice committee that you knew the cancellation indeed was much more. What you didn't tell the committee is when you knew. Is the reason because you and others have stood there in this Legislature time and time again telling us one thing when you knew something else to be true? Is that why, Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I have in my hand a memorandum of understanding dated September 24, 2012. The same day that this memorandum was dated, it was posted on the website of the Ontario Power Authority. I find it absolutely appalling that that critic did not read this document. Not only that; he did not read the 261-page contract that sets out the arrangement between TransCanada and the province on this particular issue.

It's very, very clear from this document that there are sunk costs. That number is identified. There's a range of other items, savings as well as additional costs, that are included in this document. So the whole world knew, including him, if he had read this document, that there were other costs and savings that had to be calculated in the Oakville plant. Disgraceful.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean-Carleton—oops, I mean the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Perhaps a page could send a glass of water over to the minister. His face is almost as red today as the Premier's was all day yesterday during the testimony.

Premier, we've now seen that your government will say anything to stay in power. You continue to say one thing when the opposite is true. Mississauga cancellation is \$180 million? Nope, it's \$275 million. Oakville is \$40 million? Nope—oops, it's \$310 million. You said you didn't know anything, but it's your signature, Premier, on the cabinet documents that started this whole process. You're all over this, Premier, and by not telling us when you knew what you knew, you've shown us you're part of this scandal. Why should we ever trust anything you say again?

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I think the official name for the Tories is Don Quixote tilting at windmills.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member for Simcoe–Grey, come to order.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: He’s tilting at windmills because he refused to read the document. He refused to read the document that identifies that there will be future costs and savings at the Oakville plant. He continues to say that Colin Andersen said that everybody knew. I agree with Colin Andersen. Everybody knew. The only reason he doesn’t know is that he did not read the document that says there will be additional costs, additional savings, that need to be calculated.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Member from Durham, come to order. I believe that’s the second time.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: As a result of this document, they’ve been trying to calculate the cost. Yesterday Mr. Andersen went before the committee, and he came with two different costs. Four weeks ago, he had a different cost. That’s why we need—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Sit down, please.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, people want to look to Queen’s Park and see some leadership. Instead, this is what they see: They see a Premier who says that she never even spoke with Dalton McGuinty about gas plants. They see a Liberal government writing blank cheques to cancel private power deals because you ripped up contracts without any idea of how much it would cost. They see a Premier who has known for months that the cost of cancelling gas plants was not \$40 million and not \$180 million but who knew full well that there were more costs coming and didn’t bother to tell the families who are going to pay the bill. These are more examples of the new government being exactly the same as the old government. Premier, is this the sort of leadership Ontarians should be expecting from this new government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I’m still reeling a little bit by the admission by the leader of the New Democratic Party that even though her candidates said they would cancel, they didn’t really mean it. I wonder if the member can tell us what he’s going to tell Frank Clegg, the chairman for Citizens for Clean Air, who told the committee, “Well, we met with all the parties and all the candidates

and were given commitments by every candidate in the Oakville area that they would support cancelling the plant.”

We have Greg Rohn of the Coalition of Homeowners for Intelligent Power. He said yes, “The NDP were against the plant....” He went on to say, “The NDP came in and attended our rally.” The mayor of Oakville, Rob Burton: “Our citizens organized their own effort to ask the province to re-think the proposed power plant.... They won promises from all parties to stop the proposed power plant.”

I could go on with the candidates, with the commitments from the New Democratic Party to cancel both plants. Perhaps the honourable member could explain.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Back to the Premier: Leadership means making tough decisions, and it also means being honest, not continuing to keep Ontarians in the dark despite having months to correct the record. It means taking responsibility, not trying to blame the other guy when you’ve done exactly the same thing.

I know the Premier keeps saying her government is new, so why does this Premier’s leadership look exactly the same as the last Premier’s leadership?

1110

Hon. John Milloy: You know, I can go on here. I think the member’s question about leadership proves the point here. Hazel McCallion came before the committee, and you know what she said? She said, “The impression that was certainly given beyond a doubt ... I think all parties would have cancelled it; there’s no question about it.” So I think she’ll be quite surprised to learn of the leader’s statement today.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, you can go right to the source here. Etobicoke–Lakeshore, according to Torstar News Service, September 16, 2011: “Etobicoke–Lakeshore NDP candidate Dionne Coley also pledged to fight the plant.”

In the National Post, September 29, 2011: “... local NDP candidate, Anju Sikka, soon issued statements concurring with the new Liberal cancellation.”

Even the member from Toronto–Danforth told InsideToronto.com, “We wouldn’t build it.”

Mr. Speaker, we saw today all of them right under the bus.

DOCTORS

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. It was 182 years ago today, on May 1, that Emily Stowe was born in Norwich, Ontario. Dr. Stowe went on to become the first female physician in Canada. To mark this date and to acknowledge the extraordinary service our doctors provide, we recognize May 1 as Doctors’ Day.

Doctors play a vital role in keeping everyone healthy. My constituents in Ajax–Pickering want to be assured that they have access to a family doctor when they need

one. Can the minister tell us what the government is doing to increase our doctors in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thanks to the member from Ajax–Pickering for this very important question. I'd also like to acknowledge the member from Richmond Hill. He successfully introduced the motion to recognize May 1 as Doctors' Day back in 2011. But most importantly, I want to say thank you to all of Ontario's doctors. They work so hard every day for Ontario patients.

We have made significant progress in recruiting new doctors right across the province. Today, we have 4,000 more doctors practising in Ontario than we did in 2003. In Ajax and Pickering, it's a 40% increase: 190 new doctors practising in Ajax–Pickering. We're training more doctors, we've increased the number of residency spots for international medical graduates, and more doctors are going to underserved areas. Health Care Connect is working to connect patients who need doctors to doctors and, thankfully, 93% of us now have a family doctor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Minister. Speaker, this is not only good news for my constituents but for all Ontarians. Having access to a family physician is important to everyone, but that's just one part of ensuring equitable access to primary health care. Not all of my constituents are easily available to visit a doctor's office, or might have to see a specialist who practises in a location that might not be very close to their home.

Can the minister please let us know what we are doing to ensure that each and every Ontarian has access to a doctor despite any challenges that they might face?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member raises a very important point, and we're working hard to make sure that every Ontarian has access to primary care.

We made a commitment to Ontario diabetics. We said, "If you want a doctor or a nurse practitioner, you're going to get one." We've kept that commitment. Now we're saying to Ontario seniors, "We're going to make sure you get attached to primary care."

Back in December of last year, we worked with the Ontario Medical Association with a new agreement. That includes 30,000 more house calls for doctors. It includes after-hours care so people can get access to the care they need when they need it. Our agreement was all about improving quality of care for patients, and I'm very pleased that it received overwhelming support from Ontario's doctors.

We've increased the number of telemedicine visits and virtual visits more than tenfold since 2003, and we're going to continue to work with Ontario doctors to make sure patients get the right care, the right place, the right time.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, it's obvious that disclosing all you knew about your gas plant scandals is not part of your plan. In spite of the fact that seven witnesses, including OPA CEO

Colin Andersen, have said that you and all of your cabinet knew all along that the cost of Oakville would be more than \$40 million, you still refuse to reveal when you knew that.

You claim that as a member of cabinet, you didn't know. You claim that as a meeting chair when the Oakville MOU was discussed, you didn't know. You claim that as Liberal campaign vice-chair, you didn't know—and then, as Premier, that you never knew that the cost far exceeded \$40 million.

Premier, your claim is hard to accept. It's time for the Legislature to decide. Will you call our want of confidence motion—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: —or will you continue to refuse because you know your record—

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: What's hard to accept is the double standard that exists here. The Premier of the province appeared in front of the committee yesterday and answered all the questions that were directed to her. She appeared, Mr. Speaker, as soon as she was invited.

Let me tell you about the Progressive Conservative Party, which has yet to release any of its costing for the plants before the election, despite the YouTube videos, tweets and press conferences. We asked the Leader of the Opposition to be there yesterday. He refused, and now he's looking at his schedule—maybe the 7th, maybe the 14th.

But you know what? We have asked three Progressive Conservative candidates to appear in front of the committee. One has outright refused, one was coming to the committee and then suddenly decided she couldn't, and another one is still thinking about it.

I ask the honourable member in his supplementary to explain to us when Progressive Conservative Party candidates will be coming forward and talking about their costing of these plants in the last election.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: When might you be inviting those candidates to your cabinet meeting?

Premier, you just aren't getting it. The Ontario Power Authority has given their best guess of what the Oakville plant cancellation and relocation will cost, and it is 775% higher than the number you and your colleagues have repeatedly claimed.

Yesterday, you had the opportunity to make a statement and to testify for 90 minutes about your version of the events. Premier, you failed to make your case. Your government's record has been laid bare. The members of this assembly are not buying what you're selling and I am certain that the people of Ontario aren't buying it either.

If you actually believe that you've done nothing wrong and deserve the confidence of this House, then call our want of confidence motion for debate and let this House decide.

Interjections.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's question and I failed to hear any indication of what the Progressive Conservative numbers were or about the presence of the candidates or the testimony of the Leader of the Opposition.

These are not political games, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition made this a cornerstone—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Both sides are not being helpful.

Finish, please.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, this was a cornerstone of their campaign. They had tweets. They had news releases. They had media interviews, and the Leader of the Opposition appeared—he starred—in a YouTube video. They sent out thousands of robocalls. I do not think it's unreasonable that we would like to hear from the candidate who made those robocalls. I do not think it's unreasonable that we'd want to hear from the candidate who put out this pamphlet saying, "The only party that will stop the Sherway power plant is the Ontario PC Party." Yet they evade the questions about their costing. They evade the presence of their candidates.

When will they come forward to the committee—

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

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Nearly two years ago, Jordan Fram and Jason Chenier were buried in a run-of-muck accident at the Sudbury Stobie mine. Their families are still waiting for answers about why they died in a preventable accident.

When will the Premier do the right thing and call a public inquiry into this tragedy so that no more lives are lost on the job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

1120

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the leader of the third party for the question on a very important issue. It's always very tragic when we hear about the loss of a worker. In the case of the tragedy that took place two years ago, it was tragic as well. The Minister of Northern Development and Mines and I had a chance to meet just last week with Wendy Fram, the mother of the person who passed away in that accident.

Of course, we need to continue to do more to ensure that we make our workplaces, especially mines, safe. I've committed, along with Minister Gravelle, to Wendy Fram that we will work with her to ensure that we are taking

steps that no other son or daughter is lost in a mining accident in our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, last weekend I stood with Sudbury workers and their families to mark the Day of Mourning here in Ontario. Many of those Steelworkers are here with us today in the spectators' gallery.

The miners who earn their living underground in this province deserve peace of mind, and their families deserve peace of mind. The families of Jordan Fram and Jason Chenier deserve answers, as do the families of the other nine miners who have lost their lives over the last five years, and in fact the person who was killed yesterday in a mining accident about 50 kilometres outside of Wawa.

Will the Premier give these people what they need and call a public inquiry into the deaths at the Stobie mine and the safety of the mining industry altogether, an industry which has changed rapidly over the last number of years and yet has not been reviewed for upgrades to its health and safety legislation for over 30 years?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Sympathies to the family of the worker who passed away just outside Wawa as well. I had the chance to speak with the member from Algoma-Manitoulin about that incident as well and assured him that I will work along with him and my ministry to ensure that we get all the answers.

In the case of the Stobie mine, a criminal trial date has been announced in October. There's also going to be a mandatory coroner's inquest in that instance. The Ministry of Labour is also involved in about four different health and safety blitzes dealing with the mining sector on very specific issues. One just finished, and there will be three more coming up through the summer and early next year.

We're also working through the Mining Legislative Review Committee, which is part of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We are looking at options as to how we can work with the co-chairs of that committee and find ways to make our mining even safer.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. Today in Ontario, more than 80% of our citizens use some form of mobile device, and most of them have entered into some kind of contract with a provider.

In my own riding of York South-Weston, we are experiencing many issues with regard to cellphones. I would say that the most concerning is probably that of students being robbed of cellphones. But the other major source of complaints is about contracts. People are very confused about the language in contracts, about additional charges and massive cancellation fees. I think we've all experienced that.

Minister, I'm happy to learn that you introduced legislation to address this very issue. Speaker, through you to the minister: I would like to ask the minister to share with

us why she has chosen to take action now instead of waiting for the CRTC to develop the code of conduct.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for York South–Weston for a very important question. I'm very pleased to rise to talk about the new Wireless Services Agreement Act. I also want to thank the Minister of Natural Resources, the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, for showing strong leadership on this issue from the very beginning.

We all know that there has been an explosion in the use of wireless communication devices in this province. Unfortunately, there has also been an explosion of complaints and issues around that. In fact, a recent CRTC hearing commissioner for complaints noted that there has been a 250% increase in complaints over the past four years—a very significant number.

My ministry, the Ministry of Consumer Services, has received 740 calls and complaints in just the last year. So there is need for clear action, and the bill will give Ontarians the protection they're looking for.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Minister, I'm astonished to hear the number of complaints. I'm not entirely surprised, because cellphones are one of the most widely used consumer products, with a large, complicated contract attached to them. It's not entirely surprising to hear the number of complaints. Most consumers realize that they already have the Consumer Protection Act in place to protect them from unethical practices. But with the complex web of problems that consumers encounter with their wireless services, there needs to be dedicated legislation to specifically address this issue.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can she please explain to this House how the proposed act will be providing more transparency and fairness to consumers?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to talk about the strong action our government's taking to help consumers in Ontario. This legislation has five major components.

First, it provides clarity. Contracts will have to be disclosed in plain, easy-to-understand language.

Second, it will require consumers to provide consent prior to any changes being made to current contracts.

Third, it will include a maximum cap of \$50 on cancellation fees.

Fourth, the bill will require service providers to include all-inclusive pricing predominantly on their ads.

Fifth, if you are improperly billed and the provider refuses to pay, consumers will have the right for triple recovery of the amount owed.

Additionally, Speaker, the bill will require service providers to stop billing immediately once the device is reported lost or stolen.

These measures are very strong and protect and empower consumers in Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. Four years ago, the then Attorney General and the most recent

Minister of Energy tabled in this House a very prophetic bill. It was passed by this House, and the Premier voted for it. It was Bill 108, entitled An Act respecting apologies. "Apology" is defined in this act as "an expression of sympathy or regret, a statement that a person is sorry or any other words or actions indicating contrition or commiseration...."

I'd like to ask the Premier, after an hour and a half of admitting her responsibility for signing documents for spending some \$858 million of taxpayers' money on a deal to save Liberal seats, will the Premier stand up and issue an apology to the people—

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If the member for Newmarket–Aurora checks Hansard from yesterday and from this House, he will see that I have many times said that I regret—which is one of the words, one of synonyms used to define an apology. I have said, over and over again, that I regret that this situation happened. I regret that we did not have a better process in place, Mr. Speaker. I regret that the costs were not clear. I regret that public dollars had to be spent in this way in order to relocate these gas plants. And it must not happen again. We must have a better process going forward. One of the things I said yesterday repeatedly was that I hope the justice committee, having heard all of the witnesses, is going to be able to help and give some advice on how, going forward, we can avoid this situation ever happening again.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, \$585 million was used to save Liberal seats. The Premier admitted that it was a decision by the Liberal Party of Ontario. The Premier admitted that she signed the cabinet document to spend those funds. What we cannot, and what people in this province cannot, understand is why the Premier cannot stand in her place, reach deep down and say to the people of Ontario, "I am sorry for what I did, for what our government did and for what our party did." Why can the Premier not stand up and utter those words? What is keeping her from making that apology to the people of Ontario? I ask the Premier one more time.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the passion that motivates the member opposite, Mr. Speaker. I said, yesterday, throughout the hour and a half that I was at the committee, that I was as frustrated as they were. We all agreed that—

1130

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The Minister of the Environment is not helpful when he continues to heckle while the answer is being put. It's not helpful.

Please?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We all agreed that these decisions should be made. We implemented the decision. Everyone wanted to see that decision implemented because that's what they talked about during the campaign. That was their position. We made that decision. We entered into a negotiation. I have said repeatedly that I regret a better decision wasn't made upfront and that we need to make sure this doesn't happen again.

Since I came into this office, I have done everything in my power to make sure everyone had the information they were asking for.

ELGIN-MIDDLESEX DETENTION CENTRE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. On Monday, a man who fired gunshots at his former manager and terrified a London neighbourhood was sentenced to seven years. However, he will serve less than half his sentence. The appalling conditions of the jail were cited by the judge as a reason for reducing his sentence.

Is the minister okay with convicted criminals being prematurely released due to the terrible conditions at this jail?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We respect the right of judges to impose sentences that they deem appropriate under the law. We are aware of the concern regarding EMDC. With the administration of the jail, we have developed a 12-point plan, and we are working on the improvement of that jail. I've also suggested what will be implemented: It's to have kind of a board of directors for that jail comprised of citizens in the community to help us to redress the situation at the EMDC.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The conditions at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre have long been deplorable. Workers have told this government that they were at risk, and so was their ability to properly do their job. Now we're seeing that these conditions are resulting in reduced sentences for convicted criminals.

Why hasn't the minister taken this issue seriously enough to prevent this kind of fiasco from happening in our correctional system?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: As I said in the past, the situation in the EMDC jail is our top priority. Both my office and the Ministry of Correctional Services have been following the situation. The deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister have been there many times. We've changed the administration at the jail—all of this to try to improve the situation.

I take the concern very seriously. That's why I went myself to visit the jail, and make sure we have a plan to redress the situation.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Education. A great education enables our young people

to succeed later in life. Our government has increased our investments in the education system by 45% since 2003. As a result, we have seen tremendous progress in student achievement. For example, graduation rates have increased by 15 percentage points since 2003. However, we also know that in order for students to do well in school, they need to be healthy students.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please inform the House what you're doing to make our schools a healthy place to learn?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for her advocacy on behalf of healthy schools.

We know that a healthy student is an active learner. That's why our government is committed to creating an environment in our schools where healthy choices are the easiest choices students can make. Our school food and beverage policy sets nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold in schools so that our students have access to good-quality food. I'd like to thank the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, who are here this morning, for their participation in milk programs in many of our elementary schools.

We've also set out a comprehensive healthy schools strategy which includes daily phys ed, funding for all our boards to have mental health leaders, support for mental health nurses in our schools and a healthy school framework to assist schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: Our schools are not just places to learn but are also community hubs. They're places where our students gather before and after school or on weekends, to learn and to play. This is quite evident in many of my schools in Scarborough–Agincourt.

In one of my visits to Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate, the principal had to get on the PA system to remind the students that it was now 5 p.m. and students needed to vacate the school buildings unless they were involved in extracurricular activities.

Making our schools accessible for community programs is a great way to get our students to be more active. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please inform this House of the work you're doing to make our schools more accessible to the community?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Our government has made schools more accessible to the community, because the member from Scarborough–Agincourt is absolutely correct that what happens after school is important in the lives of students too.

This school year we're providing \$42 million through our Community Use of Schools program. This funding supports healthy, active lifestyles by enabling not-for-profit groups to offer affordable activities to our young people. As part of our Community Use of Schools program, we are providing \$7.5 million to help provide free access to school space outside of school hours in communities that need it most. Through our work, 220 priority schools offer school space at no charge to not-for-profit groups. We will continue to work with local schools to serve as community hubs.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Premier. The Premier's testimony yesterday wasn't just evasive; it was downright suspect. When asked repeatedly about when she first learned of the so-called buckets of costs, the Premier ducked and dodged, attempting to avoid accountability.

While the weak-kneed Liberal apologists in the NDP may be willing to turn a blind eye, the PC caucus will hold this scandal-plagued government to account. So I ask the Premier this: Will she finally uphold her moral obligation and call the PC want of confidence motion for a vote?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Let's review the Premier's actions in this regard. She was the one that came to office as Premier and asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation. She's the one that called for a select committee of this Legislature, which was rejected by the opposition. She was the one who asked the government members to put forward a motion for a government-wide search for relevant documents. It was voted down by the opposition. It was the Premier who went before committee yesterday and spent an hour and a half answering questions that were posed by the Progressive Conservatives.

There's a quote that I'd like to share with everyone from Oakville Mayor Rob Burton. He said the following: "Anyone who wishes to criticize the cost of cancelling it would do everybody a favour if they would explain how they would have done it differently."

I couldn't put it better than Mayor Burton.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again to the Premier: That was a pathetic response. That response might be, in fact, enough to satisfy the weak and feeble members of the NDP's Toronto caucus, but taxpayers in my riding expect better. Instead of busying themselves capitulating to NDP extortion, the Liberals should be focused on getting to the truth of the gas plant—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I withdraw.

They should be focused on getting to the truth of the gas plant scandal. But it's clear this government is determined to play games. This one is hide-and-seek. You hide the real cost of the gas plant scandals and force the opposition to seek out the truth, and the truth we're finally getting hurts.

Premier, you have lost the moral authority to govern, but my question is, do you have the moral fibre to call the PC confidence motion today?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member talks about games. I'd like to just inform everyone that I've just received a note: The justice committee will not be sitting tomorrow. There's a reason why, Mr. Speaker. Because the list of witnesses were all former

Conservatives candidates, and not a single one is going to show up—not a single one is going to show up and discuss the costing, the analysis that was done by the Progressive Conservative Party about the promises that they made at the door, in media, through news releases, in the Twitterverse, on YouTube, through robocalls, and why their leader stood up and said "Done, done, done." They were available that way to stand beside the leader, but they're not available tomorrow to answer some questions of the justice committee.

FERRY SERVICE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier. The Chi-Cheemaun ferry is a crucial link between Tobermory and South Baymouth on Manitoulin Island—crucial to businesses, tourists and students. It contributes \$25 million a year to local economies and transports over 200,000 passengers a year. It's supposed to open up for the summer on Friday, but it won't because the Ontario government and the federal government refuse to take responsibility for dock repairs needed to address low water levels.

The Owen Sound Transportation Company has been raising concerns about the threat of low water levels for over a year. The cost of repairs is less than \$300,000, and the benefits are in the tens of millions. When will the Ontario government stop trying to find ways to avoid its shared responsibility for the ferry and start playing a constructive role in getting the ferry running now before local economies and businesses are devastated?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: This is a very serious situation, certainly one that we are determined to find a solution to. I appreciate the question.

The fact is the current low water levels of Lake Huron are putting the Chi-Cheemaun ferry in a position where it cannot safely dock at the wharves. The work that needs to get done is immediate work.

The wharves are owned and operated by Transport Canada. We have a legal agreement with them for them to maintain that. I had a discussion yesterday with the federal minister, who is, at this stage, not prepared to do that. We're going to keep the pressure on and make sure that happens.

But let me say this if I may, Mr. Speaker: We recognize the importance in terms of tourism and the economy. We are prepared to find a solution. The work needs to get done, and I am determined to see that that work does get done so the Chi-Cheemaun can operate as soon as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just for the record, the reason the committee is not meeting tomorrow, according to the Clerk—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a point of order.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the member from Willowdale, guests: mother Fe Pe and aunt Diane Pe are here to observe Karinna Pe. We welcome them to the House.

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

The House recessed from 1143 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? Introduction of guests?

I'll introduce one of my own. From my riding of Brant, the big shot of the Dairy Farmers—I think that's the nicest way to say it—Bill Emmott is here. He's some kind of grand pooh-bah. We are glad you're here. Thank you for joining us, Bill. The chocolate milk tastes wonderful.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAIRY FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to recognize the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. I was pleased to talk with them today with our leader, Tim Hudak, and have the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to supply management.

We recognize that Ontario's dairy industry supports 75,000 jobs across the province and contributes \$5 billion to Ontario's GDP. They are a vital part of not only our rural economy, but also our food manufacturing sector. I am proud that Oxford produces more milk than any other county.

I want to commend the Dairy Farmers for the work that they are doing to bring milk into our schools through the volunteer-run school milk program and through World School Milk Day. Unlike our now Minister of Agriculture who tried to ban and restrict milk and chocolate milk in schools, we understand the benefit of giving our students access to fresh, nutritious milk. It is a local food, and we on this side of the House are proud to support milk in schools.

Rather than banning foods, we believe the best approach is to work with groups like the Dairy Farmers to increase the food knowledge among our students. That's why earlier this week we announced that we will be introducing an amendment to the Local Food Act to require food education in the curriculum in all grades. I hope that all parties will support that amendment.

I want to thank the Dairy Farmers of Ontario for coming to Queen's Park to update us on their industry. I also want to thank them for providing Ontarians with safe, high-quality, Ontario milk.

Mr. Speaker, in my introductions this morning, I did forget the chair of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Bill

Emmott. Following you, I wish to introduce him to the Legislature and welcome him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): One too many.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This morning, my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin asked for action to keep the ferry going between Manitoulin Island and Tobermory. This vital link faces a shutdown because lake levels are dropping, which in turn causes huge docking problems—ones that can shut down the ferry.

Although there are a number of factors that affect water levels in each of the Great Lakes, climate change is the biggest single factor in driving down water levels. Higher evaporation in summer, lack of ice cover and thus evaporation in winter all mean loss of huge volumes of water. Climate studies cited by the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States show a future loss in average water level in the Great Lakes from half a metre to two metres.

The cost, the destruction of habitat and the disruption of people's lives will be immense. The need to rebuild infrastructure so that the ferry can keep going will be only one of the many costs that will come from a world that is heating up.

Speaker, the Liberals' response to climate change has been underwhelming. The government needs to act.

DOCTORS' DAY

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I have the privilege and honour, in the presence of Premier Wynne, to recognize an extraordinary group of men and women serving the province of Ontario. That is, of course, Ontario's medical doctors.

May 1, as you may know, Speaker, has been declared Doctors' Day in Ontario. I would salute the MPP for Richmond Hill, the Honourable Reza Moridi, currently our Minister of Research and Innovation, for bringing this forward. It was his private member's bill in 2011 that proclaimed this.

Why did we choose May 1 as Doctors' Day? Are we expressing solidarity with any other labour groups across the world? Perhaps, but it's also the birthday of Dr. Emily Stowe, the first female physician in the province of Ontario. As a physician parliamentarian myself as well as a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion—when it existed, of course—I'm proud to be part of a world-class health care system that we have established right here in Ontario.

I think of the many, many numbers that I can cite for you, Speaker; whether it's the 400,000 patients who see MDs across Ontario, the 4,000 more physicians that we have across the province, more residency programs, more opportunities for international graduates or the fact that 93% of Ontarians have access now to a family doctor, we can see that the government salutes and recognizes the physician contribution. That's what Doctors' Day is all about.

BLACKBERRY

Mr. Michael Harris: Today I would like to congratulate BlackBerry on the release of its latest smart phone. The Q10, with its highly anticipated keyboard and touch screen, hit store shelves today.

The launch of the Q10, along with BlackBerry's Z10 and a new operating system earlier this year, demonstrates the vibrancy of Waterloo region's tech sector, which continues to create good, high-paying jobs by driving innovation forward in Ontario, Canada and the world.

As a key company in mobile communications, BlackBerry continues to lead the sector in new directions while playing a pivotal role in Waterloo region's economy, which is home to hundreds of technology companies. I'm glad to see this iconic company has taken a major step forward by introducing another sophisticated smart phone to build on the success of its new BB10 operating system, which includes a number of new features.

One of my favourites is the BlackBerry Messenger video chat application. I use this app every night I'm away from home here in Toronto to talk to my family and to watch my young son Murphy laugh and play.

Now, I love my Z10, but I encourage those you who still enjoy having a keyboard to go out and buy the Q10 today. Again, I would like to congratulate BlackBerry on its latest addition to its smart phone lineup and continuing to develop world-class devices to work and play.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: After almost a year and a half of spearheading the fight against rising auto insurance rates in Ontario, I've learned that this issue is not only a main concern for constituents in my riding, but a major concern for drivers across Ontario. That's why our party has made reducing auto insurance rates by 15% one of our major demands in the upcoming budget.

After questions asked in this House, after a motion passed, the NDP plan to ensure auto insurance rates by 15% has finally been listened to by this government, and yesterday the government announced that they would be implementing our strategy.

But we've all heard Liberal promises before, and I'm very concerned about some hidden conditions in this promise. So what we'd like to see is the upcoming budget. We're going to be very careful to make sure that this is in writing, that there are some guarantees and, very importantly, that the reduction by 15% is within a year, because drivers in Ontario deserve nothing less.

The evidence is very clear. We've seen billions of dollars of savings passed on to insurance companies. It's time to pass some of those savings on to drivers. That's why we, the NDP, are going to make sure that this government is held to account, that they follow through with their promise and that they actually work to implement the NDP plan to reduce auto insurance rates by 15%.

JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Mike Colle: Last night, we kicked off Jewish Heritage Month in Ontario at the Lipa Green Centre with guest speaker Dr. Irving Abella. As you know, last year, with the help of the member from Thornhill and the member from Parkdale-High Park, we unanimously passed Jewish Heritage Month here in Queen's Park.

Jewish Heritage Month provides an opportunity to celebrate and learn about the incredible contributions that Jewish Ontarians have made to communities across the province, from Kenora to Cornwall to Brantford. Ontario has been home to a thriving Jewish community since the 1880s. Despite hardships and incredible obstacles, the community has been a vital part of Ontario's growth and has made significant contributions to a number of sectors, including the arts, human rights, business, academia, building, construction, law and medicine.

Today, Ontario is home to more than 200,000 Jews, the largest Jewish population in Canada. I urge all Ontarians to explore the many Jewish Heritage Month events and exhibits, so that we can celebrate the history of the Jewish community in Ontario and ensure that their sacrifices and successes are not forgotten by future generations.

1510

Mazel tov, Mr. Speaker. I encourage everyone in this Legislature to do something Jewish in their riding and celebrate this great community that has helped build this great province.

ALGONQUIN REGIMENT

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm very proud to stand today to speak about the Algonquin Regiment, headquartered in North Bay. As their honorary lieutenant colonel for many years, I'd like to speak a little bit about our proud history.

The Algonquin Regiment was founded July 1, 1900, but its independent companies can trace the official heritage back to 1863 and the Fenian raids of 1866. Our unit has earned 28 battle honours during its existence, and many of our soldiers continue to come from the north's mining, logging and hunting communities. We also have eight affiliated cadet corps spanning northern Ontario.

In World War I, several hundred of our soldiers went overseas with the 48th Highlanders of Toronto. At the outset of World War II, the majority of our soldiers were mobilized with the Grey and Simcoe Foresters. All of them exemplified our motto, Ne-kah-Ne-tah—We Lead, Others Follow. Two soldiers in our regiment were recipients of the Victoria Cross: Sergeant William Merrifield and Sergeant Aubrey Cosens. Our regiment is honoured in several communities in Holland and in northern Ontario street names, parks and schools. Regimental memorials are located in several canal cities of Holland and in Parry Sound, New Liskeard and North Bay.

I'm truly honoured to be able to represent the Algonquin Regiment here in the Legislature today, and I look forward to reading their petition regarding the regiment in a few moments.

SENIORS' CLUBS

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Speaker, I'm proud today to rise and recognize the hard work and dedication of those individuals working in seniors' clubs in my riding of Vaughan.

Seniors' clubs are an extremely important part of my community. Not only do they offer programming and resources for seniors and for their families, but they are also a key player in ensuring that our seniors continue to live safe, healthy and active lives.

I would like to take a moment to specifically recognize a number of Vaughan seniors' clubs as well as their presidents. These include the East Woodbridge Seniors' Club, and they're under the leadership of Dominic Losito; the West Woodbridge Seniors' Club, under Michele Saraceni; the Maple Italo Bocce Club, and Luciano Esposito; the Maple Pioneer Italian Seniors' Club, and Maria-Eva Cristante—I look forward to being with the Maple Pioneer seniors' club later tonight as they deal with the Seniors Association of Vaughan Initiative volunteer recognition awards; the Pine York Seniors' Club, and Isabella Ferrara—Isabella happens to be the president of SAVI; the Sonoma Heights Seniors' Club, under the leadership of Lina Tolone; and the Vellore Village Seniors' Club, under the leadership of Giuseppe Perricone.

Each of these clubs provides, as I mentioned, activities, services and outreach to seniors in Vaughan. Most importantly, each of them is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life and the physical, mental, and social well-being of our seniors. Their hard work is truly a testament to the character of those living in Vaughan, and I am happy to have been given the opportunity to recognize them today here in the House.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, this week the Premier and four other cabinet ministers announced that in tomorrow's budget they will try to tackle the issue of Ontario's high youth unemployment. I might emphasize "try." Their solution is to throw more money at the problem, but there is a better solution. Instead of spending more money on funds, grants, investment programs and subsidies, I believe we need to tackle the root causes.

Economists know why young people have a high unemployment rate. Our inflexible labour legislation makes it difficult to hire workers, especially young workers. Countless studies have shown that laws like mandatory unionism and card-based certification make it difficult for young people to crack into today's over-regulated labour market. Barriers like the College of Trades, high journeyman-to-apprentice ratios and closed tendering only compound the difficulty our youngest have in getting into the higher-paying jobs in the skilled trades.

That's not fair to the youth in this province, and they deserve better. That's why this afternoon, on May Day, I will be tabling three bills that will genuinely tackle the root causes of Ontario's youth unemployment and our employment crisis in this province.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr8, An Act respecting The Beechwood Cemetery Company.

Bill Pr13, An Act to amalgamate The Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, in Ontario, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of Peterborough in Ontario and Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Pembroke in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MARSH & CO. HOSPITALITY
REALTY INC. ACT, 2013

Ms. Jaczek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr10, An Act to revive Marsh & Co. Hospitality Realty Inc.

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): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

DEFENDING EMPLOYEES'
RIGHTS ACT (CERTIFICATION
OF TRADE UNIONS), 2013LOI DE 2013 SUR LA DÉFENSE
DES DROITS DES EMPLOYÉS
(ACCREDITATION DES SYNDICATS)

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 62, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to increase the rights of members of trade unions with respect to the certification of trade unions / Projet de loi 62, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail pour accroître les droits des membres des syndicats relativement à l'accréditation des syndicats.

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. Randy Hillier: Very short, Speaker: This bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995, to prohibit the Ontario Labour Relations Board from certifying a trade union as a bargaining agent of the employees in a bargaining unit unless a representation vote is held among the employees.

LABOUR RELATIONS
AMENDMENT ACT (ONTARIO LABOUR
RELATIONS BOARD), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL
(COMMISSION DES RELATIONS
DE TRAVAIL DE L'ONTARIO)

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 63, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to the Ontario Labour Relations Board and other matters / *Projet de loi 63, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui concerne la Commission des relations de travail de l'Ontario et d'autres questions.*

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

First reading agreed to.

1520

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: This bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995, to remove the stated purposes of the act. The practice and procedure of the OLRB is no longer determined by rules made by the board but will be determined by regulations made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council under this act.

At present, the party affected by a decision of the OLRB has no right of appeal. The bill provides the right of appeal to the Divisional Court in accordance with the rules of the court. It also makes members of the board and other officers compellable witnesses in an appeal or upon a judicial review of the board's proceedings, and makes the Minister of Labour and other ministry officials compellable witnesses before a court or tribunal.

DEFENDING EMPLOYEES' RIGHTS ACT
(COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE
BY TRADE UNIONS), 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA DÉFENSE
DES DROITS DES EMPLOYÉS
(NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE
ET DIVULGATION
DES RENSEIGNEMENTS FINANCIERS
PAR LES SYNDICATS)

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 64, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 to protect the rights of employees in collective bargaining and the financial interests of members of trade

unions / *Projet de loi 64, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail pour protéger les droits des employés à la négociation collective et les intérêts financiers des membres des syndicats.*

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. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I will paraphrase the explanatory note because it is a little bit lengthy. This bill has a number of key elements to it. The first is that it provides and compels trade unions to provide yearly financial statements on all expenditures of \$5,000 or more and to make that information publicly available to both the ministry and on websites. It also allows and creates the option for members to opt out of a union, but on doing so, if they opt out of the union, they also must opt out of the collective bargaining unit so that there cannot be any free-rider provisions for people who choose to opt out of the union.

It also prevents a union from collecting dues for purposes other than for collective bargaining purposes, and allows that the employer is not compelled to take dues off members for purposes other than collective bargaining purposes.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
AND FOOD

MINISTÈRE DE L'AGRICULTURE
ET DE L'ALIMENTATION

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to recognize the 125th anniversary of Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the oldest ministry in the Ontario government.

J'ai le plaisir de prendre la parole aujourd'hui pour souligner le 125^e anniversaire du ministère de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation de l'Ontario, le plus ancien ministère du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

The Ontario of 1888 was very different from our province today. It was new, with borders still being finalized, and if you look at the picture on the wall—and I actually look at the picture of the 1888 Parliament quite frequently; that's the year my grandmother Eva Crummer was born—if you look at that picture, it does not look anything like the makeup of the Parliament today. Oliver Mowat was in the midst of his 24-year term as Ontario's Premier, during which he extended suffrage, created the municipal level of government and introduced liquor regulation laws. Ontario's primary industry was agriculture, with twice as many people living in rural areas as there were in cities.

The support we now provide to our agri-food industry ranges from promoting Ontario food domestically and internationally, to ensuring food safety, to partnering in

research and innovation. But one very important thing has not changed: Agriculture remains a major driver of Ontario's economy.

Mr. Grant Crack: Some \$34 billion.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just as in 1888, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is committed to supporting our farmers and food processors. Today, Ontario's agri-food industry is stronger than ever, contributing \$34 billion to the economy, as my parliamentary assistant said here, and supporting 700,000 jobs. Our primary agriculture sector is the largest in Canada, producing more than 200 different commodities, and our food processing sector is the second-largest manufacturing sector in the province.

While it is certainly true that our agri-food industry is big, it could be bigger, Mr. Speaker. As Minister of Agriculture and Food, I'm committed to working to grow this industry. We'll do this by focusing on three key goals: first, making Ontario a better place to do business; secondly, increasing competitiveness through innovation and; thirdly, supporting a local food strategy that will support jobs and investment by growing our markets here at home and across the globe.

Je tiens, en tant que ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation, à stimuler sa croissance. Nous le ferons en nous concentrant sur trois objectifs clés : (1) faire de l'Ontario un meilleur endroit où faire des affaires; (2) accroître la compétitivité par l'innovation; et (3) appuyer une stratégie pour les produits alimentaires locaux qui soutiendra les emplois et les investissements en faisant croître nos marchés ici et partout dans le monde.

For over a century, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food has worked hand in hand with Ontario's farmers and agribusinesses to ensure the success and prosperity of our agri-food industry.

As we look back on our achievements, we must also recognize the hard work of the men and women who make up our agri-food industry. They have built the strong foundation for this success. They keep our families nourished and healthy, they form the backbone of so many communities across our province and they are instrumental in Ontario's success.

Ils gardent nos familles bien nourries et en bonne santé. Ils constituent l'ossature de très nombreuses collectivités un peu partout dans la province et ils jouent un rôle clé dans le succès de l'Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I know that we will continue to work together with our agri-food partners in the years to come to build on our successes and to share all the good things that grow in Ontario with families here at home and all over the world. Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

SEXUAL ASSAULT
PREVENTION MONTH
MOIS DE LA PRÉVENTION
DE L'AGRESSION SEXUELLE

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I stand today to recognize May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in Ontario.

En ce moment, je veux dire clairement que la violence à caractère sexuel, sous n'importe quelle forme, n'est pas acceptable et ne sera pas tolérée dans cette province. Chaque femme a le droit d'être et de se sentir en sécurité chez elle, dans sa communauté et sur son lieu de travail.

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat: Sexual violence in any form is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in this province. Every woman has the right to be safe and to feel safe in her home, her community and her workplace.

But we recognize that there is still more work to be done in Ontario in this respect. We've all heard the statistics. It is estimated that one in three Canadian women will experience sexual assault, yet sexual violence is a subject that is seldom discussed until high-profile devastating stories move us all to action.

Reading and learning of these tragic realities reminds us that sexual violence does have devastating consequences. The extensive media coverage shows us that men and women of all ages recognize sexual violence to be a serious and pervasive problem. It also reminds us that more discussion and more action are needed to prevent and ultimately eradicate sexual violence.

Le Mois de la prévention de l'agression sexuelle nous donne une occasion d'avoir ces conversations et de prendre des mesures. En changeant les attitudes, on peut changer les vies. L'éducation constitue la première étape.

1530

Sexual Assault Prevention Month gives us a chance to have these conversations and to take action. By changing attitudes, we can change lives. The first step is education. We need to provide children with the skills and attitudes to build healthy, equal and respectful relationships to prevent sexual violence; to build a society where boys and girls and men and women have the knowledge to identify and speak out when they see these incidents occurring; where the word "consent" is fully understood by our young people to mean something that is asked for and given, not implied; and where victims have the confidence to receive the support they need and to report crimes when they occur.

Nous sommes déterminés à promouvoir cette éducation. C'est pourquoi notre gouvernement appuie les campagnes sur le Web de la Campagne du ruban blanc et du Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions. L'initiative « It starts with you. It stays with him. »—« Ça commence avec toi. Ça reste avec lui. »—fournit aux enseignantes et aux enseignants des plans de leçons pour la promotion des relations saines et égalitaires, ainsi que sur la prévention de la violence.

We are committed to promoting this education. That's why our government supports Web campaigns like the White Ribbon Campaign and the Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions.

The "It Starts with You. It Stays with Him" and « Ça commence avec toi. Ça reste avec lui. » initiative provides elementary and secondary teachers with lesson plans on promoting healthy, equal relationships and preventing violence.

Two years have passed since we launched our Sexual Violence Action Plan to prevent sexual violence, im-

prove supports for survivors, and strengthen our criminal justice response.

We are making progress in achieving these goals. Research shows us, however, that 15% to 25% of college- and university-aged women will experience some form of sexual assault during their academic careers, so that's why we've created a resource guide to help universities and colleges prevent sexual violence on their campus. The guide provides practical tools and offers advice on how to engage the entire campus community in making our campuses safer.

We've also expanded the language interpreter services program, which delivers interpreter services in over 60 languages for victims whose first language is neither English nor French.

Avec moins d'une victime sur 10 qui signale des agressions à caractère sexuel à la police, nous savons que nous devons améliorer la confiance des victimes pour qu'elles osent parler, en augmentant le soutien que nous leur fournissons. C'est pourquoi nous augmentons notre investissement pour améliorer les soutiens aux personnes survivantes par l'intermédiaire des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel partout dans la province.

With less than one in 10 victims reporting sexual assaults to the police, we know we need to improve victims' confidence to speak out by increasing the support we provide them. That's why we're increasing our investments to improve supports for survivors through sexual assault centres across the province, and we continue on a path that I believe will lead us to achieving our goal.

I want to thank all of those who work on the front lines every single day. Throughout Ontario, we can all be a force to bring about change. Let us not stand still. Let us not be silent. Let us reiterate that sexual violence in any form is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in Ontario.

As I have said, changing attitudes will change lives, and by speaking up against sexual violence, we will make Ontario a safer, fairer society for all women.

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

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to recognize the Ministry of Agriculture's 125th anniversary. To start, I want to recognize the OMAFRA staff. I've had the opportunity to work with some, and they are truly experts in their field and I want to commend them.

I also want to recognize another significant milestone in the ministry's history. On May 18, 1966, it became the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. If food hadn't been forgotten in February, this month we would have been celebrating 47 straight years of agriculture and food.

This year, we could also be celebrating 15 years of the successful Slots at Racetracks Program to help the horse

racetrack sector. Instead, we are watching the demise of the industry.

May has another milestone. Based on the responses to our survey, May 10 is red-tape-freedom day for food processors. That means, if we put it all together, food processors would have spent until next Friday just dealing with government forms and paperwork.

Over 125 years, Ontario agriculture has evolved. Today it is advanced, high tech and scientific, but the ministry and the government haven't kept pace.

When we ask farmers, agribusinesses and food processors about the challenges they face, too often the response was: challenges created by this government. We heard that they are drowning in red tape. Businesses are choosing not to expand—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: —and create new jobs because with all the excess paperwork and regulations, they don't think it's worth it. We've heard from farmers, food processors and agribusiness that the massive hydro increases caused by the Green Energy Act and government policies are having a significant impact. We heard from farmers who can't get a fair AgriStability appeal even though they paid the premiums and followed the rules.

Recently, I received over 300 emails about the massive increases to the eco fees for agricultural tires and the negative impact it will have on our agriculture industry and our tire dealers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize one more milestone.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think your colleague wants you to listen.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: For 15 years we have celebrated Ontario Agriculture Week right before Thanksgiving. Now this government is proposing to replace it. We believe in celebrating our farmers and all of their contributions to the land, the economy, the community—

Interjection.

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

The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell will withdraw.

Mr. Grant Crack: Withdraw, Speaker.

Mr. Ted Arnott: From his chair.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll take care of that part. And now he'll stop.

Carry on.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: We believe in celebrating our farmers and all their contributions to the land, the economy and the community as well as producing the food we eat and, in the case of the dairy farmers who are here today, the milk we drink. We will be putting forward Local Food Act amendments to save Ontario Agriculture Week, add food literacy and strengthen the agriculture and food industry to give us more to celebrate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Because I believe in the precepts of this place and the way in which we operate, I'm going to ask the member

from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell to go to his seat and withdraw.

Mr. Grant Crack: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I usually look at my afternoons to be a little on the softer side.

Interjection.

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

The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for a response.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to mark Sexual Assault Prevention Month. Sexual violence has a destructive and devastating impact on the lives of victims, their families and the well-being of society as a whole. It is an issue that crosses all social, economic and cultural boundaries and affects men and women of every age. We use this month to increase awareness of sexual assault and focus our efforts on eliminating it in all of its forms.

The problem remains daunting. Statistics show that nine out of 10 sexual assaults are not reported to the police. Myths surrounding sexual assault are still common in our society and tend to shift blame onto the victim and raise doubts about the credibility of their testimony. Victims often suffer in silence without support. As a result, there is a particular need to have services that are available, accessible and safe for victims of sexual assault.

In my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, agencies such as the Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre, the YWCA in Haliburton and Peterborough and the Peterborough Regional Health Centre Sexual Assault Response Team are doing important work in addressing this issue. These organizations provide immediate and confidential services for victims and survivors of abuse. Through the services provided by organizations like these, victims can overcome the guilt, anger and shame that many still experience, and begin to feel empowered, stronger and hopeful about their future.

Our ultimate goal must be to stop sexual violence before it begins and start conversations on how to prevent it happening. When Sexual Assault Prevention Month ends, the discussion doesn't need to.

I commend the many groups and workers who are working tirelessly to spread awareness and prevent sexual assault. They and the victims they support should know that their Legislature stands behind them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good response.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Every year at this time, at this month, I stand and I say the same thing, and every year this government refuses to act.

1540

Let me tell you what I'm talking about when it comes to Sexual Assault Prevention Month. Victim Services Toronto is the only agency in Toronto providing immediate assistance to victims. It runs 24 hours, seven days a week, and it has not had a cost-of-living increase for two decades—two decades, Mr. Speaker. The government of Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan does not include one cent for victim services in Toronto, and the funding per victim for the Victim Crisis Response Program has dropped from \$286 in 1990 to \$31 two years ago, \$31 per victim—the only agency. So I would really question the true motives of the spin of this month from this government if they can't even fund the only agency that's actually helping victims directly 24 hours a day in Toronto.

That's the bad news. The good news: Some folk are doing something. On May 10, just before Mother's Day, faith leaders from across this province and across the city are coming to Queen's Park, 1 o'clock, and they are going to sign on to a statement. This is the statement: "We, the leaders in our respective faith communities, stand committed to promoting freedom from violence for all women."

This is a critical action by our faith leaders, and I'm talking about faith leaders from all the great faiths who are coming here. It's not the first time. Every year, Ruth's Daughters of Canada inspires faith leaders and gets faith leaders to come and to sign on yet again, to get our congregations active around this issue.

So there are folk doing something. There are folk doing something directly that affects people's lives directly. We just wish this government would fund victim services, please. This is, I think, the fifth year I've said exactly the same thing with exactly, unfortunately, the same results.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD MINISTÈRE DE L'AGRICULTURE ET DE L'ALIMENTATION

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to rise on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the New Democratic caucus in order to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. It's a particular honour for me because my family has been involved in agriculture since my parents emigrated from Holland many years ago.

Speaker, the more things change, the more they stay the same: 125 years ago, agriculture was the biggest economic driver in the province, employing more people than any other sector.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. And it was absolutely deserving of a dedicated ministry, the oldest ministry in the province—absolutely.

Today, 125 years later, the agriculture sector is once again the biggest economic driver in the province,

creating over 700,000 jobs and adding over \$30 billion to Ontario's economy annually.

We are honoured here today to have the leaders of the dairy sector here. The dairy sector creates 75,000 jobs in the province and adds over \$5 billion to the economy.

Urban Ontario seems to have discovered agriculture, and they all seem quite surprised how big it is. Yet those of us who have always been involved, we know, and we just smile quietly. We go and do our work feeding the province and feeding the world.

The Ministry of Agriculture kind of mirrored that. They are helping the people, helping farmers get better at their craft.

Dans la campagne, le personnel du ministère a joué un rôle crucial pour faire avancer le secteur. Ils ont été conseillers en cultures, conseillers financiers et, dans certaines parties, des traducteurs de la province. Quand mes parents ont déménagé à Temiskaming, c'était le représentant de l'agriculture qui a traduit les informations locales du français en anglais—and then my mom to my dad in Dutch.

Le personnel du ministère a joué un rôle essentiel sur les routes de la concession de la province, et dans les zones assez chanceuses de les avoir, ils le font encore.

We used to all have ag reps. We don't have them anymore. The one thing the ministry has lost is that the ministry talks to farmers; it doesn't talk with them, and it doesn't speak for them. That's the one thing, and that's why, oops, we no longer—Agriculture Week has been supplanted, and that's wrong. Our caucus will commit to talk with farmers and not talk at them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I totally agree with this petition. I affix my signature, and I'll send it to the desk with Chedi.

MINING INDUSTRY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this very heavy load today, and that's because over 5,000 people from all over Ontario have signed this petition. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas there has not been an inquiry into mining practices in Ontario for 30 years;

“Whereas there were eight deaths in Ontario mining properties since January 2011;

“Whereas mining technology has significantly changed how mines operate in Ontario;

“Whereas ownership of the mining sector has become international;

“Whereas environmental issues have been identified in workplace diseases in community health from mining operations;

“We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commission an inquiry into the state of mining in Ontario and into the Ministry of Labour's enforcement of the Ontario Health and Safety Act and regulation 854, that is the regulation for mining. Such an inquiry will reinforce best practices and identify issues for improvement.”

People from all over Ontario signed this petition, so will I, and I will send it with page Gabriel and, I hope, some of his strongest friends to bring it to the Clerk.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: “Whereas the Ontario government's ongoing investment in the RVHS Ajax and Pickering hospital has created an outstanding community health care delivery system; and

“Whereas the Rouge Valley Health System Ajax-Pickering hospital's 10-year vision plan (as read in the Legislature by MPP Dickson) will be instrumental in ensuring the ongoing needs of the increasing population are met;

“Therefore we undersign this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and ask that the government of Ontario continue to invest in this family-friendly Ajax-Pickering hospital.”

I attach my name to it, Mr. Speaker, and hand it to Brigid.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Ted Arnott: I met today with representatives from the Guelph Wellington Community Living association; they gave me this petition, and I wanted to present it today. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

disabilities like cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and autism; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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“(2) To protect existing services and supports by providing an overall increase in funding for agencies that is at least equal to inflationary costs that include among other operational costs, utilities, food and compensation increases to ensure staff retention;

“(3) To fund pay equity obligations for a predominant female workforce.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

CASINOS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the proposed waterfront casino does not take into consideration the wishes of the public, who have time and again rejected the building of a casino in Toronto;

“Whereas the redevelopment of the port lands in Toronto would not benefit from the imposition of a casino;

“Whereas an urban casino will draw most of its visitors from locals, not tourists, therefore benefiting operators of the casino and provincial government coffers at the expense of Torontonians; and

“Whereas a casino will have adverse effects on Toronto, fracturing families and communities, jeopardizing small businesses, causing long-term job loss and intensifying social problems;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly do all in its power to stop a casino being forced on the city of Toronto.”

I agree with this petition. I’ll sign it and give it to page Megan.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads:

“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 wholeheartedly, will sign it and send it down with Kelly.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here about “Stop the tire fee increases.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I thank you very much for allowing me to present this petition, and I affix my signature.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “Whereas agencies that support individuals with a developmental disability and their families have for several years (beginning in 2010) faced a decline in provincial funding for programs that support people with disabilities like cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and autism; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“(2) To protect existing services and supports by providing an overall increase in funding for agencies that is at least equal to inflationary costs that include among other operational costs, utilities, food and compensation increases to ensure staff retention;

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

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to give it to Megan to be delivered to the table and sign my name.

ALGONQUIN MEMORIAL BEACH

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, support the proposal to request the city of North Bay to dedicate the beach and adjacent land in honour of the veterans of the Algonquin unit who have served and given their lives for their country. This city-owned property is currently used as a beach by local residents but is considered underutilized due to lack of public awareness, parking and by lack of clear definition of the property. The location is ideally located near the

22 wing, and is easily accessible to both the rural and urban population of North Bay....

“The property currently has both forest and a beach that can be accessed by following a path. Ideally, a site plan would include signage, a designated walkway, public parking, washrooms and change rooms. The property is approximately seven acres.

“We support the designation and development of the city of North Bay's Springdale property on Four Mile Lake to be dedicated as the Algonquin Memorial Beach for recreational use including a public beach.”

I sign my name and give it to page Simon.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Cindy Forster: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I'll affix my signature and send the petition with page Brendan.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty-Wynne Liberal government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

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

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

I will sign this petition.

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

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“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 opportunity.”

I agree with this and will be signing it and handing it off to page Megan.

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 30, 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 (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I’m pleased to have some time this afternoon to speak to this particular piece of legislation. Actually, I should read this. It’s entitled the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, and I do want to thank our Minister MacCharles for introducing this legislation. The focus of it is obviously on consumer protection. It is the kind of legislation that I think, at the end of the day—and not to be presumptuous—all sides of the House and all three parties represented here in the House are likely to find a capacity to support, and I’ll be interested in listening to the debate as we move forward, in terms of their comments on my 20 minutes this afternoon, and I will be here for some time this afternoon and have an opportunity to listen to their longer speeches on this particular piece of legislation.

I think at the end of the day, as governments, it is important that we never lose sight of the fact of who it is we represent on a constituency level, and sometimes these sorts of grassroots issues, if I can call it that, tend to slip sideways, I think, although as I speak here this afternoon, I’ll have an opportunity to refer to some of the pieces that we’ve introduced before, including some of the specifics around what is contained in this legislation here today.

While the legislation is not focused only on seniors, I think it’s fair to say that seniors are quite probably and possibly the people most affected, not necessarily by the contents of this legislation but by some of the work that we’ve done in the past on consumer protection pieces. It really is remarkable—as I was thinking about what I was going to say today—I think it is really quite remarkable when you think about, as a government and as opposition parties, how much time we spend focused on issues related to seniors. As I said, this legislation does not primarily focus on them, but much of consumer protection work and government legislation does. I think of the obvious example, while it’s not consumer protection, but when we think about seniors, so much of what we do as a government is health care related. It is, of course, the biggest line item in our budget, about \$50 billion. It was, I think, about \$30 billion when we were elected in 2003. It’s now approximating \$50 billion, almost 50% of the total provincial spending. We’ve seen the requirement. We’ve hired, I think, 15,000 more nurses and about 4,000 more doctors—so much of that work focused on seniors.

An example on the health care side would be our Wait Times Strategy. We brought in a Wait Times Strategy that identified the five first procedures, which were MRIs, hips and knees, cancer, cardiac and cataracts. Those were the first five on our Wait Times Strategy, and when you think about it and step back for a second, who is it that uses most of those procedures? Well, it’s

seniors. And so, so much of what we do here has that particular focus.

I was doing a bit of reading the other day on the Ontario Drug Benefit, and when I was reading that, I found out that on the ODB, there are two million-plus seniors who have the benefit of that particular program that spends about \$4.5 billion a year of provincial money. It's not just two million seniors made up of over the age of 65. The \$4.5 billion does accommodate people in long-term-care homes and in other places, as well as the Trillium Drug Program. But the point is, there are two million seniors out there, and apparently about 14,000 more per month are finding themselves in that 65-and-older category. So we need to remain vigilant when it comes to issues related to seniors. I've given a little bit of an example of how the health care component tends to take up most of that work already, and that funding. But of course, as I've said, it's not primarily and only focused on them.

In fact, there was an article in the Chronicle Journal newspaper today in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan—the main newspaper in northwestern Ontario—that was talking about some of the work that governments at all levels, whether it's municipal, provincial or federal, do in relation to consumer protection and initiatives, and it reminded me that from time to time, we have been criticized and called, based upon previous legislation, a nanny state. In fact, the former Premier was sometimes referred to as “Premier Dad.” It was a reference to the fact that on occasion over our nine going on 10 years of government we introduced legislation that some people found as being perhaps too interventionist into the lives of the people who live in the province of Ontario. But as I suggest to those people—and that's fine; they can have their opinions on whether sometimes we go too far or not. What I do notice from time to time, though, is that every time another election rolls around, rarely if ever has a party had as part of their platform something that would roll back those particular pieces of legislation.

By way of example, I can talk about our smoking-cessation legislation. I see that as consumer protection; I see that as protecting the people of the province of Ontario. I was on the municipal council in the city of Thunder Bay. We were, if not the first municipality in the province, one of the first that was leading the fight on protecting people in public workplaces when it came to the use of tobacco. I can remember the arguments to this day, and an old friend of mine who was on council beside me—my goodness; this is I guess about 10 or 12 years ago now—who still then, in 2001, give or take, refused to acknowledge that second-hand smoke caused deaths. I remember it like yesterday. It was really remarkable. It's an example of legislation that we brought in pan-provincially to deal with issues related to the health and safety of people.

Other examples would be the children's seat belt law, the pesticide act and a piece that was introduced, I think this week, by the minister dealing with cellphone bills.

You want to talk about a consumer protection piece that I think will go down as perhaps one of the most well-received pieces of legislation to come to this Legislature in quite some time? I think it's going to be this piece that's introduced dealing specifically with cellphones. The use of cellphones has become so incredibly pervasive, obviously not only in Ontario but around the world, that everybody who has one—and that's making up a larger proportion of the population every day—is affected by the terms and conditions attached to the use of those cellphones. I think many of us for some time have seen and felt that maybe we're not getting necessarily such a good deal here with some of the terms that are attached to these contracts. I think that this particular piece of legislation is well introduced this week by Minister MacCharles, dealing with cellphones and the prices that people have to pay, the difficulty getting out of the contracts. I think, Speaker, that when that one finds its way to the floor of the Legislature, people in this province are going to be very pleased and are going to be very happy with what we brought in. It is going to be one of the best pieces, I believe, of consumer protection legislation that we've seen come in and be very, very popular.

The one other example I will give before I move on to some of the specifics in this particular piece of legislation, Bill 55, I believe it is—and this would be an issue I would expect all members of the Legislature have dealt with at the constituency level since they've been a member here, and that has to do with energy retailers. It's incredible to think how much time and effort staff in my constituency office—and like everybody here, I'm sure we all love the staff that we have and the work that they do. How much time and effort staff in my constituency office—and if Sharla, Karen and Norine are listening, they'll know what I'm talking about—spent dealing—and again, in this case, primarily with seniors when it came to energy retailers in the province of Ontario. These were the people who would be going door to door, and they would be—I want to be careful with my language, but I don't think I'd be straying too far afield if I used the word “preying” upon the people who answered the door—as I've said, often, but not always, seniors—and selling them energy contracts, either electricity or gas.

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I can tell you that on a weekly basis, up until this train or avalanche of looking for help into my constituency office has slowed significantly in the last little while, since the reforms have been brought in—but two, three and four years ago, I would say on a monthly basis, it was not unusual for us to have 10, 20, 30 people in my constituency office who were just aghast, discouraged, angry, frustrated, worried, frightened at the situation they had found themselves in, and that was the contracts that they had signed with these energy retailers that were going door to door.

Now we had, I will tell you, great success as a constituency office, and I'm sure that other members in this place, through their staff, had similar successes. But

the point is that, as a government, we need to be aware of the fact that there are people out there—not all of them, but there are people out there, there are companies out there that tend to be unscrupulous in their business practices, who will be looking from time to time to make an easy buck and a quick buck by preying on consumers out there. Oftentimes, that turns out to be seniors. Again, it's not the only category of people we are looking to protect here today.

This particular piece of legislation—and I want to give a few examples of what is contained in this—deals with three or four specific categories of consumer protection. The first is door-to-door sales when it comes to water heaters. I was trying to connect before I came over here. I know we've had a few in my constituency office, dealing with water heaters. I don't think we've had too many of those yet. Hopefully that's a good sign. This legislation will discourage that practice even before, and hopefully, if it does pass, it will discourage even that work that's going on today, knowing that the legislation is before the House, and if we're lucky, we'll get this passed.

Here is some of what—and I'm going to take this from the statement that the minister read some time ago when she introduced this bill—the door-to-door sales specifically on the water heaters part would do. The proposed new rules, if passed, would “double the existing 10-day cooling-off period to 20 days for water heaters ... providing consumers with more time to consider their decision.” It would also—still dealing with water heaters—“ban delivery and installation of water heaters during the new 20-day cooling-off period.” It would also “allow rules requiring companies to confirm sales by making scripted and recorded telephone calls to the customer, and that key contract terms are disclosed in clear, easy-to-understand language.” And the fourth piece is “provide new customer protections when the rules are not followed, such as requiring the supplier to pay all cancellation fees when the 20-day cooling-off period is not observed.”

This cancellation fee piece is interesting. It crosses across all of the issues, whether it's cellphone contracts, whether it was energy contracts, gas or electricity. This cancellation piece was significant in making people feel very trapped in the contracts they may have signed, and it's significant that we underscore that.

That was the water heaters piece. As I mentioned, I know we've had a few of those in my constituency office, but I wouldn't say anywhere near the amount we had when it came to the energy retailing of electricity and gas.

One of the other pieces is debt settlement services, and this one is quite interesting. There are companies out there that are proposing to people that find themselves in difficulty when it comes to their credit—who are offering to try and help them by going off and negotiating better deals with the people who hold their debt, I guess it would be fair to say. Before they will do that, they are charging—not all of them I guess, but most of them, as I understand it, are charging a very significant upfront fee

that the person who is already in debt has to pay before the debt settlement company will go off and do the work they say they will do.

Now, there is no guarantee of success. There is no guarantee that the work will even be done. Yet we find these people, who already find themselves in difficult circumstances and are probably willing, unfortunately, to take even more risk than perhaps got them into the situation they find themselves in, in a very vulnerable place, I think it's fair to say. That would make the services that potentially might be provided by a debt settlement company, with no guarantee of success, somewhat attractive to them. So this particular piece is contained in this legislation as well: It's water heaters and debt settlement services.

The last one I want to talk about—my time is winding down; I have about five minutes left—is the one that deals with real estate reforms. That is contained within this legislation as well. The reason I found this one interesting is that we would perhaps have expected—maybe many people outside the GTA, maybe the members across the way who are not GTA members might not have seen this as a particularly serious issue in their ridings. Up until about five or six years ago, I as the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan would probably have said that same thing. But something is going on in my riding that makes this very relevant in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

The real estate reforms, of course, are trying to protect people when they get into real estate transactions. In my riding, for the last four or six years—I have spent almost my entire life living in Thunder Bay. Up until four or five years ago, you almost never—I think I could probably say never, but I won't. You could say that almost never would you have seen people who are entering the real estate market in Thunder Bay find themselves in the situation of being involved in a bidding war for residential real estate. I can tell you that for the last three to five years, that has been the norm.

I have a family member who was looking to purchase a property not that long ago; within the last month, actually. It was not an expensive home. It was on the lower end of the scale. I think it was around \$150,000 or \$160,000, very much what is a starter home. I know that maybe sounds like a ridiculous number to people in the GTA, but it was on the lower end—150. The family member put in a bid and found themselves in the situation where the home apparently had five, eight or 10—I forget how many; it doesn't matter—other multiple bids. The home at 150 ended up going for—whatever—20, 30 or 40 more.

Now, in Thunder Bay, as I've said, this is an incredibly new phenomenon for us. I've been telling people for quite some time—I'm very proud of the fact—that our riding has been one of the best economies in this province, relatively speaking, for the last three to five years. We have a manpower shortage where jobs are going unfilled because there are multiple companies that cannot find people to fill the jobs. We have had one of

the lowest unemployment rates in the province for the last three to five years. This has a lot to do with what's going on in our community that is driving the price of these homes.

That brings us back to these real estate reforms. What we're seeing in here is key reforms—there are others who are going to speak after me on this particular topic—that are going to require the people who are conducting the transaction to ensure that they can quantify and show the people who are buying or bidding on a property that there are in fact other offers, that they're not just telling you there are other offers and that you can see them as the person who is interested in buying the property.

This is not intended, of course, to cast aspersions on any industry, on individual real estate agents, on brokers or on anybody. I know probably 100 real estate agents in Thunder Bay personally. They all are out there trying to make a buck and do a good job. Both my parents, near the end of their lives, sold real estate for 15 or 20 years. So I know this industry; I know lots of people in the industry. We're not here to leave the impression that everybody is doing this, but from a consumer-protection angle, I think it makes sense, and that's why I said at the beginning of my remarks that I'm going to be interested to hear what other people have to say on this particular topic.

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I think it's fair to say that this makes great sense as a consumer protection piece for people who are bidding on properties in any part of the province, whether it is in Thunder Bay, whether it is in Toronto, whether it's in Oakville—you can pick the community—where we can state with certainty that if people are bidding on a home and somebody is telling you that that price has been bid up from the list price, you're going to have an ability, as someone who's looking to purchase the property, to know that that is in fact the case.

Speaker, my time is almost up. To recap: Again, I will thank very much the minister for bringing this forward. Again, the focus is consumer protection. I think as a government we've got a pretty good reputation—in fact, something that we've been criticized for. Some would say we've been too interventionist in our approach.

As I mentioned, the other one that's coming after this one, to deal with cellphones in the province of Ontario, I think, will ultimately be one of the best pieces of legislation in terms of the broad base of support that it has when it arrives on the floor of this Legislature. I look forward very much to that arriving here.

Speaker, I thank you for your time.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, it's a privilege to address the points by my esteemed member from the wonderful riding of—

Interjections: Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: —Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Thank you. I apologize for that. I don't get an opportunity too often to address his comments. But there's always a first time.

He was hitting home with me on a few areas, especially in areas whereby there is a need to protect consumers, and he had mentioned seniors.

I've seen that happen as well, and you read about it in the papers where seniors are taken advantage of. With escalating energy costs that are occurring within this province, all of a sudden there seems to be these companies that pop out of the closet, and they have these wonderful, great rates that they want to tie people up and lock them in. I think there needs to be protection for that. There needs to be cooling-off periods for these people, because, in fact, they do get taken advantage of.

I do recall that even in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, we do get people coming in, saying, “What do I do? I signed a contract, and now my rates are exorbitant. I should maybe have stayed more local, with a local”—in this particular case, a gas company, Union Gas, as a matter of fact. Yet they jumped to another company—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Darcy McKeough.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Darcy McKeough, absolutely. He was president of Union Gas for many years, and a great president as that.

Hon. John Gerretsen: The last good Tory.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: He was one of many great Tories, one of a great many Tories in our riding. Thank you very much, Attorney General, for those wonderful comments. I'm sure he'll appreciate that.

Again, you know, we do need to have protection for these people, especially because they are a vulnerable population, and of course, on limited pensions and so on, they're counting their pennies. To be taken advantage of with high energy rates and companies coming in—I think it's very unfair. Again, I commend the member as well.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up and talk about consumer protection. I think it's been a long time coming.

In response to some of the remarks that the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan mentioned, I actually would be in agreement with you on a number of issues, but on this one thing, the conversation around the cellphone protection, we actually started to have that debate, I think you'd remember—before we prorogued the Parliament—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Don't bring that up.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's true. I have to mention it, because it interrupted democracy. But that was the last time I stood up and mentioned that cellphone issue, and I want to tell you something: My 14-year-old son recently commented. He heard that the government is going to be doing something about cellphone billing and rights of consumers. This is what he said. He goes, “Finally, the government is going to do something for me.” I mean, it's one way to engage our youth, perhaps—

Mr. John Yakubuski: Well, that's yet to be seen, Catherine.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, it's yet to be seen. Listen, we're going to do what we always do. We're going to try to make their legislation better and stronger, because

that's what we try to do. I mean, that's the way we see our role. I think that it's not going to be surprising in the debate—I'm going to have 20 minutes later on to comment further. We're really going to focus on the vulnerability of consumers in the province of Ontario. Quite honestly, this piece of legislation could be stronger. We're going to be focused on that, and I hope that the government is willing to listen on that.

Also, I have some examples, because this is—it's not a fictional issue. The issue of consumer protection and the rights of consumers is very much an issue. Especially as the economy gets more and more stressed, you see people get more and more desperate. So I think, in these times, we build some supports and defence for the consumers. I look forward to actually talking about this a little bit further.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise today and pass comment on the comments that were made by my seatmate, the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I think he did a tremendous job outlining the very practical aspects of Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act.

I guess all of us in this House would wish we didn't have the need for this bill. Unfortunately, there are those who partake in our economy who simply do it in an underhanded fashion, or they prey on individuals, or they simply sell items to people who don't really need them and don't really understand what they're buying.

If you look at the three examples of where this has the most effect, they're very ordinary, everyday things that ordinary Ontario consumers have to face on a daily basis. One of them is a milestone in somebody's life: when they buy their own piece of property. It could be a first home, it could be a retirement home, it could be a vacation home. But I think we should all have the anticipation that the agent we're dealing with is being forthright with us, is telling us the truth, that if there are other people interested in that property, that we know that there is a real interest and it's not an interest that's being manufactured simply to drive up the price.

A water heater is a necessity. You don't live in Canada without a hot water heater. It's that simple. You need one in your house. Every house in the province of Ontario would have one that would be gas-water, electric-water—whatever. It's something that is needed. Of course, those who spend a little bit more beyond their means, whether out of necessity or simply out of instant gratification, find themselves in a position where they can't fulfill their obligations—that is the last time in an individual's life when they need to have somebody prey on them. When they're actually trying to dig themselves out of a hole, they don't want to find that actually they've dug themselves deeper.

We're starting to hear stories about the debt settlement services. They're not good stories. I think that this act is going to do something about changing that and making sure that consumers in Ontario in these three areas have the ultimate protection.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am glad to speak to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan's comments. Out in the country, we have a certain few salespeople, and they get tailgate warnings. I don't know whether you've ever heard of a tailgate warning before, but when they drive out to the end of the laneway, and you see their tailgate, that's the end of the warning.

We've had that going on, particularly in the last few years, and it has to do with selling solar panels. In fact, there's a lady in my riding right now who's not hooked up to the grid and got sold a solar panel for over \$100,000, and she had to pay that. It's sitting there doing nothing. It's because of the excessive subsidies that were paid to some of these companies. They all jumped into the ball game and, unfortunately, there are people who are suffering over that right now.

Interjection: Blame the government.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Whoever we blame—but that's what happens when governments give out too much money for projects and subsidize industries: Everybody jumps into it and people get bitten.

The other—it's too bad that—

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I agree with a lot of things in this protection act. Perhaps we should have had a government protection act for our consumers, and we wouldn't be in this mess with the gas plants right now.

We have older people—many people—who are having trouble paying their hydro bills these days, and now we are trying to protect them with this type of consumer protection.

There are a lot of good points in this thing, but I think the government has to realize that they probably caused a lot of these problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has two minutes.

1630

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Speaker. Jeez, it was going so well there—right up until the last 30 seconds. I don't know what happened.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: They just can't help themselves. It's in their nature.

Mr. Bill Mauro: He was put up to it, I think, Speaker.

Anyway, I'd like to thank the four members who spoke: Chatham–Kent–Essex, Kitchener–Waterloo, Oakville and Perth–Wellington.

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex spoke most of his two minutes pretty much on part of the theme in my 20 minutes dealing with seniors. I think we all recognize that unfortunately, when it comes to fraudulent activities by unscrupulous business practices, often, but not always, the victim is a senior. As I said, since 2003 for me and my constituency office—I don't even enjoy recounting the number of times me and my staff have been involved with a senior who is at their wits' end in terms of trying to deal with a situation they have found themselves in, who trusted the person who came to their

door, who believed what they were told, who signed in good faith a contract that they thought was going to leave them in a better place, and who, very shortly thereafter, would find themselves in our constituency office—like others around the province, I'm sure—looking for support and help with this particular situation. As I mentioned, my staff is phenomenal and great, and we have been able to achieve a lot of success dealing with those contracts. But this is about being proactive, being on the front end and trying to limit a lot of the damage before it even happens.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo: Thank you for your comments. The point about making it stronger: My goodness, of course we're open to that. We're happy to accept any strong, positive moves forward on the legislation. If we're fortunate at second reading and we get it to committee, I'm sure there'll be an opportunity there for us to deal with a lot of those ideas and issues you have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You said that with such authority. You've obviously been taking a look at my riding and seeing what a great place it is. You'll want to make sure there's a lot of clarity when you identify down there. I appreciate that.

I want to start first by reminding people that some history is being made tonight. After nine years, the Toronto Maple Leafs will be playing a playoff game. It won't be at the ACC, but they will be playing at the TD Garden down in Boston. I know that everyone in Ontario, even those nasty Senators fans, is going to be hoping the Leafs are successful tonight because everybody knows the Toronto Maple Leafs are Canada's team. We hope they'll be successful.

I was watching the television as a young boy, just shy of 10 years old, when they won the Stanley Cup in 1967. I have hoped for a long time that I would still be alive when they won another one. And you know what? I feel if it's this year, I'm liking my chances. I just don't know how long I can go.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member for his sports update, the TSN moment; I appreciate that. But I do believe we were talking about a consumer bill.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You've even got support from the government side, which was very nice.

If you could get back to the bill after you've done your sports analysis, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm going to get there shortly, but what could be more important for consumers than the telecast of the Toronto Maple Leafs tonight? While they're watching that television, they're going to be bombarded with advertisements, Speaker—advertisements that are always out there trying to get the dollars

out of consumers' pockets. That's what we're talking about here. So tonight, when you're watching that hockey game, you're going to be seeing a plethora of very well-prepared advertisements designed to separate you from your hard-earned dollars. So be careful with that, but cheer hard for the Toronto Maple Leafs. I know that most of the members of my family will be cheering. I have a daughter who is a Montreal Canadiens fan and I don't know that it's ever going to change, but we remain hopeful.

Anyhow, of course we want to talk about the bill. I did want to comment a little bit about some of the things that the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan was saying. He has been raising some important points about consumer protection in the real estate realm, but he's not exactly accurate on some of the things he was speaking of.

My wife is a real estate agent, and I was a real estate agent before I got elected here. I don't know what happened to the folks in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, but for some reason they decided that they would support my bid to get elected here, and here I am. The day after I got elected to this assembly, I resigned my real estate licence, so I have not practised since then, but being married to a real estate agent at least keeps me in the loop, so to speak.

He talked about multiple offers and competing offers. He implied that somehow someone would now be forced to tell you if the bids had gone over the listing price under this legislation. Well, this legislation does not provide for that because you are prohibited, as a real estate agent, from revealing what the amount of any other offer is. You're prohibited from revealing what the buyer is willing to pay or what the seller may be willing to sell their home for. That's why we have written offers, and I know this is going to stipulate that the offers must be in writing. I've always believed, and I can tell you that my wife has always believed, that all offers should be in writing anyhow, because that's the way to do business.

But there will be some important changes also with respect to how the fees are calculated for representing a client in a real estate transaction. Today you can either pay a commission or you can pay a flat rate. Under this legislation, you'll be able to pay a combination of both. I'm sure that the members of RECO and REBA will probably be happy to see some of those changes, but I'll have a discussion with some of the folks I do know, and particularly the one I know better than most—that would be my wife—and see what she thinks of these changes in Bill 55.

I know there were some things that the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan did refer to, and he is right that you will be able to see the offers, but that will only be after they are no longer active. No one would be allowed to see the offers while the bidding and the transaction is still active, because that would prejudice—it's just like the government says that we can't give out confidential information on the gas plants, the same thing. You have to protect your client in a real estate transaction or any other. You can't let someone else know what someone

else is bidding, otherwise you've prejudiced their opportunity to have a fair shot at making the purchase or the sale as well.

But post-transaction, yes, the real estate brokerage will be required to keep those records for a prescribed period of time, a time that is not prescribed in the bill, but presumably it will be prescribed by regulation by the ministry down the road, and then they will be required to keep the records of those transactions for that prescribed period of time. So someone who was involved in one of those multiple-offer situations will have the right to have a look at those papers to ensure that they were not being improperly led or informed on the fact that there were competing offers.

That also will protect brokers and sales representatives as well from the fact that someone else who was trying to drive the price up might say to another agent who says, "You know, I've got a client who is interested in property XYZ," and they say, "Well, I've already got an offer on that, but feel free to submit one, and I'll present the offers together to my client." Well, they will be able to confirm, down the road, when that transaction has been completed, whether or not there was in fact a competing offer.

So I think this is a positive thing. Consumer protection is a very important element of our society. The old saying of "caveat emptor"—let the buyer beware—I think still applies. I think the buyer does need to beware. No one can completely protect you. You do have a responsibility as a consumer to (a) educate yourself, and (b) keep your antennae tuned for being possibly victimized in some kind of a scam, and be—what's the word?—skeptical. Be skeptical so that you have this healthy skepticism so you ask yourself, "Hmm, does this sound too good to be true?" If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. That's certainly a good rule of thumb, and I hope that most consumers would adopt that in their day-to-day lives when making these transactions.

1640

People have talked about—you know, we go back a few years to the electricity contracts. I was the energy critic for at least five, maybe six, years. Because of the nature, to be fair, the energy minister wouldn't be getting involved in those kinds of things. But I was just an opposition member, and I had the additional responsibilities of being the energy critic. I probably got more correspondence, calls, letters etc. from people across the province who found themselves trapped in an energy—particularly electricity—contract than any other member of this Legislature. I say that with all due respect to everyone there.

I even had members from my own caucus saying, "Hey, Yak, can you deal with this? Can you take care of this? Can you help my constituent?" And we did as much as we could. I would say that we got people excused from literally hundreds of contracts, maybe in the thousands, over that period of time, because we could clearly show there was a pattern of misrepresentation on the part of many of these aftermarket sellers.

I want to be clear. That wasn't the case universally—it wasn't everybody—and some companies were worse than others. But the reality is the circumstances they were put into: many times just a strictly commissioned transaction. There was a temptation to mislead the consumer, especially older, vulnerable people.

My mother-in-law was one of the people we got out of a contract. My mother-in-law was born in Lithuania and then lived in Germany. She was an ethnic German in Lithuania, moved to Germany, was a refugee during the war, ended up in Germany after the war and came to Canada in 1954. She had no English language skills. She never worked. She learned the language over the years, of course, but she never worked out of the home. She's been a widow since 1996.

She was visited by one of these contract sellers. It went on for months, and I didn't know about it. Finally, she did raise it with me. I wish she had contacted me before she signed the contract, but then again, that's why I say that people need to have this healthy skepticism and not believe everything they hear at the door. Anyway, we were able to get my mother-in-law extricated from that mess, but it wasn't that easy, because she had maintained the contract for a period of time.

Having consumer protection is a hugely important aspect of a society that wants to ensure we offer the vulnerable or those who are more susceptible to being shafted or cheated or given a raw deal some kind of protection.

Now, the government has brought forth this piece of legislation. We're not jumping fences over it or anything, but we do see some positive attributes in it. Part of this legislation will deal with water heater transactions. I used the example, of course, of electricity contracts, but you can juxtapose that into the legislation, which is more specific to hot water contracts. Again, the intention is to ensure that people might get pressured—that might be the word—into making a deal they otherwise may not get involved in—people have their tactics and their ways of making you feel you've got to buy it today. I think we've all been involved in a transaction sometime in our lives—you know, you've been walking through the mall and a guy stops you and says, "Hey, have I got a deal for you. I've got this thing. Do you have back pain, sir? You're walking like you're in back pain, sir. Come here. I've got something for you. Let me show you"; or, "Oh, your hands. I can give you some cream for those hands. My goodness gracious, your hands are going to be nicer than they've ever been before."

My friend from Nickel Belt is laughing. I know it has happened to her. She's been in a mall.

Everyone has their tactics. That's the way the world of sales—of being able to market your products—works. You have to make the decision: Is that something that I actually really want, or is that something that I feel that I've got to have now because they've created this idea in my head that if I don't have it I'm cheating myself?

Mr. Robert Bailey: You shouldn't deny yourself.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, so if people say, "My goodness, I don't do that many things for myself. Today

I'm going to buy that fancy-dancy massaging machine that is going to make me—all of a sudden the Canadian Olympic team is going to be calling me"; fat chance of that, you know? But those are the kinds of things that happen in the world, and we have to be protective of people who are vulnerable. But number one, we always have to ensure that we're protecting ourselves. We always have to ensure that we're protecting ourselves.

My kids—I make sure that they have that healthy skepticism. The problem is, I think they've developed it when it comes to me. They've developed a healthy skepticism about things I tell them now, and that of course is a concern for me. However, I think as they get a little older they're going to start to realize that I'm maybe not as smart as I claim but not as dumb as they might have thought.

Anyway, we're looking forward to getting this bill into committee and seeing what changes can be made. Perhaps people from the Real Estate Brokers Association or the Ontario Real Estate Association, OREA—I'm sure they'll be willing to come to committee and offer their views on how this legislation might be strengthened or streamlined. I'm sure that there will be consumer advocates and groups that will want to speak to committee as to how this legislation might be strengthened or streamlined.

One of the things I haven't talked about much is, basically, the selling of debt, or the collection agreements, which is to some degree the transferring of the responsibility to collect debt, where somebody has a debt and there are people out there who are willing to buy that debt, but they want to buy it for X number of cents on the dollar. Then they are in a position where they may make a profit.

If you owed somebody a lot of money, and they didn't think you were going to pay, and they said, "Well, are you interested in the debt? We'll sell it to you at 40 cents on the dollar," if they think that 40 cents is more than they were going to get—but if I have a good approach, maybe I'll get 60 cents, and I'm up 20 cents. That's kind of how the selling of debtor contracts works. I'm not 100% sure; I haven't really deciphered completely exactly what they mean in the bill, but that's why we're having this debate. Maybe the opportunity to speak at committee or listen at committee will help us in that regard.

One of the things I do want to talk about, and I am limited in time—I cannot believe it; I think something is wrong with that clock. It's running fast, Speaker. There's something happening that it's going faster than usual. But I do want to also talk about protecting people from the government.

My colleague Todd Smith from Prince Edward-Hastings spoke yesterday. He talked about the TSSA; that's the Technical Standards and Safety Authority. You know, Speaker, I get more complaints about the Technical Standards and Safety Authority than just about anything in my riding, because—you see what happens. It was a great idea to bring in such a body, but this

government then has given them way too much freedom. That's the problem. This government has allowed the TSSA to act like a nation unto themselves, like they are not answerable to anybody. They never have to ask themselves the question—or maybe they do, and they just don't care: "It doesn't matter if I put Joe out of business." They don't care. There's not enough common sense injected into the way they do their everyday work.

1650

Anybody can live life by a rule book. We just have to live by a rule book; we never have to make a decision. But it's the people who make life better—those are the ones who know when to use the rule book, when they should interpret the rule book and sometimes when they should put the rule book aside and see if there's a way of working with that other party to make the situation completely safe but in a way that does not jeopardize the ability of someone to stay in business.

We're back to the real estate. The TSSA: There's a conspiracy out there, and I don't know if it's with TSSA or the insurance companies, to get people out of home heating with oil, because, I'll tell you, you can't find an oil tank out there in a home today that they won't condemn. They walk in there, and the minute they look at it, it's condemned. That thing could be as sound as a dollar—well, the dollar is not doing too bad. It could be as sound as a dollar, as they say, but they're going to find a way to condemn that because they want to get people out of home heating fuel. I'm convinced of that. I see it all the time, and it's unfortunate. There are a lot of people, when they're doing a real estate transaction and then all of a sudden they get hit with one of these, the oil tank is condemned and the standards they have to put in to replace it—you're looking at \$2,000 to put in a new oil tank. For some people, that can jeopardize the ability to sell their home, because they've already agreed to a price, and then when they get hit with a new oil tank, they don't know if they can afford that or not.

Anyway, Speaker, there are a lot of ways that we can improve this bill, and we're going to get at it.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to comment on the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. I really enjoyed his TSN moment. I feel his pain about having one of them Habs fans in your house. Unfortunately, one of my sons turned on me as well and kind of went down that way. He's a Leafs fan at heart, I'm sure. Unfortunately, he does cheer for the Habs. Although I love my wife and I do walk the street with her when she wears that Ottawa Senators shirt—I think she does that just to spite me. But I feel his pain and his struggles in his household.

What I did want to talk about are some of the tactics he talked about when we actually got to speaking about this bill—the tactics that are being used by some of these door-to-door salesmen. They're really targeting seniors, particularly in areas in my riding where there are predominantly strong populations of seniors. I've talked

about this before in the past, and I thought I'd raise it again. It's a term that's called bait and switch. What they do is, they send out these wonderful ads. Either they announce it on TV or they put it out in the mail, and they bait an individual to contact them, in order to get a salesman at their door with a better, revised program or a product that will give them substantial savings. Once they get to your door, they overwhelm you with a whole lot of information. By the end of your call, the bait is done, the switch is in and you find out that where you were looking to getting a \$20 or \$30 savings, by the time they leave your door, you're paying for something you didn't even need but you're paying three or four times more, but they've convinced you that you absolutely need their product.

I'm really glad that he touched on that, and I'm hoping to hear a little bit more about those tactics over the course of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and francophone affairs.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ça me fait plaisir de me lever aujourd'hui pour parler en faveur de ce projet de loi.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Consumer Services for the good work that she has been doing since she was appointed in that portfolio.

Yes, my office would talk to me—at one point, almost every Friday—about these seniors who were forced to or were convinced to sign an agreement to buy electricity at a cheaper rate. When they received the bill a couple of months later, it was for a lot more than they used to be charged. So then they were trying to get out of that contract, and it was impossible. So, of course, when I arrived on Friday, I had to deal with these situations.

Sometimes it was not seniors, but they had such a good story at the door that they were able to convince business people. One owner of a seniors' home in my riding was caught in that situation.

So one Saturday, I'm at home, and the doorbell rang. I'm by myself and this 6-foot-tall, 200-pound guy enters the house and introduced himself as working for the government, and he tried to—not convince me, but his voice was going up and up. For people who know me, I'm not scared, so I stood up to him. But to be able to convince him to leave my home, I said, "Okay, give me your information and I'll call you back. I'll talk to my husband." At the time, I didn't have a husband, but I said, "I'll talk to my husband."

Interjection.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I know. Then I realized that the tactic that they use is not a good tactic. This legislation will be able—perhaps not to prevent all these situations but a lot of them, and I applaud the minister for bringing this to the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to stand here and reflect on the comments that were shared by our honourable member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke,

because he really brought a lot of things to light and underscored it with his final statement saying that there are lots of ways to improve this bill, and that's why we're willing to put it through to committee and help the government get it right. I'd be remiss if I didn't note that in 2002, it was actually our PC leader, Tim Hudak, that introduced the Consumer Protection Act. So it's great to see this type of legislation evolve to address the needs of today, our current times.

I say that because, since 2009, in rural Ontario specifically and in my riding of Huron–Bruce, we've experienced a different type of door-to-door salesperson. My colleague from Perth–Wellington touched on the solar side of it. But I can tell you, at my own door we had a very bad experience with an industrial wind turbine salesperson. They told us that our neighbours had signed and that if we didn't sign, we would be losing part of our land because they would take it because they needed approaches to the turbine and they had abilities to pressure us into signing a lease. It was just horrible, some of the pressure tactics that were used from community to community. They would go into the local coffee shops, mine information about families and use that against them as they tried to pressure them into signing leases. Eventually, organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture had to develop an information package to make people aware of these types of tactics so that people were educated when these types of salesmen came to impose themselves to try to get them to sign turbine leases. We need this. Thank you.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to stand up and offer some brief comments on Bill 55. I see in looking through the bill that there's mention of water heaters, but one thing that's sorely lacking—I know it's something that members in this House have already raised—is the fact that energy retailers are not covered. In Kenora–Rainy River, it's probably one of the biggest issues that I hear—that I heard when I worked for the former member, and that I still hear. In fact, before being elected, I spent a lot of time going door to door myself, offering information sessions to people so they could understand some of the tactics.

I've seen it all. I've seen it where they target seniors, youth, people who have low incomes. When they promise that kind of financial stability, that's really attractive for people who are just barely making ends meet. They also push their way into homes where people might have English as a second language. There's nothing that they won't do. I've seen everything from them offering these little sheets where they've got a few little houses that are brown houses with all the dirty energy and then there are the happy little green houses on the street that, apparently by signing up with a contractor, are going to get this magical green energy, which, of course, doesn't happen.

1700

They've assured savings of money. They've even told people that Union Gas no longer is going to be servicing

their area. But the part that I find most disgusting—and it's something that this government has an opportunity to address right now. They need to crack down on these companies offering gift cards, cheques in the mail, where, by signing the back, you agree to enter into a five-year term at an inflated rate. The most galling is that they will send out prepaid MasterCard to people who have low incomes right before Christmastime. That is absolutely disgusting. This government needs to focus some of their attention on that instead of some of these fluffy things.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments from the member for Algoma–Manitoulin, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the member from Huron–Bruce and the member for Kenora–Rainy River. I appreciate all their comments on what we had said earlier today. You know, we just kind of encapsulated and reiterated.

Now, I will say, there are some things, and I won't have time to go into them in the two minutes that I have left, that this bill fails to accomplish, and that's why we need to get the bill into committee, after we have a good, full debate. I know there are many members of our caucus who want to debate this piece of legislation because it is a new piece of legislation that we need to take a close look at.

We all have the responsibility, as legislators here, to ensure that in a society such as ours we take proper measures to protect those who are least able to protect themselves.

I appreciate the comments from the minister with regard to the salesman coming to her door and acting in an intimidating fashion. Fortunately for her, she's not one who is easily put off or she's not easily intimidated, and I've known that personally, but not everybody is like that. Some people are very vulnerable when they're in that situation, and then they end up signing that kind of contract, like my mother-in-law, and then she felt ashamed that she had done it. That's probably one of the reasons she didn't call me right away because she thought, "Oh, I shouldn't have done that," and then it went on for months. We were able to get her out of it, but at the same time, how many people are out there who we didn't get out of a contract, because they haven't called us or they haven't called their MPP? How many are still out there who have been mistreated by an unscrupulous door-to-door salesperson? We need to protect those people.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Some very good comments, actually, I think, this afternoon. This is a very interesting debate. I think we all care deeply about the people we serve, and we want to make things better from a consumer protection perspective.

This bill makes a start, I think, at addressing a very widespread issue in Ontario. However, most of the

measures presented are admittedly small steps and a number of them could be strengthened. The truth, or the truth as I understand it, is that millions of consumers face problems in the marketplace each year and a significant number of them are vulnerable consumers.

Ontario needs a strong consumer advocate. People need someone conveniently located to advocate on their behalf so they can seek assistance in person. Not everyone is as lucky as the member, who would go and advocate on behalf of his parent. Some people live in great isolation, and so having a consumer advocate who's in your community, who's easily accessible, would make a difference. I think, actually, this is something that we'll be pursuing as this legislation moves forward.

From the perspective of the most vulnerable consumers, assuming they face barriers such as illiteracy, lack of language skills or disability, in combination with low income and the lack of access to telephones, Internet or transportation—and all of us have these people living in our ridings, all of us have tried to advocate on behalf of folks who don't have access to the financial situation which actually gives them a position of power—these are barriers that deprive many vulnerable consumers of fair treatment. In fact, many are denied equal access to government-funded services intended to support consumers. So, in reviewing schedule 1, around the amendment to the Collection Agencies Act to regulate debt settlement services, this bill attempts to provide vulnerable consumers with protection against unfair business practices of companies that offer debt settlement services.

Now, debt settlement service agencies offer a service whereby they enter into negotiations with creditors on behalf of the consumer in return for a fee. Often, the fee is incredibly high and is agreed to by the consumer after being told that their debt will be dramatically reduced by the settlement agency; in fact, they're promised that their debt will be reduced. In reality, this upfront fee can force consumers into more debt.

Also, there is no guarantee that there will be a satisfactory outcome; debt may not actually be reduced. We have experience from this as well. I, myself, was just contacted by a citizen in my riding about this very issue. In asking for help, they actually ended up further behind.

Consumers who choose to use debt settlement services often find their situation worsened if a settlement is not reached, and they may still have to pay fees to the debt settlement service, despite not obtaining a settlement. These outcomes are a growing issue of concern, being that debt settlement agencies have increased their activity in the province of Ontario in the past several years. With increased marketing and advertising, we can only expect to see increases in these types of negative outcomes.

What schedule 1 does propose is to prohibit the payment of upfront fees before the debt settlement services are provided and to limit the amount of the fees charged overall. So this is good. This means debt settlement services operators would only be paid for actual results rather than efforts to obtain results. Schedule 1 also pro-

poses to allow debtors to cancel their agreement without having to give a reason, within 10 days of receiving a copy of the agreement. Finally, it would prohibit misleading sales practices and advertising. If companies fail to follow these new rules, the new legislation would allow for the revocation of the mandatory licences. This is also something that needs to happen, and this requires oversight, which we know is an ongoing issue, actually, in the province.

What schedule 1 does not address: Many debt settlement companies are based in the United States and have been advertising debt negotiation and debt settlement services to Ontarians. We need to protect Ontarians from increased advertising by debt settlement agencies. Consumers should be aware of all of their debt management options and that debt settlement is not necessarily the best option.

This bill also doesn't address the issue of credit counsellors, who are often mistaken for debt settlement agencies. Credit counsellors are not regulated but should be held accountable to the same standards as debt settlement companies.

Schedule 2: the attempts to curb aggressive door-to-door water heater rental tactics. It's important that this issue be addressed, seeing as, in 2012 the Ontario government received more than 3,200 written complaints and verbal inquiries about door-to-door water heater rentals, the second most common source of complaints and inquiries. Hot water heater salespeople take advantage of vulnerable or unsuspecting customers and use many tricky tactics to try to secure signatures on contracts.

I know that the government side has sort of tiptoed around the fact that there's a predatory nature to these folks. These people are trying to make a living, but they need to be held to the same regulations and the same laws to protect the consumers. Many people report being flat-out lied to by these water heater salesmen or women. Some claim to be from the local municipality or the homeowner's current water heater provider. Sometimes they claim to represent the government, and this is well documented. Sometimes they say that new regulations have been passed that mean a homeowner needs to or must replace a heater's venting system to comply, or that testing has shown the heater to be using energy inefficiently.

This is unacceptable. We need to protect those who are vulnerable to these kinds of tactics from being targeted, and one of the number one demographics that is being targeted are seniors. I think that we have to be honest and acknowledge that seniors are actually living on fixed incomes and they're looking to save money. So when someone comes to their door and makes this promise and says that the municipality, for instance, has come on their behalf, this is duplicitous, it's deceitful, and we need to protect seniors in that regard.

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There are a couple of examples from my own riding of Kitchener-Waterloo. Something like this actually took place in the Waterloo region recently. In February of this

year, CTV Kitchener reported that in the weeks following an explosion that destroyed a home and sent four people to hospital, neighbours had noticed an increase in door-to-door water heater and furnace salesmen. The salesmen claimed that the explosion was caused by faulty gas pipes and tried to convince residents that they needed to purchase new water heaters or furnaces in order to prevent a similar explosion in their own home. So, basically, they were using fear as their sales pitch. Meanwhile, the firefighters who had investigated the scene said that they had found nothing to indicate that people should be concerned with their water heaters or furnaces.

Last summer, in my region, it became such a problem that in June of last year, the Waterloo Record, our local newspaper, actually published a warning about door-to-door salesmen who were claiming to be city employees and asking to check people's furnaces and water heaters in order to try to sell them a new one. You can see how one might be concerned enough to make such a purchase if you had been led to believe that a city official was informing you that you needed to do so.

My constituency office has received calls from senior citizens who find the experience of door-to-door salespeople to be very intimidating. I've heard similar stories from other members in my caucus and actually in this entire House. This is a problem that exists for all Ontarians.

I want to say what schedule 2 does. To address this, schedule 2 of the bill puts forward several proposed solutions. It doubles the existing 10-day cooling off period to 20 days for water heaters, allowing a more substantial amount of time for customers to consider their decision. This is good. It looks to ban delivery and installation of water heaters during the new 20-day cooling-off period, again, to allow consumers to deliberate without unwanted influence.

It looks at creating rules requiring companies to confirm sales by making a scripted and recorded telephone call to the customer and that key contract terms are disclosed in clear, easy-to-understand language, to ensure that the consumer is absolutely aware and absolutely sure what they are agreeing to. It also proposes that when the rules are not followed, there are consequences, such as requiring the supplier to pay all cancellation fees when the 20-day cooling-off period is not observed. We believe that this is a step in the right direction, as it takes measures to provide consumers with more protection against aggressive, high-pressure, door-to-door water heater rental sales tactics.

However, one thing that this bill does not deal with is direct energy retailers, who are one of the biggest sources of complaints. This is an example of how this bill falls short and how it could be strengthened by covering a broader spectrum of door-to-door sales pitches. As I mentioned in the previous example that took place in my region, furnace salesmen were using the same tactics to take advantage of consumers as water heater salesmen.

Schedule 3, the third part, deals with issues related to real estate sales. It requires real estate brokers acting on

behalf of a buyer to be more transparent with regard to the bidding process. If this legislation were to pass, real estate brokers would only be able to present an offer in writing to a potential buyer. Often, people are pressured into raising their offer or rushing into the purchase of a home because they've been told that multiple offers have been made when this is not really the case. The Real Estate Council of Ontario, RECO, reported thousands of complaints from buyers and sellers who had been pressured by these exaggerations.

This legislation, if passed, would ensure that written proof be provided of any other offer so that the potential buyers are certain that they are not being pressured unnecessarily. Salespeople and brokers would also be prohibited from suggesting or claiming that a written offer exists when one does not. Brokerages acting for the seller would also be required to retain copies of all written offers related to the sale or purchase of the property so that they could be referenced at a later date. Finally, any person who has made a written offer to purchase a particular home may ask the registrar at the Real Estate Council of Ontario to determine the actual number of written offers that were received and to report that number.

So this is, in our view, a very strong measure of accountability. I think that the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has correctly indicated that without these measures, consumers are sort of left in a grey zone. This is driving up multiple offers, driving up the prices of houses and driving down the possibility of people owning a home.

These provisions would provide the necessary transparency to the bidding process in order to protect consumers from overpaying under false pretenses or from rushing into such a significant decision that for most people already creates high levels of stress. I think we can all relate to the stress, the pressure and the tension around buying a home, and we do believe that some of these measures that have been suggested in this legislation actually would alleviate some of that, or at least create some clarity around the purchase of a home.

A separate amendment would remove the ban on charging both fees and commissions. It would allow real estate agents to charge a combination of a percentage and a fixed amount. This change will make Ontario's real estate marketplace consistent with all other provinces in the country, while responding to a recommendation of the Competition Bureau. However—and this is key—it is not clear that allowing real estate agents to charge both flat fees and commissions is in any way a step forward.

In conclusion and as a brief summary, this bill does take a number of small steps, we believe, in the right direction in terms of consumer protection. In fact, perhaps it may open the door to other areas where we can actually build in some supports or some safety measures for consumers. However, there are ways in which some of these steps could be strengthened, and I hope that if this gets to committee, as it should, we can actually build some supports right into the legislation.

As I said at the beginning, Ontario needs a strong consumer advocate to assist the millions of consumers that face problems in the marketplace each year. Consumers need to be made more aware of the resources available to help them. They need an advocate that can follow up on consumer complaints, especially for vulnerable populations, who are so often taken advantage of in the consumer market.

I look forward to hearing expert testimony at the committee session. I look forward to the further debate, and I look forward to being a part of the conversation about how to make this legislation a little stronger. I know, because I've consulted with the people in Kitchener–Waterloo, that they are very receptive to having measures put in place so that they are protected. I think that is part of our job as legislators, and I also think it's part of our job to work together to make that happen.

I look forward to the debate.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for her comments. I had 20 minutes just a little while ago on this particular bill, and I didn't hear all of her speech, but it's not a complete surprise. I think we're going to find, hopefully, especially from the official opposition, a sense of common purpose when it comes to this particular piece of legislation.

As I mentioned when I made my remarks—I spent a fair bit of time out of my 20 minutes talking and focusing on the impact of consumer protection legislation on seniors specifically. This legislation and legislation that we have introduced previously that deals with consumer protection issues are of course not only focused on seniors, but I think all of us who have been around this place for a little bit of time and have manned constituency offices for a bit of time will understand that far too often, the greatest proportion of people that seem to be negatively affected by predatory practices, unscrupulous business practices, tend to be seniors.

As I mentioned earlier, I can remember a two- or three- or four-year period where it seemed like there was almost a constant parade of people coming into my office with issues directly related to consumer protection pieces, some of which, I think, to be fair, we've managed to land and find in a very good place. So I'm pleased to hear—so far, at least—that there seems to be a lot of buy-in for this legislation. I can't imagine why there wouldn't be.

As I said earlier, as well, we hope that this legislation will pass at second reading and be referred to committee. Like all legislation, we're open to positive ideas and suggestions, anything that the members of the other two parties may think can help to make this particular bill stronger.

As I also mentioned, I'm very excited by the bill that was introduced earlier this week dealing with cellphones and issues related to cellphones. We think that's going to be a great piece and very popular with the people in the province.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Of course, to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, as she has indicated as well, we need to protect all consumers. But as the member from the government side had mentioned earlier as well, we talked about the importance of protecting perhaps one of the more vulnerable age groups, and that’s our seniors as well.

You know, I mentioned earlier in a previous discussion that rising energy costs are in fact a huge issue for all Ontarians across this great province of ours. Of course, with these seniors, not only are they concerned about rising energy costs—how are they going to pay for it, especially on limited pensions? Then, all of a sudden, these vulture-type companies come along to try and take advantage of those who are perhaps more susceptible to being influenced than perhaps those who may be more in the know.

You know what? I look at, for example, Union Gas, a local company in my riding. Again, I do know specifically—I mean, I used to work for that company for many years, great years. They were a trustworthy, honest and reputable company. Now, all of a sudden, you get some of these what I call fly-by-night companies that want to take over your gas bill and promise you the world, but they don’t give you anything other than added—

Interruption.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Pardon me. I think it might have been a little gas indigestion I may have had there.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Perhaps it wasn’t either. However, what I do want to say is that down in my area, also, we have wind turbines. There are a lot of these wind turbine salespeople who go along to the farmers and they try to entice the farmers in putting these wind turbines on their properties. To those salespeople I say, “You know what? You’re only as good as your last sale, and that’s it.” They take advantage of people, especially down in the great riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. I suggest the member sees his physician. I’m very concerned.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I think there was a lot of focus in the debate today—and I thank the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for her remarks—on the unscrupulous salespersons, but not as much on the companies these salespeople actually work for. I know that I’ve talked to many salespeople at my door over the years, particularly since hydro was deregulated by the PC government and with all of these new marketing companies coming on board. Many of these people are considered independent contractors. They are not employees of these companies. In my view, you know, they’re pushing these contracts because they work strictly on commission. They should be covered under the Employment Standards Act. They should be employees. They should

be getting minimum wage plus commissions, but they feel pressured as well to be able to bring that paycheque home to support their families. Many of them are new immigrants to this country who have not been able to find work in their own field or are youth who are not able to find jobs in this province.

I think that there needs to be more teeth in the legislation, that these companies, not only would they lose their licence, have their licence revoked, but they would be fined, because all they’re going to do is close that door and they’re going to reopen tomorrow under another name. We all watch Marketplace and W5, and that’s what happens. They rip off seniors, but it isn’t just seniors they rip off. I know some middle-class, smart, educated people who have been ripped off and have been paying 42 cents a kilowatt hour for a five-year contract when the rest of us were paying 18 cents.

So, the legislation is good, but I think we’re going to need to be making a lot of amendments to it to make sure that it meets the needs of all the people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and francophone affairs.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci, Mr. Speaker. I cannot be so adamant than to say to people who are listening today, “Watch out. We’re going to change the legislation, but be very careful.”

I wanted to talk to you about the door-to-door water heater rental contracts.

Just in 2012, the ministry received over 3,200 complaints and inquiries on water heater rentals, which continue to rank number two on the ministry’s top 10 complaints list. I can say to you that 3,200 is not the total number of complaints, because every one of us here in the House has had these complaints. Currently, the Consumer Protection Act only has limited protection for consumers with regard to door-to-door water heater rentals.

If this legislation and its regulations pass, with better consumer protection for door-to-door water heater rentals, to require plain language and prohibit delivery during an extended 20-day cooling-off period—that is so important because, again, I’m talking about my own personal experience. My sister had this guy who came to her door and promised all the reductions she would get if she changed her water heater, and he was coming the next day to change it. So I said, “Call right away and cancel it.” They know the tricks. They know how to enter a home, and they know how to convince people. Like you said, it’s not only seniors; it’s middle-class people and smart people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo has two minutes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the members from Chatham–Kent–Essex, Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Welland, and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

I think there is common ground on this piece of legislation, because all of us have these personal stories.

All of us know people who actually have fallen victim to very aggressive, somewhat deceitful proprietors who feel that the rules do not apply to them, and the rules do. If we're thinking of the goals of this legislation, we should also be cognizant that we have a whole generation coming up through the education system, for instance, and we need to build some skills for those future consumers. It should be part of the curriculum that you have certain rights as a consumer and that the rights of companies don't trump your rights as an individual citizen.

To that end, quite honestly, all provinces of Canada should consider and should encourage and adopt the teaching of consumer protection and awareness in schools, starting at grade 6. All of us actually know of some youngster who got the parents' credit card and made a purchase through the Internet. It's just ridiculous, some of the stories we've heard, but it's better to build in those strengths and skills than try to undo the damage afterwards. Certainly that's how I feel about this.

I think I share the warning, in these times of stressful economic pressures that people are exhibiting, that if someone comes to your door and says, "This is the best deal," and it sounds like it's too good to be true, it is. Actually having some common sense at the door is one thing, but building in some protection for the consumer at a provincial level is the ultimate goal.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to stand in my place in this Legislature to make my contribution to the debate on 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.

Part of this legislation, which is very important to many people, is schedule 2, which amends the Consumer Protection Act, 2002: "A supplier under a direct agreement that requires the supplier to supply to the consumer a water heater or other goods or services that are prescribed by the regulations shall not supply the heater or the goods or services, as the case may be, until a 20-day cooling-off period that the consumer has for cancelling the agreement under the act has expired."

That's very important. The bill gives the consumer 20 days to cancel an agreement, twice the time that is provided under the existing legislation, and that's very important.

These door-to-door high-pressure salespeople became quite prominent with the sale of gas and electricity—we've all heard about those. There may have been some deals for consumers, but most of these companies were making big dollars out of these sales and generally were taking advantage of people who did not have adequate facts at their disposal. They had all the phrases, all the keywords, all the arguments. The consumer, the person at the door, did not have that information; did not know what was going on. There were many, many, many people who were fooled and got into contracts and they paid a lot more money.

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The scare tactics and misinformation forced many people—often the elderly—into contracts that were not fair and resulted in high costs to the consumer. The latest hoax has to do with water heaters. Last year, there were 3,200 written complaints against unscrupulous businesses fast-talking people into buying a new hot water tank while they still had adequate tanks under existing contracts. That is 30 complaints for each riding. How many more went unreported? Many, many more. Consumers were left paying for two hot water tanks and had to pay to get rid of one tank. To add insult to injury, the companies will often cite inconsistent penalty fees to terminate service agreements. Early termination fees have been quoted to some of my constituents to be as high as \$4,000 to \$5,000. That's from my office staff today. I find that just horrible.

The best solution, therefore, is not to deal with these thieves. Rather, it is to obtain competitive prices from reputable suppliers. My wife signed a deal at the door for electricity and I had difficulty getting out of that contract, but I finally did. I had a salesman who came and wanted to see the bill, so I wanted to go through the process with them. It is unfair, the level of information the consumer has and the sales pitch the salespeople have. Since we both had bad experiences at the door, we refuse to speak to salespeople. We still let neighbours in, of course. That is the advice we give: Do not deal with door-to-door salespeople. Seek out reputable firms and ask for competitive quotations.

Our constituency office is working on several cases where people have been swindled, but once it is done, it is almost impossible to obtain justice. The most common phone call we get is on the issue of being pressured by door-to-door salesmen from various companies. On many occasions, the salesperson at the door wanted to see the residents' invoices and at times would even go so far as to try and enter the home. This has especially been the case with hot water tank sales.

There are three instances where constituents have fallen victim to door-to-door sales scams I would like to mention here. On one occasion, a constituent, originally with Direct Energy, switched their services to another company. They did not deliver the new hot water tank, so the constituent called for the follow-up. Much to the constituent's surprise, she was required to obtain a removal authorization number. It took five months to resolve the issue, and in the meantime, she was being charged by both companies.

On another occasion, an elderly woman from my riding, when trying to sell her home, found out that there was a lien on her hot water tank. Not only was this constituent not made aware of this situation; this also got her into serious financial troubles.

Other constituents of mine have also notified me of over-billing. In many cases, the over-billing extended over the course of several months, resulting in a large accrual of charges. In one case, a constituent was over-charged over \$400 for their hot water tank. In another

similar case, companies have attempted to debit constituents' bank accounts for sums in excess of \$1,500. It is appalling and disconcerting to hear this sort of consumer abuse happening in this day and age, but it does.

Schedule 3 of this bill deals with the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002. The act is to be amended. "A registered brokerage acting for a seller is required to retain, for the period of time prescribed by the regulations made under the act, copies of all written offers that it receives to purchase real estate. A person who has made a written offer to purchase real estate or a registrant under the act acting on behalf of such a person may request that the registrar appointed under the act make an inquiry to determine the number of written offers that a brokerage acting for a seller has received to purchase the real estate." Now there will be a record of all offers made. All offers have to be in writing, and these offers can be obtained by the registrar. "The registrar is required to disclose that number to the person who requested the inquiry."

This amendment would further protect people from unscrupulous agents who use misinformation to drive up the selling price of real estate. As the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said, this is not a situation that comes to our office in Orléans; it's not a situation that he is familiar with in his area. I believe most real estate agents are very, very fair.

In addition, flexibility is provided for remuneration. It can be a combination of both a fixed amount and a percentage fee. It was either/or in the past; now it can be both. I'm not aware of the advantages of that, but I know that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said that this is a good idea. I would think that people who are conversant with it know that it is an improvement.

The third part of this bill, schedule 1, addresses the Collection Agencies Act. I am addressing this part of the bill last because it's something that I have not seen as presenting problems in Orléans. However, we don't see all the issues, and I must say that the proposed amendments to this act are important steps to be taken to further protect Ontario consumers.

What strikes me as highly beneficial to consumers is the creation of particular rules regarding debt settlement services activities by collection agencies and collectors. The requirement of the registration of collection agencies or collectors is also of critical importance. If a collection agency or collector is not registered, neither is it entitled to any payment.

The implementation of this bill, Bill 55, is very important. It seems to be getting good support within the Legislature. It will ensure stronger protection for consumers, for our constituents and for our communities that we all work so hard to represent in this House.

I've been representing my community here for 10 years, and even longer if I include other leadership and representative roles I've had. I would like to speak about my community here, because it is a poster child for linguistic minority communities in Canada. In Orléans, we have 35,000 francophones living together with 75,000 anglophones and other minority groups. It was not

always so. When I was growing up on a farm along the Ottawa River, Orléans was a community of 300 to 400 souls. St. Joseph church was the hub of the community. There were two stores: one was Montpetit's; the other was Boisvenue's. And Dr. Major was the health system.

The farms are quite large, and one of the orders of sisters operated one large dairy farm. There were many good French farmers, and the area was beautiful, lying along the Ottawa River. The soil was clay, was tough to till, and cropping was often difficult, especially if the falls were wet. The soil, though, was very fertile. The Kennys and McNeelys joined the French farmers in the 1930s, worshipped at the same church and became a strong part of a successful community.

I was born in Cumberland. It was primarily English-speaking, but the French minority were a large part of our community. In the rural area I lived in, there were two schools across from each other on Beckett's Creek Road: The public school, where English was the language, had about 25 kids; and the Catholic school, which was French and English—depending on which teacher was hired. Sometimes we had a French teacher and we learned French, and some years we learned English from an English teacher.

My best friends were the Lalondes, Hupés, Ladoueurs and Michauds. They were good outdoor people. We fished the Ottawa River and often built rafts for our rowboats. In winter, we always had a skating rink on Sharkey's Bay.

Cumberland grew into a city and Gloucester grew into a city, and they shared Orléans, which continued to grow. When Gloucester and Orléans joined the new city of Ottawa in 2000, Orléans became a large community and has continued to grow as a strong community within our city. Today, Orléans is a very successful community, and probably the largest linguistic minority community in Ontario. As such, it is protected both under the Official Languages Act and under the charter.

We live together in harmony. We love each other, as exemplified by the fact that in most homes, one of the spouses is a francophone. We have seen constant growth; where the population in 1945, when I first went to Orléans, was, as I said, a few hundred souls, it's now over 100,000—I think 107,000, and still growing.

We had a tough fight to keep our Montfort Hospital in the late 1990s, and the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Orléans, could you sit down for a second? I'd just like to comment that I appreciate the tour of your community; however, we are discussing a consumer-problem bill. If you could stick a little bit to that, I'd appreciate it, because you seem to have gone off track a bit.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker. I wanted to give you the history of Orléans, so that we knew how a wonderful community developed and how we are so representative of this wonderful province and this country.

We want to let all the people know there are unethical people at their door to sell them high-priced products, that use unethical practices to try to close a sale on a home. I've found real estate agents care for the people

who sell or buy homes and who go out of their way to make sure there is fairness in the market. This bill will bring those who misuse the system closer to ethical business practices.

None of us want too many laws, but our complex societies need laws to protect the more vulnerable. These improvements in protection are a good start. I want to commend the Minister of Consumer Services for bringing in this legislation which is needed. This legislation will protect the people of Orléans, the kids who get into trouble with debt and young couples starting out unaware of the bad business practices that creep into our changing world and fall victim to quasi-criminal predators.

I would like to return to my community of Orléans and to the protection we have as a minority linguistic community. We are the poster child of minority linguistic communities. In Orléans, our minority official language happens to be French. The Official Languages Act is quite clear: The federal government must treat Orléans not only fairly, but more than fairly. So I would like to switch, in talking about my community and this bill, to the other language.

1740

En tant que représentant de la circonscription d'Ottawa-Orléans depuis 10 ans maintenant, je suis très heureux que notre gouvernement travaille à accroître la protection des consommateurs ontariens. Je fais surtout référence à la protection accrue contre la vente à domicile agressive de chauffe-eau. Plusieurs de mes commettants ont d'ailleurs soulevé leurs préoccupations à cet effet.

Le nouveau gouvernement de l'Ontario a lancé donc, le 11 avril dernier, de nouvelles réformes en matière de protection des consommateurs. Nous prenons ainsi des mesures pour offrir une meilleure protection aux consommateurs contre les techniques de vente à domicile agressives et persuasives, plus particulièrement pour la vente de chauffe-eau. Trop souvent, nous avons eu l'indication que certaines entreprises et certains vendeurs avaient recours à des pratiques entrepreneuriales et douteuses. Il est à noter que le site Internet du ministère des Services aux consommateurs possède une page, « Protégez-vous », afin d'alerter les consommateurs face à la location de chauffe-eau.

Dans le cadre de son plan de protection des consommateurs, la province de l'Ontario prévoit proposer une loi qui, lorsque adoptée, imposera de nouvelles règles pour rendre la vente à domicile plus équitable. Ainsi, nous fournirons des moyens pour aider les consommateurs à faire un choix éclairé et à disposer d'un laps de temps adéquat pour prendre une décision.

Pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns : la période de réflexion relative à l'achat de chauffe-eau doublera et passera donc de 10 jours à 20 jours; aucune livraison ne sera permise avant la fin de la période de réflexion de 20 jours; et de nouvelles protections aux consommateurs seront offertes lorsque les règles ne sont pas suivies.

Ces réformes proposées contribueront à protéger les droits des consommateurs tout en permettant à l'Ontario de tenir son nouvel engagement qui consiste à bâtir une économie solide et à instaurer un marché juste et sûr.

Il est essentiel de protéger les communautés que nous représentons, et cette démarche aidera les consommateurs de ma circonscription, comme tous les Ontariennes et Ontariens à travers la province.

Mais il ne faut pas seulement protéger les consommateurs. Il faut aussi s'assurer de protéger la communauté à laquelle nous appartenons et dans laquelle nous vivons. Trop souvent, nous sommes témoins d'événements ou encore de décisions qui sont prises et qui affectent considérablement notre communauté locale. Notre pays s'est doté de lois afin de protéger les différentes collectivités qui y vivent.

Comme je le mentionnais plus tôt, je représente la merveilleuse communauté d'Ottawa-Orléans depuis 10 ans maintenant. Mais le plus important, c'est que je suis avant tout un résident de cette communauté que je respecte et aime profondément.

Selon le recensement de 2011, Orléans compte quelque 35 000 francophones auxquels s'ajoutent les quelque 65 000 habitants d'autres langues. Cela représente le tiers et les deux tiers de leur population. Ces deux communautés constituent donc une importante part de la population francophone de l'est de l'Ontario et de la région de la capitale nationale. De ces francophones, plusieurs travaillent au sein de la fonction publique fédérale, où le bilinguisme est une exigence requise pour beaucoup d'emplois.

Les francophones qui vivent à Ottawa choisissent de s'installer à l'est d'Ottawa parce qu'ils veulent élever leurs enfants dans un environnement francophone, participer à des événements culturels francophones et recevoir des services dans leur langue maternelle.

La région d'Orléans est certes une tête d'affiche des collectivités bilingues au Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me. I think you're drifting back in the second language to the description of Orléans again, so if you could keep to the bill, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

M. Phil McNeely: Merci, monsieur le Président. C'est vrai que je ne mentionne pas seulement les avantages de la Loi 55 en avant de nous et que je mentionne beaucoup de choses. Mais c'est quelque chose d'important pour moi de parler de ma communauté parce que dans les communautés qui ont bâti, comme Ottawa-Orléans ou comme voisins—on protège eux et l'autre. C'est vraiment une communauté : on travaille ensemble et on vit ensemble.

Now I'll switch back to English on this. I think that the bill that has been brought forward today is an excellent bill that is going to help consumers, protect consumers. It's something that we've been letting go a little bit. As we advance as a country, we seem to be getting more pressures on consumers from fly-by-night operators. We'll be able to take advantage of the new legislation. We'll be able to make sure that we don't meet those people at the door. Those are not the people who should be selling our stuff.

Historically, on the farm—and this goes back to the 1940s and 1950s—we used to have people who came around and painted the barn roof. Sometimes, in the next

rain you lost your paint, or the siding wasn't quite right, or the whitewash that you got in your barn was not quite the right strength. It wasn't as good. You had a lot of people who roamed the countryside preying on people.

It's much the same today. It's a lot more technical. They've got long agreements. You can't read them, you don't understand them, and yet the person is at the door telling you that it's a great deal or that your water tank is going to blow up or something else is going to happen. So this is going in the right direction.

I thought I could talk more about my community in French, but, Mr. Speaker, you certainly were correct in getting me to stop. I'll have to find another Speaker on another day to get that message across.

I thank you very much for this opportunity. We're getting down to, I think, near the end of this day. Tomorrow is an important day—I can mention the budget. I think it will be an exciting day—every budget is an exciting day here—and exciting times to follow. I thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about my community of Orléans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member. Feel free to trick another Speaker.

The member from Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's my pleasure to comment on this bill. I am a little bit bothered, I must say right off the top, by everybody treating salesmen like they might be unscrupulous, unworthy people who would hurt people. I would like to say that I think most salesmen are good people. They're professionals, they carry out their business with dignity, and they have no intention of hurting people. They do try to deliver the right product to the right person at a fair price.

That's not to say that this legislation isn't worthwhile to protect those who are vulnerable from the few who might be unscrupulous, but the majority are good, worthy people, and in this House we should recognize that.

We should also recognize, I believe, that we can't solve the world's problems with a piece of legislation—not, again, that the legislation isn't good and worthwhile. It's impossible to protect everybody with the papers we produce in this place—with laws. Education is probably the most effective thing we can do—to educate consumers to beware, to look out for themselves and not to sign agreements that might get them something that they don't want.

Having said that, the legislation is good, and we will support that.

Applause.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Thank you very much for your support.

Debt settlement and door-to-door salespeople will require written agreements. The cooling-off periods and fee limits and controls are all very good. I would say it is a good thing for real estate. It's a little bit different. This gives them the flexibility to charge fees and commissions, which is a practice across the rest of the country in Canada, so I would applaud that.

We will support this bill, Mr. Speaker. We just have to be careful not to paint everybody with a black brush.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the member who just spoke from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, we all agree with what you stated in regard to salesmen. Let's not do the same mistake that we normally do and paint the whole industry with a white paintbrush, which I refer to as a syndrome. You're absolutely right.

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However, you know, there are 3,200 complaints that have come out of this industry, so we really need to look at how we're going to address this.

To the member from Ottawa–Orléans, I'm not sure if I missed your maiden speech, but if today was the attempt at your maiden speech, congratulations. It was really good. I must thank you and appreciate the fact that I know a little bit more about your riding now and the importance, and let me help you out.

Merci beaucoup pour avoir apporté ton adresse initiale pour tes membres. Ça m'a fait bien plaisir d'écouter l'information sur les gens de ta circonscription. Ça me donne une plus grosse connaissance et puis une appréciation, comme vous, comme député qui représente les francophones dans ta région.

Comme vous le savez, moi, je suis une personne qui est vraiment touchée par la langue française. C'est de quoi que j'encourage tous les membres, qu'ils soient anglophones ou francophiles, d'au moins essayer de parler en français dans la Chambre. Ça te donne une grosse crédibilité, même si c'est juste un petit peu. Même pour les autres gens qui essaient d'écouter de temps en temps, on a un beau morceau ici, une belle pièce de technologie qu'on peut mettre dans l'oreille pour vraiment participer à la discussion et pour qu'on puisse apprécier ce que tous les gens, surtout les francophones à travers cette fameuse province, peuvent apporter à la situation.

On est assez chanceux—vraiment, j'ai apprécié les points de vue que tu as apportés, et puis surtout comment les gens dans ta circonscription sont affectés, parce que plusieurs de ces gens-là qui sont des aînés, dans la mienne, ma communauté, sont affectés.

Je t'encourage de continuer à apporter le profil et la situation de tes gens qui sont des aînés dans ta communauté. J'écoute. Merci beaucoup.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Let me first of all, once again, commend the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for his action last night when, during a reception here, as has already been mentioned earlier today, someone was in extreme difficulty. He performed a Heimlich manoeuvre and saved the individual's life, and for that we can all be thankful.

With respect to the member from Ottawa–Orléans, many of you may not know, but I believe that he's the only professional engineer in the House these days. There used to be another one, the member from Carleton—

Interjection.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Oh, we have another one here. Well, you know, engineers are as welcome here as nurses, teachers, lawyers and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): With all due respect, I had a tour of Orléans, and now I'm getting a tour of his profession. Thank you very much, but I think we might want to stick to the bill. Thanks.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you for your interventions. They're always so useful in this House.

But the background that he showed of Ottawa–Orléans all speaks to a time when people could totally trust their neighbours and totally trust the people they were dealing with in business in one way or another, and what this bill really deals with is those consumer protection issues that, unfortunately, have become more and more necessary in our society.

The rules and regulations relating to the real estate industry are excellent in this bill. There are excellent real estate agents out there, but there are some people who maybe have not always been playing by the rules. The rules with respect to the water heaters, where there's a cooling-off period from door-to-door salesmen: That's an excellent provision. It is all intended to protect consumers.

So if we all agree on this bill, why don't we just move unanimous consent, give this second reading and send it on to committee so that the people of Ontario can be protected with the provisions of this bill as soon as possible?

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This bill provides three areas of change that we support. To get back on track and remind people in the next two minutes what this is about, there really are three areas.

One is debt settlement, that mandates that all contracts be in writing; sets a cap on the fee that may be charged for debt settlement services; prohibits debt settlers from charging upfront fees; establishes a 10-day cooling-off period, which we've heard so much about, the importance of it; mandates certain disclosures and forbids certain advertising practices; establishes penalties for contravening the act: all good, all important.

Door-to-door sales: doubles the cooling-off period for water heater door-to-door purchases; leaves the door open for other cool-off periods to be doubled; forbids new suppliers from installing a new heater for 20 days; makes a new supplier liable for cancellation charges if heater is installed within 20 days; mandates that all sales be in writing and recorded; and scripted follow-up calls be made to the consumer. Speaker, all good.

Real estate—a very important one: removes the restriction against charging both a fee and a commission for selling or buying a house; mandates that offers for property be made in writing; allows the consumer to inquire with RECO as to whether other offers were made on the property.

In general, the government must ensure legislation creates a safe and trusting business environment, and I genuinely believe that this will accomplish that, which is why I'll support it.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about North Bay, Speaker.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you from the member for Orléans, but that would be my job.

Thanks very much, and your time is up. You can thank him for that.

The member from Orléans has two minutes to respond, and let's hope he sticks to the topic.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you to the members from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Algoma–Manitoulin, the Attorney General and the member for Nipissing.

I really enjoyed taking you on a bit of a tour of Orléans today and the francophone nature of it.

Je remercie beaucoup le membre d'Algoma–Manitoulin. C'est quelque chose que—je devrais me préparer un peu plus pour parler en français plus souvent. C'est bon de vous entendre aussi parler en français dans la Chambre.

The Attorney General made a good point, that we used to have neighbours we knew, that we knew all our neighbours. Now, you get into the urban setting and maybe down each side of the street you have five, six or seven neighbours whom you know quite well and who are good friends etc. There are nice places to live in our urban centres, but they're a lot different from what we grew up in. So it's important that we help each other, that we get the word out. Don't talk to people at the door who are trying to sell you something. If they've got a good product, they must have a place of business where you can go and get a competitive price from them and have that option.

The bill is very timely. I agree with the Attorney General that it would be nice to get it moving quickly through the Legislature and get it into law so that it does start protecting people. That is what the bill is about.

The most important part right now is the hot water tanks. There may be something else in the future, but I think the important message is: Keep away from dealing at the door. That is not where you're going to get a good deal; that's where you're going to get a good spiel, and that's not going to help you out.

Thank you very much for the opportunity of taking you on the tour of Orléans. I'd like to get a new Speaker in at some time and take you for the tour that I was trying to get at, but that's going to be a challenge for some other time. Thank you, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much, and I hope you're successful in your bid to find the Speaker you can trick.

It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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Ernie Hardeman, Helena Jaczek
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
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