



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

Second Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 9 September 2013

Lundi 9 septembre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Monday 9 September 2013

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Lundi 9 septembre 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning, everyone. Welcome back.

Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, vacancies have occurred in the membership of the House for the reason of the resignation of Dalton McGuinty as the member for the electoral district of Ottawa South, effective June 12, 2013; by reason of the resignation of Laurel Broten as the member from the electoral district of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, effective June 28, 2013; and by reason of the resignation of Margaret Best as the member from the electoral district of Scarborough–Guildwood, effective June 28, 2013. Accordingly, I have issued my warrants to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of the writs for by-elections.

**INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS
FOR OTTAWA SOUTH,
SCARBOROUGH–GUILDWOOD,
ETOBICOKE–LAKESHORE, WINDSOR–
TECUMSEH AND LONDON WEST**

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table certificates of the by-elections in the electoral districts of Ottawa South, Windsor–Tecumseh, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Scarborough–Guildwood and London West.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Certificates of by-elections were received as follows:

“Mrs. Deborah Deller

“Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

“Room 104

“Legislative Building

“Queen’s Park

“Toronto, Ontario

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Lynne Peterman, returning officer for the electoral district of Ottawa South, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Ottawa South in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Dalton

McGuinty who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Ottawa South, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Ottawa South on the 1st day of August, 2013, John Fraser has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa

“Chief Electoral Officer

“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

The second certificate:

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Darryl D’Sousa, returning officer for the electoral district of Scarborough–Guildwood, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Scarborough–Guildwood in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Margaret Best who, since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Scarborough–Guildwood, has resigned her seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Scarborough–Guildwood on the 1st day of August, 2013, Mitzie Hunter has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa

“Chief Electoral Officer

“Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

Third certificate:

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Wendy Gibbs, returning officer for the electoral district of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Etobicoke–Lakeshore in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Laurel Broten who, since her election as representative of the said electoral district of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, has resigned her seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Etobicoke–Lakeshore on the 1st day of August, 2013, Doug Holyday has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa
 “Chief Electoral Officer
 “Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

Fourth certificate:

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to James C. Evans, returning officer for the electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Dwight Duncan who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Windsor–Tecumseh on the 1st day of August, 2013, Percy Hatfield has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa
 “Chief Electoral Officer
 “Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

Fifth certificate:

“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the 3rd day of July, 2013, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Karen Mazereeuw, returning officer for the electoral district of London West, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of London West in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Chris Bentley who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of London West, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in London West on the 1st day of August, 2013, Peggy Sattler has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 9th day of August, 2013, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“Greg Essensa
 “Chief Electoral Officer
 “Toronto, August 19, 2013.”

1040

Mr. Fraser was escorted into the House by Ms. Wynne and Mr. Milloy.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House John Fraser, member-elect for the electoral district of Ottawa South, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Ms. Hunter was escorted into the House by Ms. Wynne and Mr. Milloy.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Mitzi Hunter, member-elect for the electoral district of Scarborough–

Guildwood, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take her seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take her seat.

Applause.

Mr. Holyday was escorted into the House by Mr. Hudak and Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Doug Holyday, member-elect for the electoral district of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Mr. Hatfield was escorted into the House by Ms. Horwath and Mr. Bisson.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Percy Hatfield, member-elect for the electoral district of Windsor–Tecumseh, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims his right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Ms. Sattler was escorted into the House by Ms. Horwath and Mr. Bisson.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Peggy Sattler, member-elect for the electoral district of London West. She has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims her right to take her seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take her seat.

Applause.

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

1050

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to introduce to the assembly—no stranger to the assembly—the former leader of our great party, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, and member for Dufferin–Caledon, John Tory, joining us here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Because I can't see him, I'm going to assume that he's smiling and that he's in good nature because he's got the pen from the media. I won't say anything else.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to introduce some residents of Don Valley West to the Legislature: Barbara Adams, Anne Marie Branch, Linda Dean, Dave Dean, Leanna Foster, Dmitri Logounov, Vanessa Rose, Joan Tadman and Janet MacDougall. They're all here to witness the day back to question period.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is a pleasure to welcome some friends to the chamber here today from the United Steelworkers. They are: Terri Nugent from Parry Sound;

Lisa Cook and Joe Holman from Windsor. I welcome them to the session today.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, the best constituency assistant you could possibly have: Mitchell Blass.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: At the risk of pre-empting you, Speaker, I see that the former Speaker, Dr. Alvin Curling, is here, my constituent. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Government Services is correct, and I will talk to her.

The member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelin Hunter: I would like to welcome my family to Queen's Park. Welcome.

I'd also like to welcome the former Speaker of the 38th Parliament, my dear friend, Mr. Alvin Curling.

I would also like to welcome my constituency staff who are here, as well as our volunteers from Scarborough–Guildwood.

Finally, I would like to welcome the chair of CivicAction, John Tory—another former member of this assembly, as well as the chairman of CivicAction. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Somebody else stepping on my toes, here.

The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to recognize my wife, Linda Fraser; Fadi El Masry, from my constituency office; and my friends Phil Parsons and Tracey Sobers, who's known to many.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from—

Mr. Todd Smith: It's been a long time: Prince Edward–Hastings.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It hasn't been that long a summer, has it, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): How could I forget?

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome my good friend Simon Chapelle, who's here. His son, Ian, is one of the new pages for the next five weeks here at Queen's Park.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome my father, who's here in the visitors' gallery. Welcome, Dad.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Third time's the charm. In the Speaker's gallery, former member and Speaker of the assembly, for Scarborough North, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th; for Scarborough–Rouge River, 37th and 38th; and the Speaker from 2003 to 2005, and joined by members of his staff: Dr. Alvin Curling.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, congratulations to the five new members who joined the assembly today, and their

families that have joined with us as well. I was just talking to Christine and Lisa; I know Norm and Steve went through it. It's very exciting to actually walk in here to the assembly and take your place. Congratulations to all those members and their families here today.

Speaker, a quick question to the Premier: Premier, almost a million people today are jobless. Instead of using the summer to bring forward any agenda around jobs, we saw the Liberals continue with the attempt to bury information around the gas plant scandal, including allegations of intimidation of the Speaker to keep documents outside of public view.

I've come to a conclusion, Premier—I hope you have as well—that the only way to get answers for taxpayers is a full judicial inquiry into the gas plant scandal. Would you agree and support one today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm going to answer your question, but I want to just say, first of all, thank you to the five new members for introducing a moment of harmony into the Legislature, and welcome them to this august place. I look forward to working with all of you, absolutely.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the Leader of the Opposition that, in fact, the August net job numbers were up 43,600 in Ontario, and across the country the jobs were up 59,000, so in fact, the bulk of the net new jobs in the country were here in Ontario. I'm very proud of that, and we are doing everything in our power to keep that trend in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I can't believe, Speaker, that the Premier calls that a turnaround. I call that a miserable failure when a million people today have no job to go to. They want to make ends meet for their families. That's why we brought a plan forward to actually get our economy moving again, to create jobs and to hold this government to account for its waste of taxpayers' money. There's not a single jobs item on the agenda here today.

Here's what's troublesome: Instead of working on jobs and the economy, you continue to try to bury information around the gas plant scandal, including allegations of an attempt to intimidate the Speaker of the assembly, an attempt by Liberal staffers to put the Speaker "on notice" to keep documents out of scrutiny for the public. Surely people have been fired. Surely you've taken this cause up. What can you tell us, Premier, about this attempt to intimidate the Speaker to bury gas plant files?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me talk about what we've been doing this summer in terms of travelling the province and making investments. We've put in place \$17.6 million to support business in regions across the province. That has leveraged over \$133 million in investments, and it has helped to create nearly 2,800 jobs.

We launched our youth jobs strategy, Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition well knows. We're going to be investing \$295 million to make sure that young people have the opportunity to have placements and to have co-

op programs and to start jobs. Part of that fund is an entrepreneurship fund; we've launched that.

We're increasing the employer health tax exemption, and the Leader of the Opposition should know that that is going to help small business and allow them to hire more people. That's job creation strategy.

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

I do want to offer the Leader of the Opposition a small caution, and that is that there is an issue before this House under a privilege request for my investigation, so I would ask him to stay away from that particular topic while I deal with that issue, before it's live in the House right now. So I would defer to him.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, the fact that there's a point-of-privilege motion of this seriousness shows that something has gone dramatically off the rails when it comes to the Liberal government.

Premier, respectfully, you said you'd be different. You've now been Premier for almost nine months—

Interjection.

1100

Mr. Tim Hudak:—eight months—and you've failed that. In fact, the cover-up continues to happen. This is not a time for hand holding; it's not a time for kicking it down the road. It is time for action. It is time for a judicial inquiry, it is time for the truth and it is time to expose those who try to intimidate a Speaker of the assembly.

Premier, don't you agree? What action will you take, and will you call a full judicial inquiry?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thought the Leader of the Opposition was talking about a job strategy. That was the answer I was giving, because I think that is what people in the province are focused on. They want to know that those 43,600 net new jobs in Ontario are a result of work that we've been doing for the last eight months. I'm quite clear that government works to put the conditions in place so that the private sector can create those jobs. That's the work that we've been doing.

On the issue of the relocation of the gas plants, which is the fixation across the aisle, what I have said and what we have done since I came into office as Premier is that we have opened up the process. We have made it clear that as questions are asked, they will be answered. We've provided thousands of pages of documents. We will continue to provide the answers to the questions that are asked.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: You'll recall that on March 6 of last year, the Ontario PC caucus brought forward a motion to build subways in the city of Toronto, and specifically in that motion, subways to Scarborough. We simply believe that world-class cities build underground—they build subways—and it's time to treat Scarborough residents as world-class citizens in Toronto.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Leader?

Mr. Tim Hudak: So last year you voted against the subway for Scarborough. You were against subways for Scarborough; you were pro-LRT. During the election campaign you flip-flopped and, quite frankly, your Minister of Transportation has been a runaway train when it comes to making announcements that make no sense whatsoever.

Premier, why did you say one thing during the by-election, one thing last year and something completely different after the by-election? Why should we trust a word that you or your transportation minister have to say?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. There is an old teacher trick that was used many years ago and probably still is today—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, that could be arranged.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):—where the person starts off real tough at the beginning and then eases off, instead of waiting to get tough at the end. I just thought I would offer you that experience that I've had. That goes for everybody.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What is clear is that it's this government that is committed to building transit. Since the day we came into office we've been investing in transit, and we will continue to do that. The new-found interest for transit investment on the opposite side of the House is heartening, and I look forward to working with the opposition on moving forward to build transit.

I am the first to admit that the subway—transit in Scarborough—has been an issue of contention. I was Minister of Transportation when there was a serious debate about what modality was going to be built in Scarborough, and that has gone back and forth. The fact is that we need to work with the people of Scarborough; we need to work with the city council. And where we have landed is a subway in Scarborough.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Mr. Speaker, before I begin I would like to thank all the members for their very warm reception this morning. I look forward to meeting you all personally.

My question is for the Premier. Madam Premier, prior to the by-election, you promised the people of Scarborough that you would put out \$1.8 billion for public transit in Scarborough. Unfortunately, after that you've now made another promise that you're going to put only \$1.4 billion forward, and we're going to have fewer stops. I would like to know why you don't think enough of the

people of Scarborough, and for that matter the people of Ontario, to put the full amount in and give these people the subway they deserve.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I welcome the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore to the Legislature.

Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, we committed \$1.4 billion to the construction of this project, and we also committed \$320 million for improvements to the Kennedy station, so we are following through on our commitment. I think what is critical to understand is that since 2003, since we came into office, we have been investing in transit really across the province, because the GTHA is obviously an important focal point, but we moved the gas tax out. There is gas tax that's being invested in transit across this province. We have been consistent in our support for transit and consistent in our call for a revenue stream that will allow us to build transit going forward. I hope that with a new-found passion for transit, the opposition party will work with us as we work to implement that plan and find that revenue stream so we can continue to build transit across the GTHA.

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

Mr. Douglas C. Holyday: Premier, the people of Toronto deserve a better answer than that. I think your party knew full well that you would break your promise to the people of Scarborough. You say transit is a priority, but your only priority is keeping your faltering government alive. Faced with the risk of losing a Liberal riding, you dreamt up a plan you had no intention of paying for. Premier, will you admit that this was no more than a scheme to try to save a seat in Scarborough?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that I know the history of this conversation pretty well because I was Minister of Transportation starting in 2010. We have been committed to building transit in Scarborough since that time and before. We remain committed to building transit. It has been a contentious file, there is no doubt about that, but the fact is that we have worked with the people of Scarborough, we have worked with the city council, and there has been a lot of back and forth. The member opposite is newly from city council and he knows how contentious that debate has been, and it must be difficult for him to actually ask that question with a straight face. So I'm very pleased that we will continue to honour our commitment to build transit in Scarborough, and that is—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order. The member from Peterborough, come to order.

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I also want to begin by congratulating the five new members who took their seats this morning and share with all of their friends and rela-

tives, who are either here or watching, the excitement that they have and the pride that they have in those people. Congratulations to everyone.

My first question is to the Premier. Over the summer all of us had an opportunity to hear from Ontarians, both on the campaign trail and off. They told us pretty clearly that they're worried about keeping good jobs, ensuring that health care is there for them when they need it and keeping up with the bills in tough times. More importantly, they are tired of hearing promises of change and seeing the same old status quo. Has the Premier gotten the message that people need to see results?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I absolutely concur with the leader of the third party that what we need to be doing is making investments in people, making investments in infrastructure and supporting business so that they can create jobs, which is why I am very pleased that in August the jobs numbers were up 43,600 in Ontario. It's why I'm so pleased that we've been able to commit \$17.6 million to support business and regional economies; that we have launched the youth jobs strategy that I know the leader of the third party is very keen on, and that we're dealing with the employer health tax exemption, which will allow employers to hire more people. Those are real changes, Mr. Speaker. Those are the kinds of things that are getting results already.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I would put to the Premier that part-time service sector jobs are nothing to crow about these days in Ontario. The measures that we put on the agenda in the spring will ensure that seniors are not left waiting for home care, that young people get the good jobs that they need, and that all of us have real accountability on government spending.

But we have a lot of work to do if this is going to be anything other than more promises from a Liberal government desperate to hold on to power. For example, Ontario's wealthiest corporations will be getting a brand new HST loophole on meals and entertainment pretty soon. Now, last spring, the government said that they wanted this loophole closed. Have they done anything about it, Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the leader of the third party knows that this is not a loophole, and we've talked about this many times in the Legislature. The Minister of Finance has written to the federal finance minister to work to rationalize this. I think the leader of the third party knows that what we are doing here on this side of the House, in fact, with the help of her party in getting the budget passed, is making those investments supporting business so that those businesses can create the jobs that are needed in the province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with all due respect, what I do know is that people are tired of the same old status quo that they've seen for the past 10 years coming from the Liberal government. They told us very clearly

that they want to see results that make their lives better this session, and we're going to be working hard to deliver those results.

For example, drivers paying the highest auto insurance rates in the country are wondering how long they're going to have to wait for their rates to actually come down. They see the government working overtime to protect insurance industry profits, but moving as slowly as possible when it comes to lowering their auto insurance rates. Can the Premier explain why it is that the government's dragging their feet on lowering the rates while it continues to protect industry profit margins?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party asked a number of questions and touched on a number of issues in her questioning, and I know that there are ministers who will want to speak specifically to some of those issues. But I just want to make this point, and that is that I am determined to continue to work to make the minority Parliament function so that we can get results, so that we can make the changes that need to be changed and so that we can bring the legislation in that needs to be passed, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to working with the leader of the third party on issues like auto insurance, on which we're not dragging our feet; in fact, we're implementing the changes that will allow those average decreases to happen. We look forward to working with the third party on making sure that those investments in home care happen, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to working with the third party and with the opposition on the changes to, for example, the employer health tax exemption, so that businesses will have more room to hire people. That's the work of the Legislature. I look forward to working with the opposition members on that.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I really look forward to change, and people keep hearing promises of change. But over the summer, they saw more and more of the same old same old from the Liberal government.

Way back in January, New Democrats proposed a public inquiry to look into the gas plant scandal. But the Premier insisted that a legislative committee would do a better job. This morning, she actually insisted again that all the answers were going to be gotten by that committee. She insisted it would have a full scope to ensure that all questions were answered back in January as well, Speaker. Can the Premier explain why, then, the committee Chair, the Liberal MPP from Etobicoke North, is blocking questions at committee?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the leader of the third party knows that that is not what is happening and that the Chairs of committees take their advice from the Clerks, Mr. Speaker, and they act in accordance with that advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, Ontarians judge leaders by what they do, not just what they say. They see New Democrats have been delivering results that will make government more accountable, and they see Liberals trying to stop Ontarians from getting answers about the gas plants.

On August 13, the Premier said she was "surprised" that MPPs weren't being allowed to ask about senior Liberal staff. Will the Premier direct her government House leader to agree to expand the mandate of the justice committee so that Ontarians can get answers about attempts by senior Liberals to influence the Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the House leader is going to want to comment on this question in the next supplementary, but let me just say I'm very pleased that we were able to get the budget passed in this Legislature. I'm very pleased that the NDP were able to support the Liberal budget—that the NDP were able to support the initiatives of this government to invest in home care, to invest in a youth jobs strategy and to invest in transit. I'm very pleased that the third party was able to see that the people of this province sent a minority government to Queen's Park, and that they are working with us—have been working with us—to make that work.

Interjections.

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

I do want to offer the leader of the third party the same advice that I offered the leader of the official opposition, and that is this: There is a live issue before this House right now in dealing with the prima facie case regarding the issue that you brought up, so I'm asking that you refrain from asking questions about that particular issue. I'm just offering that as a caution, please.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this is about her leadership, not the leash that she has her House leader on.

On August 13, the Premier said, "I was surprised" that the questions were out of order. "I fully expected those questions"—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Is that leash leather?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order. I'm not impressed.

Please put your question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On August 13, the Premier said, "I was surprised" that the questions were out of order. "I fully expected those questions could be asked." The Premier herself has promised that all questions would be answered. Now, she can keep her word and do the right thing now, or she can continue to protect well-connected Liberal insiders. Will the Premier do the right thing and get Ontarians answers, or will she let the same old status quo stand?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is day 1—just noting.

I just want to note, Mr. Speaker, that the quote that the leader of the third party has read out a couple of times—that I was surprised—demonstrates that I don't control what goes on in committee. So when something happens and I'm asked a question, I respond honestly to the question.

We all want the information out. We want to continue to be open. I wrote to the Auditor General; I asked that the Auditor General look at both situations. There are 135,000 documents that have been provided to the committee.

The leader of the third party knows this. I really believe she knows that it is my intention—it has been our intention all along—to make sure that, as questions are asked, they get answered, and we will continue in that manner.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is also for the Premier. Premier, over the summer, my colleagues and NDP colleagues were prevented at the justice committee from asking very important and pertinent questions about your Liberal operatives—senior Liberal staffers—attempting to strong-arm the Speaker after his decision in finding a prima facie case of contempt against your government in the gas plant scandal.

So I want to know why you weren't forthcoming with that information, that the meeting had taken place and had put the Speaker in such a terrible position—so no transparency; you said you were going to be transparent, but you're not.

Secondly, why did we have to find out by scouring through thousands and thousands of secret emails that the meeting did take place between the Speaker and senior staffers?

Thirdly, what have you done to take action to make sure that your senior staff people, that Liberal campaign people, will be prevented in the future—and this will never happen again—from inserting politics and trying to influence rulings of an impartial Speaker?

Interjections.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Again, I'm very much wanting quiet so I can hear the statement. I'm very concerned about the direction when there's a live issue that will be dealt with. I am sensitive to the questioning, so I'm trying to be as balanced as possible, and that's why I'm asking all members who are asking those kinds of questions to try to divert themselves from making mention of the Chair while the Chair is supposed to be making a ruling. If you can find a way to do that and everyone would be listening while I'm speaking, it would be helpful. I'm leaving it with you to try to make that happen, and if not, then I will rule it out of order.

Premier, you can answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that members of the opposition, including the member who just asked the question, are really playing some procedural games here. The fact of the matter is, the Chair of the committee made a ruling, and there are a number of options that we could deal with, going forward. One was a point of privilege, of which the honourable member in question has given notice to this House and that this House is seized with. The second is for the House leaders to sit down and talk about a reasonable way to move forward.

The House leaders have met on this matter and, without divulging our confidential conversations, I can say that we looked at both. I, as House leader, would never want to be in a position of trying to horse-trade away the right of a member to raise a point of privilege. We talked about some potential ways forward, but the honourable member has chosen to raise that point of privilege. That is his right, Mr. Speaker, but then he cannot use question period to try to berate the government. He's got to make a choice procedurally, and these types of games are quite frankly beneath him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? I'm allowing it.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm still stunned with that answer, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the Premier: Ontarians are disgusted with what happened. You know, it took Watergate a long time to be a big issue. This, in parliamentary circles, is a huge issue. You do not do what your people attempted to do. It's not whether the Speaker was influenced or not; it's the attempt to strong-arm the Speaker while a ruling was going on.

Email exchanges between these Liberal staffers and advisers have raised a lot of eyebrows with members of this House and with the public. You want to be open; you want to be transparent. The people of Ontario want you to be open and transparent, and they want the answers. You won't, because the House leader hasn't brought forward a motion we could all agree on to expand the mandate of the justice committee so that we could ask these process questions leading up to the Speaker's ruling.

At the end of the day I ask you, what are you going to do to correct things; and secondly, has anyone been fired over this?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, it really is beneath this member. He knows that with a point of privilege before this House we could not explore any other way forward. I was not in a position to ever want to horse-trade away the right of a member to raise a point of privilege. I did, without breaking the confidentiality of House leaders, offer a potential way to move forward, and we know by the actions of the member that that was rejected.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that the Chair of the committee made a ruling based on his best advice. I understand that later in the session a technical briefing was offered by the Chair and the Clerk and other experts. And do you know what I found surprising, Mr. Speaker?

The opposition tried to have it in camera, in secret, so that the press and the public could not realize that this was a ruling that was based upon the legal advice that was received by the Chair of the committee at the time.

Mr. Speaker, we will hear the point of privilege, and you, sir, will deal with it.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. On Friday, people in London West received some discouraging news, with the release of the latest jobs numbers. Compared to a year ago, there are 5,800 fewer people in the London labour market. That's people who have given up all hope of finding work and have just stopped looking.

Premier, taking away people's hope that they will ever be able to earn a living is no solution to high unemployment rates. When is the government going to take real action to create jobs in London West?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course we are working hard to create jobs right across this province. In fact, I was in the London area just last week, making some announcements with the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund—important announcements in places like Palmerston, Guelph and Elmira. I'm working closely with the leadership of London.

It's important to recognize that, although there are provincial disparities in terms of job numbers, we saw in August, as the Premier mentioned, overall 43,000 new jobs created. Let's drill down a little bit in that and what that means because some are asking about the quality of those jobs. We actually saw that there were 7,600 new manufacturing jobs created in August alone. There were an additional 13,300 jobs created among our youth. We have an important youth jobs strategy that's contributing to that.

I'll speak more about the measures we're taking in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that London has lost 4,600 jobs compared to a year ago, and people in London West are worried about being able to pay the bills. The Southwestern Ontario Development Fund was established to help businesses create jobs, yet the only thing Londoners got from the fund recently was a by-election reannouncement of 14 jobs that had already been announced earlier.

Again, my question is to the Premier. When can the people of London West expect to see the fund bring some desperately needed new jobs into the London economy?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Of course I look forward to applications coming from London and the London area, as we've already seen. Armo Tool is another example in a riding immediately adjacent, but there are a number of people from London who work at that firm. We've pro-

vided them with support, a grant through the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund.

In fact, even though this fund has only existed since October—and I know it's a fund that the PC opposition voted against. But since October alone, this government has invested more than \$25 million in southwestern Ontario through this fund. That's more than 6,000 jobs that have been created and retained through this program. It has leveraged more than \$200 million from the private sector.

I've had a great time all summer travelling through southwestern Ontario, including London, seeing the projects, the programs that we're contributing to. Manufacturing is alive and well, and we're working with these companies as they expand and extend their global reach.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelin Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to rise in this House on behalf of the people of Scarborough–Guildwood.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. My constituents rely on public transit every day to get to work and from school. Improving transit is a top priority for my constituents. People in my riding across Scarborough are looking for more frequent and faster options when using public transit to get around, and they want to know who will deliver.

My colleagues the members from Scarborough Southwest, Scarborough–Agincourt, Pickering–Scarborough East, Scarborough–Rouge River and Scarborough Centre have been tireless champions for a subway in Scarborough. Premier Wynne and this government have stepped up to the plate with a plan to build a subway to Scarborough and the money to back it up. However, there seems to be the risk of more delay because other levels of government don't seem to be ready to support a Scarborough subway extension.

Speaker, we need Scarborough moving. Will the minister tell this House when a subway project will get under way in Scarborough?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to join my colleagues in the House to welcome five very fine Ontarians to this Legislature. This is a huge privilege, and congratulations to you and your families—and also to the other candidates who weren't successful. Congratulations to all of you.

1130

We are building a subway, Mr. Speaker. That's the first thing I'd like to say. I think this government is tired of the talk. If we've had anything about Scarborough and subways, we've had debates and we haven't had enough action, and Premier Wynne has asked that I make sure this project gets built on budget and on time. The total budget for this is actually more like \$1.8 billion because we have \$320 million in the common components in the project. We will be building, without any ask for funds from the federal or provincial government, a \$1.4-billion

subway to the Scarborough Town Centre, on budget, on time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelin Hunter: Thank you, Speaker, and through you, thank you to the minister for that update. I'm proud that this government continues to make public transit a priority. Ontario Liberals are transit builders. The projects being funded under the Big Move in Scarborough will be well received by the people of Scarborough–Guildwood. The investments that this government is making will help make public transit a better choice for commuters, reduce congestion on our roads and contribute to a better quality of life for Ontario families.

When my constituents talk with me about improving transit, they want to know how it's going to be done as much as they want to know what's going to be done. However, many are unfamiliar with the Big Move and Metrolinx itself, the agency responsible for implementing transit in the GTHA.

Will the minister tell this House what Metrolinx is doing to deliver on the promise of better transit for the people of Scarborough and throughout the GTHA?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member again for her advocacy for her constituents. We are building \$16.4 billion in the largest regional build-out of transit in the history of the GTHA: fifteen major projects and a major new system. And 90% of that is being funded singularly by the provincial government, which is where lies the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, 4% of the funding comes from the federal government—a measly 4%. In the six months that I've been the minister, I have written letters; I have had one conversation with Minister Lebel early on. I've invited him on a cycling trip. We have had nothing. Minister Raitt took over a couple of months ago. I have tried to get a meeting with her to talk about this for several weeks—for a couple of months. We actually had three different appointments in the last few weeks; she cancelled all of them. We have no support from the federal government. We have no meetings. They clearly don't care about this at all, never mind fund it.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question this morning is for the Premier. Welcome back, Premier. The Liberal gas plant scandal hearings went on all summer long. The surprising thing here is, we are almost a year after the first email documents started dribbling out and we still don't know how much the Oakville gas plant cancellation was. We have one fact confirmed by the documents and by sworn testimony, and Premier, that is that you, as cabinet chair, signed the order that started this whole charade with TransCanada. Now, you either knew how much this was going to cost Ontario or you blindly signed it with no regard whatsoever to what this will do to the taxpayers or the hydro bills.

So, Premier, when you put that pen in your hand to start this whole thing off, were you thinking, "I don't know" or "I don't care"?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we talk about transparency. This is the Premier of the province who has asked the Auditor General to look into the Oakville situation, and I see from media reports that she is suggesting that will be out in the coming days. She said early fall. It was this Premier who went forward and asked for a broadening of the committee. She even offered a select committee, which the opposition rejected. It was this Premier who went in front of the committee and answered hundreds of questions that have been put to her both in the House and in committee.

But you know, I want to talk a little bit about transparency and that particular member. It's interesting; he was mayor of North Bay for a number of years—actually, I think eight, nine or 10 years. The Liberal research bureau asked for emails under freedom of information from his time as mayor. I look forward to sharing the response in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again, to the Premier: It is pitiful that—I can guarantee you that in those emails there were no gas plant scandal documents, and I can also tell you I have no idea what the city did with my seven years of emails that I saved when I was in office.

Your Liberal operatives, Premier, would not tell us the truth during the scandal hearings this summer. Anyone watching saw the pathetic display your party put on with half-truths and misdirection, such as we've just seen from the House leader. Nobody would tell us how much you, Premier, spent to cancel the Oakville plant, but we know you already know that number. You already have the Auditor General's findings, and you know you've been caught red-handed again.

You spoke of the people's fixation with gas plants. Well, let me tell you, Premier, they are fixated. They're fed up. They're fed up with your nonsense, your deleted emails and your delay tactics. Tell us today, how much of the taxpayers' and ratepayers' money did you spend to cancel the Oakville gas plant. Tell us right now.

Hon. John Milloy: You know what, Mr. Speaker? We don't know whether there were any emails about gas plants in the honourable member's emails because this is what we heard from the deputy clerk for the town of North Bay. I quote—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: You'll want to hear this: "I have now confirmed with the director of information systems and the executive assistant for the mayor"—wait for it, wait for it—"that all available emails and attachments for the mayor and his office staff from December 1, 2003, to November 30, 2010, are no longer available. Emails are only kept for a 30-day period."

You know, Mr. Speaker, the dramatics—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I would ask the members to come to order. Minister of Energy, come to order. Minister of the Environment, come to order. Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the point is that the dramatics and the histrionics—let's let the committee do its work. The fact of the matter is that they have heard from dozens and dozens of witnesses. They have looked for over 100,000—

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

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone for that warm welcome this morning.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In late 2012, the minister responsible for infrastructure learned that the girders manufactured for the Herb Gray Parkway in Windsor did not meet code. Nevertheless, some of those girders were installed as late as January, and it was only this July that the ministry ordered a stop to the installation of girders on this vital \$1.4-billion project.

Why did this government wait until July to stop construction when it knew months earlier about the structurally unsound girders?

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, this government is pretty proud of a \$1.4-billion investment that we're making in the Windsor-Essex Parkway. This is timely because the bridge crossing—this unprecedented level of infrastructure is of huge concern to this government, and we know it is the foundation for future economic development in the Windsor-Essex area.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as I discovered that there was an issue, we acted immediately. I have now ordered an inquiry. The expert review panel is reviewing this entire matter. We acted promptly. That is an open and transparent process. They will be rising and reporting within the next 30 days, Mr. Speaker. I think all of the questions being raised will be answered.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The government has retained a group of what it calls leading experts in structural engineering to review these unsound girders. The study was to be completed in late summer. Now we learn that the deadline for submissions has been extended to the end of September, meaning that even an interim report won't be available until sometime this winter.

When will this Legislature—when will the people of Windsor, Tecumseh and LaSalle—finally get some answers on this critical project?

1140

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I became aware of this, as you know, in May. I immediately acted, gathered information and went to my deputy. We immediately, in June, ordered any construction to cease. We

will not open any part of the parkway until this review is complete, and we've committed to that. We're managing this in a prudent and thoughtful way.

The expert panel are the engineers who will make these determinations around compliance and around structural integrity—this is not something for politicians. When the transcripts will all be public, the committee will be reporting completely publicly and all these questions will be seen in the full report. I think it will demonstrate that certainly I, as the minister, and this government responded quickly and promptly as we came across information that caused concern.

HEALTH CARE

SOINS DE SANTÉ

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to echo the comments of the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore and thank everyone for their warm welcome in the Leg today. I understand it's not that way every day.

At least that's what I've been told. I'd also like to say it's an honour to rise today on behalf of the residents of Ottawa South.

My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As our population ages, the quality and sustainability of health care is a growing concern for my constituents. Whether it's a trip to the emergency room or a visit to the family doctor, they want to know that health care services will be there for them when they need them.

I have made clear my commitment to ensure that the people of Ottawa South get the high quality of care they deserve. Could the minister speak about what we're doing to keep Ottawa healthy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am very sincere in my congratulations to the new member from Ottawa South and to the other new members who have been elected to this wonderful Legislature. Congratulations to you all.

We are making important investments to improve the quality of care in Ottawa and accessibility to health care in the Ottawa area. Ten family health teams have now been established and are providing care to 140,000 people in the Ottawa area. As the member from Ottawa-Orléans knows well, we are committed to building a family health hub in Orléans to provide comprehensive primary care in Orléans. We've cut wait times in Ottawa. For example, MRI wait times at the Ottawa Hospital have been reduced by 82%, and anyone needing a hip replacement at Montfort has had their wait cut in half.

The previous government wanted to shut down Montfort Hospital. Our government has invested \$173 million in expanding and redeveloping Montfort, and just this past summer, it was certified as an academic teaching hospital. Things are getting better in Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M. John Fraser: La ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée mentionne l'Hôpital Montfort. J'ai déjà rencontré plusieurs de mes commettants francophones d'Ottawa-Sud et je sais à quel point cet hôpital est une

véritable institution à Ottawa. Montfort offre des services de santé excellents et est un grand symbole pour la communauté francophone de ma circonscription, d'Ottawa et de l'est de l'Ontario. Monsieur le Président, est-ce que la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée pourrait m'en dire plus sur ce que le gouvernement fait pour les francophones d'Ottawa, en plus de ce qui a été fait pour l'Hôpital Montfort?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the minister responsible for francophone affairs.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Moi aussi, je voudrais féliciter mon collègue John Fraser pour son élection. C'est un homme extraordinaire, un grand ami de la francophonie. C'est un homme qui a beaucoup aidé à l'avancement de l'Hôpital Montfort. Alors, je veux le remercier.

Oui, ce gouvernement ici a été extraordinaire envers les Franco-Ontariens. L'hôpital qui devait fermer ses portes, il y a quelques années sous le gouvernement précédent, je dis toujours, s'est relevé de ses cendres et on a doublé le nombre de lits à l'hôpital. Tout récemment j'avais l'honneur et le bonheur d'annoncer la désignation de l'Hôpital Montfort comme un hôpital enseignant. Vous savez que l'Hôpital Montfort, c'est mon alma mater; j'ai fait mes cours d'infirmière là. J'étais très touchée et je remercie la ministre de m'avoir donné cette opportunité-là de faire l'annonce. Merci.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If I may, just before I speak, I want to congratulate all of the new members of this assembly: obviously, Mr. Fraser from the same city as me, and Doug Holyday to our new bench, and also to the others. It's great to have you here.

My question is to the Premier. Premier, you and I have asked and answered, or I've tried to get answers from you, on a number of occasions, almost 40 direct questions from me on what the true costs of those cancelled gas plants are, and I haven't been able to get that response from you. But I do know you do have that information because the auditor's report has been given to you in advance. The residents of Nepean-Carleton would truly appreciate it once and for all if you would provide us in this assembly with the full details and the true costing of what those cancelled gas plants are. You've had all summer to do it. Will you do it today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know my colleagues will want to comment in the supplementary.

I do not have the auditor's report, Mr. Speaker. I do not know what the auditor's report is going to say. When the auditor's report is available, it will become public.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We were promised it before we came back.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We were promised it before we came back, Speaker.

I want to go back to the Premier. I have no interest in hearing the spin lines from the government House leader. The abuse of tax dollars to what could be to the tune of

\$1 billion that has been misspent is a serious matter. That is why our leader is calling for a judicial inquiry so justice will be served and the severity of this matter will be studied in the full view and the full attention of the public.

Premier, we need a full inquiry now, but we also need the full set of numbers. We know that you have them. We know that you've had them for quite some time. Will you make that known to us today? I appeal to you on behalf of all Ontarians and in particular the residents of Nepean-Carleton.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will say to the member opposite that just repeating an untrue statement does not make it true. I do not have the numbers. I do not have the Auditor General's report. When I have the Auditor General's report, it will be shared with you. I do not have those numbers.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the Auditor General to look at the two situations. I went to committee and answered questions, and I opened up the scope of the committee so that those questions could be asked. I repeat, Mr. Speaker: I do not have the Auditor General's report. I have not seen it. I do not have those numbers, and when they are available, the member opposite will be able to see them.

Interjections.

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

I've been challenged a few times today to try to bring us to focusing on how we should be asking and responding to questions and also what we should be doing in between that time.

I'm challenged by the way you responded by saying it's untrue, so let's try to be as succinct as possible with this. I'm making an observation about what I'm hearing. I haven't made a challenge to anyone other than to challenge us to race to the top instead of the bottom. Let's try to keep this on a high level, please. I'm satisfied with that, and I'm just making a comment.

New question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The question is for the Premier. The Premier once talked about the need to work with the city of Toronto on transit as part of the conversation, as she is fond of saying, so why has she sent the Minister of Transportation to cause chaos and division by announcing a cut-down Scarborough subway plan with no buy-in from city council, no buy-in from the TTC and apparently even Metrolinx, the government's own transit planners?

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to be very clear about this, Mr. Speaker. There has been, if you look at the maps, one way only and one route only between the Kennedy station and Scarborough Town Centre. It is the route we are proceeding with. It is the route that was there today; it was the route that was there three years ago. It is the route. It has never changed. This govern-

ment has never proposed an alternate route to do that. What we are changing is the technology. The technology is changing from an LRT to a subway.

Interjections.

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

1150

Hon. Glen R. Murray: There are a number of members of my caucus—Messrs. Balkissoon, Berardinetti and Duguid and others—who have fought for 20 years to get a subway. Mitzie Hunter ran on it, Mr. Speaker. We are paying 100% of the cost of that.

Not only do we have collaboration with the city; Minister Duguid and Councillor Thompson are co-chairing a committee to develop and elaborate this project and others going forward, which I think is an unprecedented level of co-operation between our two governments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, the minister's latest plan has been widely panned as half-baked, politically driven and perhaps even physically impossible. Why is the minister playing railroad tycoon and taking potshots at supposed partners instead of working collaboratively with the city of Toronto to improve transit to Scarborough residents?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I could take a great deal of lessons on potshots from some of my friends at city hall and in Ottawa, like Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Ford—I certainly have had a lot from them. The only two points we've made were not potshots. The two points we made of our colleagues in the other governments—and I don't speak of the whole city but some politicians there who are champions but not funders.

Four per cent as a contribution to our economic and social capital of this country's transit needs is laughable. Mr. Speaker, I've been the mayor of another city. I would never have accepted less than a third. The mayor of Kitchener doesn't accept less than a third; the mayor of Ottawa doesn't accept less than a third. I hope his federal counterparts will start raising this issue. The city has yet to put five cents into a subway. So, Mr. Speaker, we again find ourselves as the only people funding our promises and delivering our promises.

My question is, what route? Does the NDP want to change the route? Do they not like the route that's been there for four years? What is their position? How are they going to fund this? What did Mr. Giambrone promise the people of Scarborough–Guildwood?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Our 2013 budget is about creating jobs and helping people in their everyday lives. Speaker, any economist will tell you that an effective regional support program will play a significant role in supporting businesses and communities, helping them grow and create good, meaningful jobs. With Ontario back on track after the global

recession, it's still important to provide economic supports to rural regions across this province to ensure economic growth and prosperity.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, could the minister please update this House about the action our government is taking to provide regional economic development supports for businesses across Ontario and in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, for example?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for such an important question.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague is correct when he says that Ontario is back on track, so much so that we have recovered over 180% of the jobs that were lost during the recession, more than 475,000 jobs; 90% of those jobs full-time, 80% of those jobs in the private sector. A lot of that has to do with commitments made through our Southwestern Ontario Development Fund and the important Eastern Ontario Development Fund, which we have committed almost \$90 million in support for so far. These investments have not only created and retained more than 20,000 jobs; they've leveraged private sector investment of nearly \$1 billion.

Our government's commitment to promoting such regional economic development remains a priority. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, just last week I was in Elmira, in Palmerston, in Guelph, announcing \$3 million of investments creating a considerable number of jobs and retaining them as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for your response. It's great to hear that our government is working to support businesses across the province and leveraging investments for growth, such as in my own riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell: Beau's beers is expanding, and Holder Tractors is expanding as well.

While providing supports is important, rural Ontario communities face unique challenges when it comes to employment. For example, what may work here in Toronto does not necessarily work for the rest of rural Ontario or for other rural ridings across this great province.

I recognize the importance of helping people find good jobs in their home communities. This will help keep Ontario diverse, while contributing to the lives of those who may not live in major urban areas.

Speaker, through you, again, to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, could the minister please update this House on what our government is doing to help everyday Ontarians in all regions of Ontario find good-quality jobs?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: This is, in fact, a great opportunity to let the Legislature know about our government's recent expansion of the boundaries for our regional economic development funds and how this will further help to create jobs in local communities across the province. The Southwestern Ontario Development Fund will now include the county of Simcoe, Mr. Speaker, and the Eastern Ontario Development Fund will now include the district of Muskoka.

I have to say, I want to congratulate the local municipal and regional leaders of those two areas for working so diligently and closely with my ministry to make that possible. By expanding these geographic boundaries, we're helping businesses, not-for-profit organizations and municipalities in both Simcoe and Muskoka apply for funding for projects that will spur innovation, attract investment and create good local jobs.

Growing up, of course, as I did, in rural Ontario, I understand just how important regional economic development programs are, and economic development generally, for rural Ontario. I'm sure my colleague feels the same for his constituents.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, it's been two years since your government's self-serving decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant in the dying days of the 2011 election. For two years, your party has done its best to obstruct, delay and avoid coming clean with the taxpayers about how much this is going to cost them.

Despite being under oath, one Liberal operative after another, when called in front of the committee, has put on their best Sergeant Schultz impression. When you appeared before the same committee, you also refused to answer a question put to you 32 times.

The committee's summer hearings left us with a whole lot more questions, not answers. You're on the record as saying that you want the answers to come out and that you have heard the public's anger loud and clear. Will you finally let us get to the bottom of this scandal, end this charade and call a judicial inquiry?

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We certainly appreciate the question.

I recall, in the month of April at the justice committee, the CEO of the Ontario Power Authority was a witness, and at that particular meeting, he presented his best cut at the cost of Oakville. We also had a number put forward by the opposition critic as his best cut for the cost. There was also an independent consultant who put his number forward for the best cut at the cost of that particular project. Three weeks earlier, the CEO of the OPA had given a different cost for that project.

If there was no other evidence, Mr. Speaker, that we need the Auditor General to report and to have the patience to wait for her and that office, that's where it should be. That's where the answer will come. It won't come from one committee meeting where four people are giving four different answers. They're wasting time at the committee. We want to get on with the business of this Legislature. Let the Auditor General do her job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: A lot of bluster, a lot of excuses, no answers.

Premier, the obstructionist tactics by Liberal Party operatives are well established. They have memory lapses. They claim that sworn testimony by other wit-

nesses in front of the committee is false. They dispute unequivocal evidence contained in the released documents.

You claim you want to have the questions answered, but your actions betray your true intentions. It is clear that your Liberal government has no interest in the truth. Your attempts to pay lip service to transparency have been exposed, and nobody believes you anymore.

The only way to restore public confidence and get to the bottom of this scandal is to call a judicial inquiry. Why won't you do this? What are you hiding?

1200

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, there is a statement here, and the question is, who said this: "The cost of a public inquiry is excessive; we don't believe that that's necessary"? Well, that's from MPP Leone, MPP for Cambridge. What's changed between then and now?

Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat that the justice committee has gone up and down on this issue a hundred times. They've got different answers. The Premier had the leadership capacity to say, "Let the Auditor General look into it. Let the Auditor General come back and report." We did it for Mississauga; we accepted the report. We're doing it for Oakville; we'll accept the report.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Last week, the Premier skipped around the north on a whistle stop tour, but her government isn't going anywhere on issues that actually matter to northerners. She hasn't delivered on the twice-promised, twice-cancelled conversion of the Thunder Bay Generating Station. In fact, northerners have watched as the Liberal government blew over half a billion dollars cancelling gas plants in southern Ontario and as they blew \$20 million cancelling the Thunder Bay gas plant conversion twice.

Now, northerners are asking themselves what's going on here. They need results, and they don't need photo ops and endless conversations. My question is a pretty basic one, Speaker: When can the people of the northwest expect some clear answers about their energy future?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I have to say that my experience of being in the northwest was that people were pretty darned happy about the Experimental Lakes Area—that the provincial government has stepped up when the federal government abdicated its responsibility. I have to say, \$100 million a year for roads and bridges, that kind of infrastructure investment, was a direct request that came from municipal leaders, many of them in the northwest.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I have to say is that I did spend time in the north; I did travel the province this summer. The result of that travel—my travel in the past and this summer—is that the needs and concerns of regions in the province make their way to our policy discussions. That results in better outcomes for the people of the province. So I was happy to be there, and I will be happy to go again.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On August 14, the member from Simcoe–Grey provided me with written notice of his intention to raise a point of privilege upon resumption of the House. I am now prepared to give my ruling without hearing further from the member from Simcoe–Grey, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

The member's point of privilege relates to the existence of certain emails that were recently produced to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy in connection with that committee's review of the gas plants issue generally and my September 13, 2012, ruling specifically. These emails chronicle a discussion among a number of then-current and former staff of Premier McGuinty's office and are offered by the member from Simcoe–Grey as evidence that an attempt was made to influence or intimidate me with respect to my ruling arising from the point of privilege put forward on August 27, 2012, by the member for Cambridge.

As I have said in a public statement on July 30, I cannot speak to the mindset or the motivation of the authors of these emails. However, I think it is critical to note that my ruling that a prima facie case of privilege had been established by the member for Cambridge was made on September 13, 2012—fully eight days before the emails in question here.

I can tell the House that I made the September 13 ruling without any interference from any person, based on the evidence and arguments put forward to me by various members of this assembly, based on the August 27, 2012, report of the estimates committee, and in consultation with only my procedural advisers at the table. At no time did any person seek to pressure me with respect to that ruling, and, it having been made, it was not changeable in any event; this simply was not possible.

As I also noted in my July 30 public statement, I meet and have discussions regularly on a wide variety of issues related to my duties and responsibilities as Speaker. I am sure that all members can appreciate the extreme reluctance I would have in divulging the topic or content of any of those discussions, for many of them take place with you and your colleagues. To do so would justifiably open me up to a criticism that I cannot be trusted to keep confidences, regardless of whether they are of great or minor importance.

However, given the serious nature of the matter at hand, and in what I judge to be in the best interests of this institution, I am prepared to say that at no time, in any discussion I might have had after delivering my September 13 ruling, was I the recipient of any inappropriate overture or suggestion. I have not been pressured, intimidated, cajoled, warned or threatened in any way, nor was any influence exerted upon me to do or say any particular thing or to pursue any particular course of action. Nothing of this nature has taken place.

It is because I can so clearly give this House this assurance that I must find that a prima facie case of privilege does not exist. I thank the member from Simcoe–

Grey for providing me with a comprehensive notice in this matter.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, earlier today in the answer given to the member from Nipissing, the government House leader delved into areas that I believe are inappropriate for this House to even be considering. I look at standing orders 23(h), (i) and (m) as my justification for raising this point of order.

The question at hand put to the Premier at the time and answered by the government House leader is to deal with the issue of the gas plant cancellation—matters that were dealt with by this Legislature, by this government, by the Liberal Party. For this House leader to go down the road of trying to make a mockery of what we do in this House by talking about FOIs to the city of North Bay to look for emails that go back years from someone who's no longer a member of that city council, let alone the mayor, and to bring and raise those issues into this House takes us down an area that we are not responsible for. It is not the job of the Legislature of Ontario to be looking for emails from the city of North Bay. Secondly, it is absolutely certain that any emails from the city of North Bay would have nothing to do with the cancellation of gas plants in Mississauga or Oakville.

That is an insult to the members of this Legislature. It is an insult to the public, the people of the province of Ontario, to play those kinds of games, and I would hope that any question of that nature in the future that is responded to in that silly, ridiculous way by the government House leader is immediately ruled out of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order. I honestly believe that it actually would be helpful to this House if all members would refrain from making any personal comments to anyone about anything they've done in the past, present or future.

I would also suggest very strongly that all members give serious consideration to speaking to the Speaker when responding to and asking questions. That would help us remove ourselves from the noted comments from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I thank him for his comments and I charge all of us with taking that path as much and as often as possible.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Ted Arnott: Today, the first day of the fall sitting of the Legislature, we begin again to discuss, debate and

deliberate the public issues facing the province. We might even have the occasional conversation, to use the Premier's favourite word for a dialogue that usually leads nowhere. A genuine conversation must be two-way. Both sides must listen and show respect for each other, and normally the conversation should have a conclusion if it's going to be anything but a waste of everyone's time.

On August 14, along with the members of the opposed Belwood wind farm group and residents of West Garafraxa in the township of Centre Wellington, I attended a meeting in Elora hosted by wpd Canada, a wind energy company which is planning to build a wind farm near Belwood. This particular conversation was initiated by the McGuinty Liberal government's Green Energy Act. Today, it is perpetuated by the Wynne Liberal government. The anger in the room was palpable. The representatives of wpd took the brunt of it because, of course, no one from the Liberal government would have dared to show up at a meeting such as this. But shown up these Liberal scoundrels should be, for it is their policy to take away local decision-making authority, move ahead prematurely while health studies have yet to be completed, and arbitrarily decide that a setback of 500 metres is sufficient, all the while driving up hydro bills and driving out industry, which is the root of the problem.

This is the legacy of their Green Energy Act. No wonder the Liberal support in rural Ontario has all but disappeared. But the voice of rural Ontario will continue to be heard here at Queen's Park from this side of the House, and the conversation will only conclude when the Liberals are removed from office.

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today, I rise to discuss the issue of temporary job agencies. All too often, Mr. Speaker, many members of the community around Ontario and particularly in Brampton and Mississauga are finding precarious employment. That's employment that's not permanent. This type of employment often sees people face conditions that are much worse than other people's. There's a strong connection between precarious employment and poverty, and the root cause is that people who don't have a guaranteed source of income, who don't have an employment that they can rely on, often fall through the cracks.

This government has for too long been inactive on this file. There is a serious problem brewing, there's a serious problem that exists, and we need the government to take action to address this issue of precarious employment. We need to see some regulations in place so that people are transitioned from precarious employment from these temporary jobs into permanent, full-time jobs.

I have numerous examples of folks who are working through these agencies. There was a time when they would be transitioned into a full-time job, but people are now working, for year after year, through temporary agencies. They get no benefits; they have no severance pay. They do not have the same rights as those who have full-time, permanent employment.

Again I urge this government to take steps and to take real actions to address this issue, which is one of the root causes of poverty that addresses the working poor in our community. We need to give them some solace and some security that we are standing for them to ensure they get permanent, full-time jobs.

STREETSVILLE CEILIDH

Mr. Bob Delaney: On Saturday, September 21, the vibrant village of Streetsville invites everyone to the third annual Streetsville Ceilidh. The phrase "ceilidh" is of Irish and Scottish descent. Ceilidh is a Gaelic phrase meaning "party" or "gathering" at which song and dance is accompanied by storytelling.

In North America, some 50 million of us have descended from Gaelic ancestry, mostly from Ireland and Scotland. While Mississauga celebrates the heritage of our neighbours from all over the world, the annual Streetsville Ceilidh is an opportunity for the whole community to become Gaelic for a night and to join between 400 and 500 of us to celebrate, eat and be merry.

The Streetsville Ceilidh will be held at Vic Johnston Arena on Saturday, September 21, 2013. Doors open at 6 p.m.; the celebration runs until 1 p.m. Tickets are merely \$50 per person, with the option to reserve tables of six, eight, or 10. Each ticket includes dinner and a chance at a door prize raffle, plus live entertainment throughout the evening. The best part: All the evening's net proceeds come back to the western Mississauga community to help kids through local service groups: the Legion, the Rotary Club, the Lions and the Streetsville Hockey League.

HATE CRIMES

Mr. Peter Shurman: I am very saddened to rise today to speak to an important, distressing and rapidly increasing problem which we in Ontario have been encountering. Over the past weeks, residents in Thornhill, Richmond Hill and even myself here at Queen's Park have been the victims of hatred, discrimination and anti-Semitism.

On Wednesday August 14, the Richmond Hill Golf and Country Club, which is known to have a high Jewish membership, was targeted with two nasty swastikas cut into the grass of the golf greens. Only a week later, four homes in Thornhill had their vehicles vandalized, with the Nazi symbol spray-painted on their hoods.

Because of my own religious persuasion, I was the victim of personal discrimination and hateful words expressed in writing against me earlier this summer, but I cannot be more specific today.

Several years ago I stood in this chamber with many of you condemning the term "Israel Apartheid Week" as being inflammatory and speaking hatred on our university campuses. I stand before you today to report that it seems our efforts to stop hatred against any group have fallen short. I will continue to be a relentless advocate for tough sanctions when dealing with issues of hatred and racism. Canada is the ultimate mosaic, the

envy of other nations for our work in creating tolerance and full integration. Actions like these demean the legacy of thousands of Canadians who have laid the foundation for acceptance and tolerance.

With every hateful act, the words “never again” become more meaningful. We must stand our ground in Ontario and in Canada to fight against all forms of hatred perpetrated against any and all groups.

As the MPP for Thornhill and as a target of anti-Semitism myself, I strongly urge the York region police to be unrelenting and vigilant in seeking out the perpetrators of these heinous acts and to treat these incidents for exactly what they are: hate crimes. I call upon all my fellow parliamentarians to join me in the fight against hatred, intolerance and bigotry.

TWIN PINE VILLAGE CO-OP INC.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It’s my privilege to be able to share with the members of the Legislature the accomplishments of the Twin Pine Village Co-op in my riding of London–Fanshawe.

Constructed in the early 1970s, the Twin Pine Village Co-op has the distinction of being one of London’s first co-op buildings, and this co-op community continues to thrive today. The initiative at Twin Pine Village introduced a new approach to housing. Over time, this project evolved into an exemplary model of community co-operation and proved to Londoners that it is possible to deliver affordable housing in a supportive and inclusive community setting.

Once built, it was up to the residents to continue to promote the philosophy of co-op housing city-wide. Residents of a co-operative have a sense of true ownership, responsibility and investment in their homes. They work together to benefit all residents.

1310

I’m delighted to announce that the Twin Pines co-op in London–Fanshawe was able to pay off their mortgage in full this past summer. I would like to congratulate the co-op residents, volunteers and board members on this achievement. They have proven that co-operative housing is effective and beneficial to residents, the community and all Londoners.

RECOVERY DAY

Mr. John Fraser: I’d like to say, once again, thanks to all the members for their warm welcome this morning. I’d like to say thank you to the residents of Ottawa South. I look forward to continuing to work hard for them both here and in Ottawa South.

On Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the first Recovery Day ever held in Ottawa. I was joined by my colleague from Nepean–Carleton, who’s not here right now. The Recovery Day is a celebration that highlights the bravery, courage and dedication of people in long-term recovery, their families and the people that work with them. It also tries to remind people that there’s a stigma that’s often attached to long-term recovery.

I would like to offer my congratulations to Daniel Rathwell, the organizer of the event, and all the people who volunteered with him. It was a very successful event. I would like to encourage all members of this Legislature, when Recovery Day comes around next year at this time, that if there’s one in their area, they participate.

FREEMAN STATION

Mrs. Jane McKenna: We frequently take our built heritage for granted, and we often realize the cost of our mistakes too late—often, but not always. Today, the city of Burlington celebrates a chapter of its history and heritage when the historic Freeman Station begins its journey back to restored glory. Starting today, the station, built in 1906 by the Grand Trunk Railway, will be gently moved from its temporary sanctuary beside the Fairview fire station to a permanent home nearby. I’m sure the people of Burlington will be taking the time to witness this historic moment.

It’s a moment made possible by community volunteers who rallied around this cause and rescued the station from decades of neglect and who called themselves the Friends of Freeman Station. Since 2011, they have worked to stabilize, repurpose and relocate this piece of Burlington’s history. Along the way, they have partnered with local companies to help return Freeman Station to its former condition. Companies like Ashland, Murison Restoration, King Paving, and Laurie McCulloch Building Moving have all been a huge help. But in the end, the success of this project can be chalked up to the vision, dedication and focus of the people of Burlington. Congratulations to all.

RIDING OF SCARBOROUGH– GUILDWOOD

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelin Hunter: I’d also like to thank the members this morning for that very warm welcome. I’m pleased to join you.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Scarborough–Guildwood for placing their faith in me and electing me to serve as their representative. I am so proud to represent Scarborough, a place where I’ve lived, learned and worked. I’m so proud to be here to serve my community and the people of Ontario.

I came to Canada when I was four years old with my family, including my grandmother, Eva Almira Hunter. I visited her on her birthday, August 14. She was so proud that her granddaughter had been elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. She passed away peacefully on August 16. I want to thank the team at the Scarborough Hospital, including Dr. Ko, for the care that she received.

I am humbled to join the 106 other MPPs in this assembly. While our experiences and opinions are widely different, I look forward to serving with you and getting to know each of you. We are working together in

common cause to make a better life for the people in communities we represent.

In my own community of Scarborough–Guildwood, we take pride in our diversity and strong cultural spirit. Scarborough–Guildwood is proudly one of the most diverse ridings in one of the most diverse provinces in the country. I know that my constituents strongly believe that we are stronger together as one community.

HIGHWAY 15

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise on behalf of the residents of north Leeds to speak about Highway 15. Frankly, I'm not sure what's worse: the deplorable condition of this major roadway or how utterly the Ministry of Transportation has bungled this improvement project since it was first identified in 1999. That's right: The journey started in 1999—and 14 years later, the stretch from Seeley's Bay to Crosby stands among the worst in Ontario.

I regularly hear from constituents fed up with paying for repairs to their vehicles. They also fear for the safety of their loved ones, their friends and their neighbours who travel the highway daily.

Among the delays was a year lost to study the project's impact on snakes and turtles. Speaker, the only endangered species I'm concerned about is the humans driving Highway 15.

Rideau Lakes Mayor Ron Holman and I were shocked to learn that MTO has shelved a commitment to finally begin the work this fall.

Minister Murray, you know Mayor Holman has requested a meeting to discuss this urgent situation. We need your personal involvement, and I'm calling on you to meet with the mayor.

I'm also extending this offer: When you pick a date, I will meet you, with Mayor Holman, in Kingston, so the three of us can drive Highway 15 to the Rideau Lakes township office in Chantry. You can experience first-hand the dangerous conditions north Leeds residents have endured for far too long and why this latest detour is unacceptable.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Forster assumes ballot item number 61 and Mr. Schein assumes ballot item 69, and Ms. MacLeod assumes ballot item number 47 and Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item number 72.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following reports from parliamentary officers were tabled:

—on June 18, 2013, a request from the member from Ottawa–Orléans, Mr. McNeely, to the Integrity Commissioner for an opinion pursuant to section 30(1) of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Ms. Scott, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention;

—on June 24, 2013, a report regarding alternative voting technologies from the Chief Electoral Officer;

—on July 15, 2013, a report concerning the Honourable Brad Duguid, the member from Scarborough Centre, from the Integrity Commissioner;

—on July 16, 2013, the 2012-13 annual report from the Ombudsman of Ontario, sessional paper number 81;

—on August 20, 2013, addendum to the special investigation report from the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I beg leave to present a report on agencies, boards and commissions: the Liquor Control Board of Ontario from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, and move adoption of its recommendation.

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

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: No, thank you. I'd like to move adjournment.

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

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the clerk received the report on intended appointments dated August 14, 2013, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE DIRECTEUR DE LA RESPONSABILITÉ FINANCIÈRE

Mr. Sousa moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to establish a Financial Accountability Officer / Projet de loi 95, Loi créant le poste de directeur de la responsabilité financière.

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?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll make my statement during ministerial statements.

1320

RADON AWARENESS AND PREVENTION ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LA SENSIBILISATION AU RADON ET LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'INFILTRATION DE CE GAZ

Mr. Qaadri moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 96, An Act to raise awareness about radon, provide for the Ontario Radon Registry and reduce radon levels in dwellings and workplaces / Projet de loi 96, Loi visant à sensibiliser le public au radon, à prévoir la création du Registre des concentrations de radon en Ontario et à réduire la concentration de ce gaz dans les logements et les lieux de travail.

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. Shafiq Qaadri: I would simply urge all members of this House to please vote in favour of this wholly essential bill. Thank you.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Milloy seeks unanimous consent to put forth a motion without consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 34 and 35 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee membership.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we have unanimous consent to put forward? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a long one, Mr. Speaker. I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated February 20, 2013, the membership of the following committees is as follows:

The Standing Committee on Estimates: Mike Colle, Kim Craiton, Joe Dickson, Amrit Mangat, Michael Harris, Rob Leone, Rick Nicholls, Taras Natyshak, Michael Prue;

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: Steven Del Duca, Kevin Flynn, Mitzie Hunter, Soo Wong, Victor Fedeli, Monte McNaughton, Peter Shurman, Catherine Fife, Michael Prue;

The Standing Committee on General Government: Donna Cansfield, Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla, John Fraser, Laurie Scott, Todd Smith, Jeff Yurek, Sarah Campbell, Peggy Sattler;

The Standing Committee on Government Agencies: Laura Albanese, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Rick Bartolucci, Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonnell, Randy Pettapiece, Lisa Thompson, Percy Hatfield, Monique Taylor;

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy: Bob Delaney, Steven Del Duca, Phil McNeely, Shafiq Qaadri, Frank Klees, Jack MacLaren, Rob Milligan, Teresa Armstrong, Jonah Schein;

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Lorenzo Berardinetti, Helena Jaczek, Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely, Toby Barrett, Norm Miller, Jerry Ouellette, France Gélinas, Jagmeet Singh;

The Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills: Donna Cansfield, Dipika Damerla, John Fraser, Monte Kwinter, Randy Hillier, Rod Jackson, Bill Walker, Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof;

The Standing Committee on Social Policy: Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon, Helena Jaczek, Ted Chudleigh, Ernie Hardeman, Jane McKenna, Cheri DiNovo, Paul Miller; and

The Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly: Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack, Vic Dhillon, Amrit Mangat, Steve Clark, Garfield Dunlop, Lisa MacLeod, Cindy Forster, Michael Mantha.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All in favour? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm pleased to stand in the House to introduce the Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013. This bill, if passed, would move forward with the commitments made by our government to enhance the accountability and transparency of the province's finances. Our government is strongly committed to ensuring that we as legislators are accountable to the people of Ontario for clearly communicating the objectives, costs and benefits of proposals. The Financial

Accountability Officer Act, 2013, would further the accomplishments and build upon previous work made by this government—in introducing the financial transparency and accountability act—that we have made already on this front.

This bill would establish a Financial Accountability Officer to provide independent analysis to members of the Legislative Assembly about the state of the province's finances, including the budget, and trends in the provincial and national economies. In addition, at the request of a committee or member of the assembly, additional types of research could be undertaken by the Financial Accountability Officer, including the financial cost or benefit to the province of any public bill. The Financial Accountability Officer could also be requested to review and estimate the financial cost or benefit to the province of any proposal, such as private members' bills, or that which relates to matters over which the Legislature has jurisdiction, such as new programs. On request, all ministries and other parts of government would be required to provide the Financial Accountability Officer with financial and economic information on a timely basis.

Our government remains committed to building a strong and prosperous economy while protecting the high-quality public services that the people of Ontario expect and deserve. But at the same time, we must eliminate the deficit, and in this regard we've made great strides. Ontario has beaten its deficit targets for the past four years. We're the only government in Canada that has actually achieved this level of success. But we know we must always strive to do better. Research suggests that officers in other jurisdictions that work in similar ways to what we are proposing lead to improved forecasting, help ensure accountability in meeting their fiscal goals, and improve transparency by better informing the public. These are all laudable ends, Mr. Speaker, and a Financial Accountability Officer would help us meet them.

Ontario is leading the way as the first provincial government in Canada to propose the establishment of such an office. If passed, the Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013, would also enhance the information and resources available to all members of the assembly.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in our throne speech Premier Wynne made it clear that this government is committed to getting real work done on behalf of all the people of Ontario, and it calls upon members of this Legislature to come together in support of that goal.

This bill is an example of our commitment to making minority Parliament work in the interests of all Ontarians and demonstrates the collaborative approach we are taking to work with the opposition. We have a shared responsibility to serve with integrity, and this added level of review by an independent officer would also help provide even greater confidence to all Ontarians. That is why I'm asking for the support of the assembly on this important bill.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: It is my privilege, on behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the official opposition, to respond to the minister's statement as the accountability critic.

1330

First, let me stand and explain to the taxpayers what is really expected in demanding accountability. Accountability would mean that money is available to invest in health care, education, infrastructure and the things that matter most to Ontarians. Sadly, this government's idea of fiscal accountability is too little, too late—about 10 years, in fact, and many billions of dollars. It comes too late to stop the loss of at least \$585 million—perhaps \$1 billion—in the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga in the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga. Second, with or without the Financial Accountability Office, it is too late for this government to reverse the fiasco at Ornge air ambulance. Third, it's too late to save back the billions of dollars squandered by the McGuinty-Wynne government at eHealth.

This summer, the Ontario Debt Clock, sponsored by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, stopped in my riding of Durham and in cities across Ontario to display the facts about Ontario's growing debt. Ontarians were shocked to see that the debt is climbing at a rate of \$32 million per day. The debt stands at more than \$19,000 for every man, woman and child in this province.

Why are the members of the McGuinty-Wynne government the last people in Ontario to admit that they have a spending problem? The taxpayers do not need a second opinion. In fact, we do not need a new watchdog to tell us whether our government is accountable or not. Simply, the case has been made: They are not accountable.

If this government really cared about accountability, it would not have waffled so badly on the recommendations of the Drummond report. If this government cared about accountability, it would not have fought the fair disclosure of emails and information at the committee hearings into the gas plant cancellations. If this government cared about accountability, it would not have plunged Ontario into expensive energy policies that will result in this province having some of the highest electricity prices in North America.

Mr. Speaker, the new financial watchdog is not even the idea of the McGuinty-Wynne government. The Financial Accountability Office was a demand from the New Democrats to help seal the coalition between the Liberals and the NDP to pass the 2013 budget. The Financial Accountability Office will, in itself, cost taxpayers additional money. Estimates have pegged the annual budget at at least \$2.5 million or more.

After almost 10 years of the Liberal government and the many, many scandals that go on even as we speak, I ask the people of Ontario: Do you have any trust in this government to be accountable?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up in this House today following the NDP's request of this government to be more financially accountable and to ensure that the people of this province have a true assessment of

where we're spending our money and how we're spending our money.

As you will recall, we brought forward this idea of a financial accountability office during the negotiations over the 2013 budget. We were immensely proud of the idea then and we remain proud of it today. At the time, the Liberal government said that this idea was interesting. Well, we in the NDP and the people of this province think that accountability is more than interesting; we feel that it's needed, and we need an office in place to make sure that it happens.

Second of all, to respond to the PCs, it is never too late to right a wrong and it is never too late to rebuild trust. The people of this province have a serious trust issue with this government. Our idea of bringing a financial accountability office to the Legislature is not only good for us to rebuild trust but it's good for the people of this province, to ensure that we are spending their tax dollars appropriately and responsibly.

I know that as we move forward, though, we're going to make sure—myself and the member from Beaches—East York on the finance committee and the entire NDP caucus—that this piece of legislation will be working as it was originally planned to work, and that is to ensure that every dollar, moving forward, is spent responsibly.

I'd like to remind people that the Financial Accountability Office would have the ability to do an independent cost analysis at the request of MPPs. Anyone in this House can ask the FAO for the real numbers, the truth about a financial plan. Imagine, moving forward, if we had the truth on the gas plants, if we had the truth on the Ornge scandal, if we had the truth on eHealth—we would not be in the state that we are right now in this province of Ontario.

The Financial Accountability Office will be a new, independent office of the Legislature. It will bring much-needed accountability and transparency to Ontario by giving independent analysis. It will have the ability to do an independent cost-analysis for MPPs. Why any MPP in this House would not support financial accountability—I have no idea why you would not follow through on one of the most important responsibilities that we have.

The Ontario NDP are proud that this province would be the first subnational government to have a Financial Accountability Officer. I am looking forward to the debate on this legislation in this House and in committee, and I am most looking forward to the day that our first Financial Accountability Office starts their work, because only then will we start to rebuild trust in the Legislature, in our democracy and governments for all parties going forward.

PETITIONS

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario,

and I want to thank Jim Bertram from the municipality of North Grenville for taking the summer to get I believe about 350 signatures. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas we the residents of South Gower and surrounding communities are aware of an application by Lafarge Canada Inc. for a licence to extract up to a 500,000 tonnes of aggregate annually from the 121.33-acre proposed McGill pit on Bennett Road in the municipality of North Grenville, and at end of operations will leave residents with a 95-acre 'stagnant, exposed body of water'; and

"Whereas the proposed hours of operation will be 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. It is expected the activity will result in one truck every six minutes, this being heavy trucks and trailers, hauling aggregate on roads not fortified for heavy truck traffic and in close proximity to homes; and

"Whereas the risks this operation poses to the quality and quantity of groundwater area residents are reliant on for their wells, in addition to its effect on the natural environment, including air quality, have not been studied sufficiently to satisfy the local community regarding the degree of risk/benefit; and

"Whereas the risks this operation poses on local wetlands, function and viability, because of such operations; and

"Whereas there is no provision under existing provincial legislation for residents to be compensated for any present or future decreases in property values or a reduction in their quality of life stemming from the operation; and

"Whereas many of the issues raised with concern to the proposed McGill pit are similar to those expressed during presentations to the Standing Committee on General Government during its review of the Aggregate Resources Act, which has yet to be addressed;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Natural Resources to require that all concerns raised by residents are fully addressed before a licence to extract aggregate from the McGill pit is granted; and further, that the Standing Committee on General Government complete its review of the Aggregate Resources Act and present its recommendations to the Legislature without further delay; and that all aggregate applications be suspended until the recommendations are tabled and implemented."

I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Katherine.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have a petition here being read on behalf of the member from Scarborough—Agincourt. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Scarborough residents north of Ontario Highway 401 and east of Don Mills are without a rapid transit option; and

“Whereas a strong transit system is critical for increasing economic development and tackling income disparity; and

“Whereas this geographical area continues to grow and the demand for strong rapid transit continues to increase; and

“Whereas Sheppard Avenue is a major artery for automobile traffic for commuters travelling from suburbs to downtown Toronto, and travelling from suburb to suburb; and

“Whereas ground-level rapid transit would increase traffic, restrict lanes for automobiles, and add further risk for pedestrians and commuters at dangerous intersections along Sheppard Avenue; and

“Whereas demands for underground rapid transit along Sheppard Avenue have been part of public discourse for over 50 years; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario previously approved a plan from the city of Toronto to extend the Sheppard subway line from Downsview to Scarborough Centre; and

“Whereas an extension to the Sheppard subway line will require contributions and co-operation from the city of Toronto, the province of Ontario and the government of Canada;

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

“To support the extension of the Sheppard subway line east to Scarborough Centre; and

“To call upon all levels of government to contribute multi-year funding for the construction and operation of an extension to the Sheppard subway line.”

I agree with this, will sign it and send it down to the desk with Erica.

1340

CARELESS DRIVING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a great pleasure that I'm going to read into the assembly a petition created by Rick Levesque, an activist in my community who would like to see distracted drivers have demerit points awarded for that type of driving.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas any persons convicted of using hand-held devices while operating a motor vehicle should be included in the Ontario Highway Traffic Act category of careless driving. This to include fines of not less than \$200 and not more than \$1,000, as laid out in section 130 of the Highway Traffic Act of Ontario, and six demerit points to be recorded to their driving record;

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

“Any persons convicted of using hand-held devices while operating a motor vehicle should be included in the Ontario Highway Traffic Act category of careless driving. This to include fines of not less than \$200 and not more than \$1,000, as laid out in section 130 of the

Highway Traffic Act of Ontario, and six demerit points to be recorded to their driving record.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and I'll present it to page Daniel. Thank you very much, Daniel.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on cutting physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes—from an estimated \$110 million to \$58.5 million; and

“Whereas with this change seniors will not receive the care they are currently entitled to through their current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who the government plans to delist from OHIP on August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas the government has announced that the funding level, the number of treatments a resident could receive, has not been specified and will be reduced from a maximum of 150 visits/year to some unknown level, which means the hours of care and number of staff providing seniors with physiotherapy will ... be significantly reduced as of August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas our current OHIP physiotherapy providers have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, and these services have ... proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and falls risk;

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

“To review and reverse this drastic cut of ... physiotherapy services to seniors, our most vulnerable population, and to continue with \$110-million physiotherapy funding for seniors in long-term-care homes.”

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

ONTARIO RANGER PROGRAM

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to present this petition to do with the Ontario Ranger Program. It's “Save the Ontario Ranger Program.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, draw attention to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“The Ontario Ranger Program takes youth out of their comfort zones by taking youth from the south and placing them in northern camps and vice versa, allowing for personal growth;

“The Ontario Ranger Program also helps nearby rural communities as the Ontario Rangers help with various projects and build partnerships within the communities; the work is recognized and appreciated by these small communities;

“An extensive amount of work maintaining the interior routes and major provincial parks such as

Quetico, Algonquin and Temagami is completed by Ontario Rangers on multi-day overnight canoe trips (and is otherwise unreachable);

“The lifelong skills and friendships built during the Ontario Ranger Program help youth develop into mature, confident, independent individuals, which is well worth the money spent on the program;

“Low-income and high-risk youth sent to rangers are isolated from their home situation and are exposed to the positive team-building environment within the Ontario Ranger Program;

“Therefore, your petitioners call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demonstrate that the Ontario Ranger Program is a valuable program to the youth of Ontario, reverse the decision to close the Ontario Ranger Program and continue to help youth make a difference in Ontario.”

I support this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I have a petition here signed by 572 people, 222 of whom dropped off the petition into my office.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the provincial agency Metrolinx recently provided several options to pay for improvements to gridlock and transit in the Toronto and Hamilton areas, including a 1% hike in the HST and a five-cent-a-litre gasoline tax; and

“Whereas internal government documents show nearly 50 other new provincial taxes and fees are being considered, including a monthly phone bill surcharge, increased licence and validation fees for drivers, vehicle owners, fishers, hunters and park users; and

“Whereas taxpayers in northern Ontario are already overburdened with demands by the provincial government on their pocketbooks, and residents in northern Ontario experience higher costs for many items, including transportation;

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

“To not pay for the expansion of Toronto and Hamilton transit through taxes, fares, fees, surcharges or other mechanisms that burden the taxpayers of northern Ontario.”

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Auditor General confirmed in his December 2012 report that the Champlain CCAC had the longest wait time in Ontario in which 90% of their clients were placed; and

“Whereas the region requires a comprehensive plan assessing the future long-term-care bed needs of the

region, as well as the provision of community care for independent and semi-independent seniors; and

“Whereas the number of Ontarians over 75 years of age is projected to increase by 30% by 2021, the year the baby boomers start to turn 75 years old, putting even more demand on the number of available LTC beds;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care immediately conduct a study to identify the current and future requirements for long-term-care beds and community care for independent and semi-independent seniors in our region of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, including the city of Cornwall;

“That such a study also identify future solutions for the current and future demand and the possible short- and long-term role the Cornwall General Hospital could play in fulfilling these requirements;

“That the Cornwall Community Hospital be funded to retain the Cornwall General Hospital until such a study is conducted and the role of this building is assessed in the solution to the LTC bed crisis.”

I will be passing this off to page William.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I have a petition 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;

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

“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 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.”

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning major changes to the provision of OHIP physiotherapy services as of August 1st; and

“Whereas this will drastically reduce the number of allowable treatments to 12 per year for people who are currently eligible for 100 treatments annually; and

“Whereas funding for physiotherapy services to seniors in long-term-care homes would be cut by almost

50%, from an estimated \$110 million per year to \$58.5 million per year; and

“Whereas ambulatory seniors in retirement homes would have to travel offsite for physiotherapy; and

“Whereas under the changes scheduled for August 1, the cost of visits under the CCAC (community care access centre) model will rise to \$120 per visit, rather than the current fee of \$12.20 per visit through OHIP physiotherapy providers; and

“Whereas these changes will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits of physiotherapy;

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

“That the delisting of OHIP physiotherapy clinics as of August 1st not proceed and that the provincial government guarantee that there will be no reduction in services currently available for seniors, children and youths, people with disabilities and those who are currently eligible for OHIP-funded physiotherapy.”

I support this petition, will sign it and give it to page Erica to take to the Clerks’ desk.

1350

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim McDonell: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approval;

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

“That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

“That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? That concludes the time that we have today for the reading of petitions.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to assent to certain bills in his office on June 13, 2013.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Loi visant à mettre en œuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

An Act to revive Terra Paving Inc.

An Act respecting the Beechwood Cemetery Company.

An Act to revive Marsh & Co. Hospitality Realty Inc.

An Act respecting the Royal Conservatory of Music.

An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

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.

An Act to revive Aspen Drywall Inc.

An Act to revive Triple “D” Holdings Ltd.

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 June 11, 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. Ted Arnott): When this House last debated second reading of Bill 55, the member for Burlington had the floor, and I’m pleased to recognize again the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is my pleasure to be back in the Legislature and rejoin the debate on Bill 55, Speaker. Bill 55 was designed with the goal of providing greater protection of the people of this province—boosting consumer confidence and making Ontario’s marketplace more clear and fair.

Government oversight is important to making sure that consumer dealings stay above board, but enforcement is everything. Government sets the tone, and legislation means nothing if it isn’t acted on.

Six years ago, the Liberal government designed a piece of archival legislation intended to strengthen transparency and accountability. It was part of a consumer protection omnibus that, like Bill 55, also addressed

issues such as real estate fraud. But even while it was trumpeting its commitment to transparency, accountability, disclosure and straight-dealing, the Liberal government was failing to honour that commitment. The Liberal government was working under the assumption that someone else was taking care of transparency; someone else was stepping up and being accountable.

The Archives and Recordkeeping Act was bundled into another consumer protection bill, Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act. In June, we learned that senior Liberal government officials condoned the deletion of emails and entire email accounts in contravention of the spirit and the letter of legislation they themselves created. We learned that for the first six years of the government's Archives and Recordkeeping Act, the Premier's office acted as if the legislation did not exist. It operated without any approved records retention schedules, raising the question of whether there were any other deletions that went undetected during that period.

I have the highest regard for the Minister of Consumer Services, someone I have had the privilege of working with closely on many occasions since being elected. She cares a great deal about her portfolio, both personally and professionally. But the problem that this government faces, it seems to me, is that it can no longer command respect on some pretty fundamental issues. Trust has been deeply damaged, and the people are understandably outraged.

As the email archive scandal demonstrates, we need to build in checks and balances, real powers of oversight and real penalties, because otherwise we're building legislation that can easily be ignored—and, as we see, it is. I'm happy to support Bill 55, but also eager to send it along to committee, where we can make the minister's good ideas even better.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's good to be back here in the House, with some new members here. I'm very pleased to welcome the two new members that we have in our caucus now: from London West, Peggy Sattler, and from Windsor–Tecumseh, Percy Hatfield. I'm very proud of those accomplishments, and very happy that they are here to join us today.

But I'm also here to talk today, of course, about Bill G55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. One of the things that I like about Bill 55, under schedule 1 of this act, is under the collection agencies agreement. The collection agencies agreement's function—you have debt settlement services that offer services to consumers who unfortunately find themselves in a situation because of actions that happened in their lives financially and who are in dire need. They seek out the services of the debt settlement services, and they're vulnerable. They probably know they have made mistakes, and they are looking to get their life back on track, but what will happen is that some of these companies take advantage of them. They charge them, sometimes, a very exorbitant

amount of fees up front in order to assist them, because what the debt settlement service is going to do is talk to the creditors—the companies that they owe—in order to kind of negotiate something maybe more manageable, so that these people can get their life back on track. Just because you make a mistake financially in your life doesn't mean your whole life's over, you can't start over and you can't start fresh, take responsibility for those things and pay them back but move on.

So it's good to see that that is in there, but we do have to be very careful that we're protecting the consumer when we look at this act, and we have to make sure that the contracts that these consumers sign are in plain English, so they understand what they're signing. As well, there's a 10-day window in this bill that allows consumers to cancel that contract.

I'd like to talk a little bit more about it, Speaker, but I'm running out of time. Thank you.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: A pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 55. It's had a lot of debate; I think we're over 16 hours now, and I believe at this point there are at least two parties in the House that would like to see this move on to committee.

What this does, in a very practical sense—we have all sorts of interests in this House; often it's broad public policy, and often it's quite practical things. This bill proposes to protect consumers from door-to-door salesmen—I think we've all had complaints from constituents about water heater rental companies and other door-to-door salespeople that haven't acted in the best interests of Ontario's consumers. We've got some debt settlement services, and we've also got some interest in some changes to the real estate consumer protection field.

I think it's time that we move this on. I think all parties have had their say on it. It is time that it go before the committee. I'd urge all members to get on with the vote and to move this bill forward. Thank you.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to first recognize the member from Burlington and her insightful remarks and how appropriate they were, but I'd like to just take a moment to digress and welcome to the Legislature the five new members: Doug Holyday, as well as Percy Hatfield, Peggy Sattler, Mitzie Hunter and John Fraser. It will be an enjoyable time as long as you participate; if you don't participate, you're spoiling a real opportunity.

But this is a really good example to get up and hold the government's feet to the fire. Here's the deal: We're talking today about a bill introduced by the Minister of Finance, Mr. Sousa, on the Financial Accountability Office. This is another glaring example of too little, too late. They've spent all the money. We're basically bankrupt, and they're now saying that they are going to be accountable. This is going to be another level of bureaucracy so that you won't be able to blame the

Premier or the Minister of Finance. They're going to say, "Well, the accountability officer should have found this."

1400

Bill 55 is really about consumer protection. In the broadest sense, I think we're all here to protect the consumers of Ontario who pay the bills. The taxpayers of Ontario have been fleeced. In fact, right now, they have increased spending, it's my understanding, somewhere in the order of 60% to 70%. You have to ask yourself: Are we any better off? We have the highest energy prices in North America. We have a scandal in much of health care, along with the Ornge helicopters and eHealth, and ongoing commitments where the consumers of Ontario are being abused, frankly.

Bill 55, in itself, has been debated before. I have spoken on the bill. It's a bill we initially support. We are concerned about some of the disclosure requirements under the real estate brokers act, but I'll say more about that a little later.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I also would like to add my voice to the debate, with particular reference to the debt settlement services. I think it's important to clarify that when we are looking at protecting consumers, our goal should be exactly that: to protect consumers. Now, debt settlement services are actually services that are consumer-based. They're protecting the consumer or assisting the consumer in paying back their debts.

Regulating them makes sense, but let's keep in mind that the agencies that most people complain about are not the debt settlement services; it's actually the collection agents and some of the tactics they use, the aggressive manner in which they communicate with folks who are facing debts. That's an area that definitely needs some attention. I think I'd like to see more balance in the bill so that we're not just looking at debt settlement services, which are ostensibly protecting the consumer in a way, but we also balance that by looking at collection agencies and credit counsellors, who are actually not-for-profit but are funded almost entirely by the banks. Let's look at those as well to ensure that they're providing balanced and fair services for consumers, and they're not exploiting consumers or using inappropriate techniques.

With the door-to-door sales, yes, many of my constituents have complained about that, but the bill is narrow in the sense that it only covers the gas-operated heaters. There are other services—energy in general—that are provided door-to-door that should be covered and would provide greater consumer protection.

Certainly, there's protection here that's afforded to consumers, and we support that. There are some areas where we can expand the bill, and I'm looking forward to this bill moving on to the committee stage so we can address some of those issues and work on expanding it so that it provides greater protection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. We return now to the member for Burlington for her reply.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to say thank you for the kind words to the member from Durham. It's always nice that he has something always positive to say.

Consumers in this day and age face a dizzying array of options and outcomes, both positive and negative. It is important that the province is there for them, Speaker. It is critically important that we are mindful of the need for strong protections and that we match that with education and awareness measures that give people the critical tools that will improve their ability to identify potential problems before they become a full-blown crisis.

It is essential, when it comes to legislation of this kind, that it does exactly what it promises to do and that it does so clearly and strongly. Unfortunately, we have seen far too many government bills in the last session and the current one that are just window dressing, legislation that functions first and foremost as a branding tool rather than a legislative or regulatory tool.

With Bill 55, the government wants to appear to tackle certain areas of consumer services involving high-pressure sales tactics that generate complaints—a bigger cooling-off period for water heaters, for example, or firmer rules for debt settlers. But when it comes to a bill that explicitly intends to strip away the mask of deceptive and unfair practices, when it comes to a bill that hopes to foster a safe and trusting business environment, this government is obligated, Speaker, to step up its game.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Here we are back on the first day of the Legislature. This government just does not take this place seriously. Not only is there not a quorum here, Mr. Speaker; there is one member on the government benches. It's absolutely disgusting. I'd like to call a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there a quorum present in the House?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Call in the members.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for Halton, who has the floor.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's not up to the opposition to keep a quorum. And I say to the member for Oakville, in your new positions as whip, you should take that position a hell of a lot more seriously than you're doing today. It's disgusting that there's merely five members of the government here. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: You should be ashamed of yourself. That's what you should be.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the member for Oakville to refrain from heckling the member for Halton. The member for Halton has the floor.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a more positive note, I'd like to congratulate the five new members in the House and welcome them to these hallowed halls. I'm sure your time here will be well spent. It will be an exciting time in your life. Beginning a new career is always exciting. It's a steep learning curve, and as we go through steep learning curves in this life, I think it's an interesting time; it's always exciting.

As you start on your first day, the government usually isn't this absent; they usually have a few members in the House to listen to the speeches. But today, they seem to be very busy and otherwise occupied, I'm sure, doing something very important. Did you get the sarcasm to that? That was a very sarcastic remark.

However, we congratulate those five new members who joined us today. You'll pardon me if I give a special congratulations to Doug Holyday, a man who has served on many different levels of government—municipal, Metro and now provincial politics—devoted a lifetime to public service, something that isn't always possible for everyone to do. Those who do have the opportunity to do it, such as Doug Holyday, deserve our congratulations.

We are here today to discuss Bill 55, the consumers' protection act. I have to ask myself about Bill 55—here we are the first day back. Ontario has a huge debt, we have a huge deficit and we have a huge lack of jobs in this province. And I ask myself: Will Bill 55, the consumer protection act, reduce the debt of Ontario?

Our debt is currently \$270 billion or so. That figure has doubled in the last nine years of this government's tenure. It took 146 years for us to get to \$135 billion, and this government has doubled it in less than 10 years. Will Bill 55 reduce that debt or move Ontario closer to debt reduction? I've got to say no. In fact, this bill will have absolutely no effect on the reduction of debt.

Will Bill 55 help balance that budget, the budget which is almost \$12 billion in deficit? Will Bill 55 help reduce that debt? I've got to say, after careful consideration, no, it will not. It won't do a thing to help balance that budget or reduce our deficit.

Will Bill 55 help create jobs in Ontario? We could use a million new jobs in Ontario, such as were created by our government in the late 1990s. Will this bill help lay the foundations for the private sector to begin to build on those jobs? Again, I'm afraid, the answer is no.

1410

This government has before it bills such as the tanning beds act—an important piece of legislation, I'm sure. Is it going to do anything for our fiscal position? Is it going to reduce our debt? Is it going to balance our budget? Is the tanning beds act going to create jobs in Ontario? No, it won't.

We're dealing with the condo board act and dispute settlement problems with condo boards. It's not going to do a thing to help reduce our debt, balance our budget or create jobs. Those three things are what Ontarians are crying out for, and yet none of the legislation before this House deals with any of those important issues.

Today, the Minister of Finance introduced the Financial Accountability Officer Act. As the member from

Durham mentioned, this is a classic bill locking the barn door after the horse is gone. The horse left a long time ago. It has already had several foals; the first one is at the racetrack already. It was a long time ago when the fiscal responsibilities of this government went sadly lacking.

I don't see the Financial Accountability Officer Act reducing our debt. I don't see it helping to balance our budget. I don't see it creating any jobs, other than the job of the commissioner. What I do see it doing is providing a scapegoat for the Minister of Finance, who is supposed to be on top of all the costs of this government. He's supposed to know what's going on, and yet here, with the Financial Accountability Officer Act, he's going to hire someone to tell him what's going on. Is something wrong with that?

The Premier should know what's going on, and yet this bill is going to provide a scapegoat for the government whenever they get into fiscal problems. I think that's wrong. But like Bill 55, it won't reduce our debt, it won't balance our budget and it won't create jobs, other than for the commissioner who is being appointed.

Bill 55 has three main points in it, and when I say they won't affect our fiscal situation in Ontario—one of them deals with debt settlement services. Basically, that deals with companies—there are about 100 companies in Ontario that are involved in this area. Money Mart is perhaps the largest of the 100. Money Mart could have done a good job financing the Oakville power plant or the Mississauga power plant. You were paying 14% interest on that debt. Money Mart probably would have been able to do that cheaper for you. These are people who prey on citizens of Ontario who are in a very vulnerable stage of their lives.

It also is going to impact door-to-door salespeople who deal with water heaters. That has to be one of the primary situations in Ontario that's crying out for this government to spend 16-odd hours or so debating how it has to be corrected: door-to-door water heater salesmen. "But we're going to control them with this bill. This bill will put an end to people who take advantage of our seniors when they are selling them a water heater door-to-door"—something that certainly isn't going to change the situation of our debt, our deficit or our jobs.

The third thing this bill does is deal with the real estate business. In the real estate business, there's something called a phantom offer. I don't think any legitimate real estate agent with a scrap of integrity would ever use this as a process to sell a house, but it's when you say, "Oh, I have another offer coming in, and it's worth this much"—probably about the same as you're offering—"but I can get your offer in first, and therefore you'll get this house if you act quickly." It's a phantom offer; the other offer doesn't exist. There's no documentation for it, but it does put undue pressure on a purchaser. Again, I say that it's not something that most real estate agents would be caught dead doing. However, this bill attacks that process.

This bill is going to do nothing for our deficit, balancing our budget, or to create jobs in Ontario, so I

say to the government, you're not here today; I wonder where you are. I hope you're developing some legislation that is going to help Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity, if I might, to introduce my brother Tom, his wife, Carol, and my wife, Sandy. Most people think of me as the apple guy in this House. Well, this is the real apple guy. A lot of people know about the apple blossoms and apple pies; my sister-in-law is the real apple blossom, and, of course, Sandy—

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: But the apple of your eye is your wife.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Sandy is the apple of my eye.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. We are pleased to welcome the Chudleigh family to the Legislature today.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: A pleasure to be back. Welcome, everyone.

I listened to the member from Halton, and, actually, our take in the New Democratic Party to this government bill is a little bit different. Yes, we agree it does not go far enough. The place to address that, however, is committee. The bill makes small strides in the right direction, I think. We need to strengthen it, so let's get to it. Let's do that strengthening. Let's talk about it and let's debate it in committee and get it done.

I don't think obfuscating and stalling the process is what taxpayers and our constituents have sent us here for. I know my constituents have sent me here to get something done, very, very clearly, and that was the tack that we took last year when we negotiated around the budget. That's why we got our demands in the budget. Unfortunately, my friends to the right here, figuratively and literally, did not take that tack, so they got nothing out of the budget.

Again, our constituents sent us here to get something done—not just to talk, not to obfuscate, not to stall, but to get something done, and that's what we're committed to doing. In fact, we'd like to push things along a little faster, too, as I'm sure my colleagues in the Progressive Conservatives would as well. Certainly, a Financial Accountability Office, we hope, will do that; that's why we got that in the budget.

This is important. We need to move it forward. Of course, where consumers are concerned, boy, a little step is better than nothing, but this is a little step. I use the example of someone in my constituency who said she tried to go bankrupt and she couldn't afford to. She contacted a debt settlement service and they quoted her a figure to go bankrupt. She said, "The reason I need to go bankrupt is that I can't come up with that figure." Now, how absurd is that? That's Orwellian.

So obviously more has to be done. We have to do it. My constituency has demanded that we do, so let's get the bill to committee, let's work on it and let's make it stronger. Thank you.

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

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed great to be back. Welcome to everyone. I'm particularly happy to be here. Thank you to all the members who were so supportive during my recent health struggles. You've all been great, and I feel terrific. I'm back to being myself, as they say—stronger than ever and more dangerous, I hope, than ever as well, but—

Interjections.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Well, in a good sense. You know what I mean by that. Thank you very much. It's great to be here.

May I say that I think I agree with the member from Parkdale–High Park and many of our colleagues: We're here to get some work done, to make some things happen for our constituents. Indeed, Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, is a good example of that. I think, indeed, it is important that we move this forward.

There's no question, when you think about issues such as door-to-door sales—like every one of my colleagues here in the Legislature, we get a substantial number of complaints and calls from people who have issues with door-to-door sales. I think we need to tighten that up, make it protect our consumers in a more significant way. It's awfully important to do that.

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The member for Parkdale–High Park made a reference to debt settlement services. Those are the kinds of issues where we need to make some improvements.

Certainly, I want to encourage all my colleagues to do the same thing. This is about us finding an opportunity to work together on issues that mean a great deal to our constituents. There's no question that stronger protection for the citizens that we represent is really, really important. I would certainly encourage all members of the House to move forward in a positive way.

We really can make a difference here; we need to work together to do that. Certainly, Premier Wynne has made it clear she is here to govern and to bring forward legislation that's of benefit to everyone in the province.

We were very grateful to have her up in northern Ontario last week. She spent four days up there opening up a law school, a new law school, the first ever in northern Ontario, which is fantastic—the school of architecture in Sudbury, I say to my colleague from Sudbury. And of course she made the great decision regarding the Experimental Lakes Area, the fact that we're going to be funding this operation for years to come.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Again, I respect the member from Halton because he was trying to make some very important points, I think, on the three particular schedules in the bill. At that time, as you recall, he called quorum because the new whip was unable to keep any of his own caucus—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Where were you, John?

Mr. John O'Toole: We were watching it on television and having a meeting. There was a caucus meeting, as it turned out. The member from Halton, with the experience he brings to the House here as kind of an expert on finance issues—I'm only going to deal with one of the schedules here.

He talked about the Collection Agencies Act. That's one where I think we have agreement, because most often, these people who are availing themselves of these agencies to borrow money, money market or whatever they're called, sometimes they're the most vulnerable in society. They're often so needy because of their poor circumstances. It could be drug abuse; it could be a lot of different things that cause it. They're called on to pay an inordinate amount of interest. Once it goes into collection, you basically have lost any rights. The Collection Agencies Act, I believe, is something that we can agree on.

I question, quite honestly, why the government is floundering. Why don't they get this bill into committee? They can't manage even the simplest of bills that we kind of agreed to that would look at the—Mr. Chudleigh mentioned the real estate brokers act.

One little condition in it is that this is going to allow—and I know we all know a number of real estate people; they're very hard-working, self-motivated people. If you don't work, you don't get commission. I know potentially Sandy at one time was in the business. Here's what it says: They may be able to set a price, which would be a fixed price, plus commission. I would suspect they should be able to negotiate the whole package of how they're going to remunerate it. If you are selling a \$1-million or \$500,000 home at 5% or 6%, it makes you wonder how much you're going to have to pay for that business.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I understand that members opposite really want to push things forward and move things forward and get to the business of what people sent us here for, and that's to make things better for them, to get results for them.

One thing that the member from Parkdale–High Park said was that you have your opportunity to do that. We had the opportunity to negotiate and present our ideas in the budget process. Unfortunately, the members opposite decided to step back out of that process. They didn't contribute to that.

So today we are talking about Bill 55, and we have to bring our voices to Bill 55. I agree with the bill. We should be looking at having much better consumer protection.

My constituents of London–Fanshawe call all the time about all kinds of contracts that they enter into or agreements that they have or even services with cell-phone companies and how they're being—they don't understand how they can't get out of a contract, how it's costing them more than they actually thought it was going to cost them. A lot of these services are done as

well on the phone, and they can't go in to someone and speak face-to-face and explain their concerns.

So one of the things that we thought would be a good idea in this bill is also having a strong consumer advocate who represents consumers so that they can have a voice in that advocate. They've oftentimes gotten into the situation because they don't understand or because somebody, a really slick salesperson, came to the door and sold them something they didn't really want. Having the consumer advocate gives them somebody who's actually going to be on their side, to listen to their concerns and try to help them navigate through the problem that they've entered into a contract that they shouldn't have.

Speaker, I agree that we should be looking at this bill and sending it to committee and working out the details as to how to make this bill better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I'm pleased to return to the member for Halton for his response.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I say to the member for Parkdale–High Park: We're debating this bill. She wants to move it forward. If there was another bill awaiting debate that would affect the debt in Ontario or affect the job structure in Ontario or affect the budget or the deficit, we'd be more than happy to move on to that bill. There just doesn't seem to be anything this government has. The government is out of ideas. It has no direction that it's giving to Ontario.

I say to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, with all sincerity, welcome back to the House. It's nice to see the member in the House again with a full head of hair and in good, robust health. He was sorely missed when he was gone. Mr. Gravelle is certainly a person whom all members of this House can approach with their issues, and we're pleased to have him back in the House in good health.

The member for Durham, again, spoke to the bill and made some very nice remarks, and I appreciate that and thank him very much.

The member for London–Fanshawe, in somewhat typical NDP fashion, is going to add to the bureaucracy of the province. She's going to have a consumer advocacy person appointed. Of course, that person would have a huge number of people working for them. It would add considerably to our cost of doing business in Ontario, it would add considerably to the budget, which is in deficit now, and it would add to our debt, which is at \$270 billion.

But none of that really matters to the NDP. They're the ones who propped up this government. They're the ones who allowed this government to create all the issues and problems that they have in the last six months.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased today to be able to rise and speak to 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.

I think there's no question, when it comes to consumer protection, that we need the teeth in the particular bill. However, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to you that it's one thing to create the legislation. It's one thing to debate it and pass it and go through all the hearings etc. It's another thing to enforce it.

I look forward to some examples being set. I can tell you an example that happened this summer. My wife is a council member in the township of Severn for ward 2, in the village of Coldwater. A lady called our house on a Saturday afternoon. A gentleman had come to the door. This lady lives alone. Actually, she lives at the end of a sort of dead-end street. What happened was that this gentleman came to the door saying he was there on behalf of the municipality to install a filter on her water system; it was now the law to have this particular filter put on.

In complete innocence—so many of our seniors, in fact, are very innocent in this way—she believed the gentleman. She let him into her home. He went down into the basement and he said, “Yeah, the filter will have to go on here, in this particular location.” Following that, he said, “I’ll be back in a few days to hook it up”—to hook up this particular filter. It’s law and it would be all free. A few minutes later, her daughter comes into the house. She’d come home to visit her mom for a few days. She said, “Oh, I just had a guy in who’s going to put a free filter in for me.” What had happened was that this gentleman never did come back. So the daughter and the mother called my wife and said, “What do we do in this particular case?” I don’t know what you’d do on a Saturday afternoon with legislation. I know we may have the legislation, but I don’t really know what we would actually do in this particular case.

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I have some friends in the OPP. I called the OPP communications department and asked how you would actually handle this. He said, “I think the first thing you should do is go to the radio station and actually put the story on the radio to watch out,” because what this gentleman had done, the guy who had come to the door, was he had actually cased the whole house. He’d looked at the whole house. He was able to see everything she had, and at some time he can come back and do a break-and-enter on the house. We think that’s really what he was up to. So, by calling the OPP ourselves and then calling the local radio stations, we were able to at least get it out in front of the public. It was all over the radio station, and I think the guy sort of disappeared after that particular case.

But I’m wondering: In a case like that, how does a bill like this actually protect the consumer? I see nothing in it that would say—government offices are all closed on weekends, other than the police. I just don’t know how—we continue to debate these types of bills and talk about them. It’s always a good idea, but when there’s actually a pressure to take steps to improve it, then I’m not so sure the bill actually works. So, based on that, we have some problems in that particular area.

There’s no question about it. The examples of the water heater—the water heater situation comes up all the time, and just door-to-door salesmen who are doing things that are fairly illegal. But in a lot of cases it’s interesting that we have to even bring in all kinds of legislation like this. The problem I’m finding is that I think we’re growing and growing in all kinds of legislation we’ve passed in this House, and I don’t know how much of it is actually being enforced. I think of things like the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Ministry of Natural Resources, which was once one of the most proud ministries we had in this province, has been gutted so badly. The conservation officers have beautiful four-wheel drive trucks to drive around in, but there’s no gas to put in the trucks. They can’t afford the gas in their budgets, so the trucks sit idly by, and you can hear that conversation from any conservation officer. They’ll tell you how that particular ministry has been gutted. The same thing applies to a lot of our rules around highway traffic safety and around the laws that our police are to protect—they simply do not have the amount of money in their budgets to actually handle the complete enforcement.

Then you have these new bodies. My favourite enforcement type of thing will be the College of Trades. We’ve got this brand new bureaucracy downtown. Apparently they’re out hiring enforcement officers as we speak to go out and check on people in the trades. I’m not so sure what happens after 4 o’clock on Friday when all these guys are out moonlighting and working out of the back of a car on a Friday night, Saturday and Sunday. I don’t expect that the enforcement officers from the College of Trades are going to be out trying to nail them at that time or trying to weed out these people. It’s so easy to say that we’re going to have new laws, new regulations and new empires, but you know what? Things happen after hours. It’s okay if you break the law during the working period and someone’s there to actually fine you if you’re doing something wrong, whatever it may be, but after that I think you’ve got some real problems enforcing all these types of things in the evenings and weekends etc.

That’s one of the problems I see with this bill.

It’s a fancy little bill; it’s generated a lot of debate. I look forward to the committee hearings as well. I think it’s going to be important to get it to committee, and we’ll see what kind of concerns we have.

I think what people really need in this province right now—more than this type of legislation, and I praise the minister for bringing it in—is a government that’s going after job creation and getting young people working. Not 24% or 20% youth unemployment, but getting jobs for all those sorts of people, creating a business environment where people want to invest in their businesses, where they want to create jobs, where they want to create wealth that will pay down this debt.

I believe the debt right now, if I’m not mistaken, is about \$1.9 million to \$2.1 million per hour. That’s very, very high. When I tell people that, most people don’t

understand that you've doubled the accumulated debt, but boy, I'll tell you, they understand \$1.9 million an hour. Most people work their whole life to get a third of the net worth of \$1.9 million an hour, and they simply can't do it.

Obviously, we'll support the bill, but in the end, is this the kind of bill that really needs this kind of debate in this Legislature or should we be doing more around trying to create a better business environment so that we don't have to be a have-not province anymore here in Ontario? I think that's what's very, very important at this stage.

I know everybody today has been congratulating all the new members. I think it's great when people can be brought into the Legislature. It is a very proud day in your life, I'm sure. I'm honoured to be sitting beside MPP Holyday, and I just want to say on behalf of myself, I look forward to working with all five of the new members in the Legislature. I worked a little bit on one of the campaigns, and it was an interesting time to go through that. I think those campaigns, they're kind of the time in your life—it's always bad to be in a campaign because you're always scared and it's kind of a gut-wrenching experience, but at the same time, I think it's why we're here. We love to do those campaigns, in the end. It makes it worthwhile, especially when you've actually won an election, and you can come down here and voice your concerns and get all your press releases out and get your statements in the local media. It's a proud day for anybody who's elected into this Legislature. I just want to say, to all five of the new members, congratulations.

God only knows when we're going to be having another election, though. We don't understand that. We might be at the polls in five or six weeks again, so don't put your signs too far away, because that could easily happen.

Anyway, thank you very much for the chance to speak to Bill 55.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I actually didn't take the opportunity yet, and I'd like to take the opportunity now if you will indulge me, to congratulate all the new members as well. I'd like to congratulate Doug Holyday, Mitzie Hunter, John Fraser, and a special and heartfelt—not that it's not heartfelt for anyone else—but a particularly special congratulations to the new member from Windsor–Tecumseh, Percy Hatfield, who's in the House with me today, and Peggy Sattler, our member from London West. It is truly a remarkable feat, if you think about it. There's only 107 members in this great province, so it's quite an achievement. Congratulations again to all the newly elected members, their family, their friends, and all the hard work that was put in in all their in campaigns.

On this bill, the member from Simcoe North made a good point: We start wondering why we're still debating this bill. It's a good point because I think that we could engage in debates on other topics that might be more

fruitful. At this point, I think we all agree, and I don't think there's anything further really to add. We've already discussed some of the shortcomings of the bill that we can address, perhaps, in a better forum, which would be at committee. At this point, there really isn't much more that we can add.

I think that consumer services is clearly an area where we need to protect the consumer to look at the roles that are played in society that we've determined that, given the nature of a consumer not having all the skills, the tools and the knowledge of what's going on in the industry, they need some assistance to make sure they make the best decisions and they are protected. That's why we have a ministry that's involved with ostensibly doing that. So I think we should move this bill along and look at strengthening it in committee. I'd like to also endorse a comment made by my colleague from London–Fanshawe that a consumer ombudsman might be something we should take a look at as well, as a way of ensuring greater protection for consumers in this province; again, a novel idea proposed by the NDP.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I think the vast majority of speakers I've heard so far are treating this bill with the seriousness it deserves. I think what they're saying is that we've had 17½ hours of debate. Some members are treating it properly, I think, and are providing that input. Others seem to want this to go on indeterminately, and some are playing hide-and-seek. What the vast majority of members are saying, though, is that we've had enough debate; it's time to pass this bill, send it on to committee, have further debate at committee and further input—perhaps improve it along the way—bring it back and improve it in the best interests of Ontario's citizens.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to rise, and I too would like to add my congratulations to the five members who have joined this House. It's certainly a privilege for all of us to serve our constituents here, and I trust they'll do it to the best of their ability, as we try to every day on behalf of our respective constituents.

At the end of the day, as my colleague from Simcoe North said, I'm generally in support of this bill, and we can make some moves forward with this. But it baffles me why, for a bill like this, we're spending 17½ hours when we have 600,000 people out of work, we've got the biggest deficit in our province's history and we have a health care system that's not meeting needs. Certainly, in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, we have the Markdale Hospital that, 10 years ago, was promised to be built and still hasn't had any money committed to build it. It's falling around them, and we're talking for 17½ hours.

This should have been sent to committee long ago. Out in the public, we as the opposition are continually being criticized for obstructing and not allowing things to

move through this House. These types of bills could go to committee, they could be researched, they could be debated behind closed doors, with the appropriate people there and the appropriate input, and be done.

The other point that I think my colleague from Simcoe North raised is, who's going to enforce this? It's great, but it's not great to set up more legislation that is never going to be enforced. The public gets brainwashed into thinking this is a wonderful thing for the consumer and everything is going to be rosy tomorrow, and yet there's no one out there.

He actually brought up, again, a very valid point in regard to the skilled trades: We're going to add another 110 or 120 inspectors to virtually put people out of business. I have a guy in my riding who has moved to Alberta because he had to work and he couldn't find work in this great province. And they're even threatening to take his licence out there because he won't pay this fee. He had already paid it ahead of time for three years, and they still want to charge him again, plus the tax.

It's just one of those ones, again, that they really haven't thought through. It's unfortunate that many of the bills are like that. It sounds good to the average taxpayer, if you don't read the details, like the Green Energy Act: clean, green and free. We all know that those three words aren't even close to that bill, Speaker, and we just need to ensure that at the end of the day this type of thing does get addressed in a timely manner so we can move on to the more important work of this Legislature.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I guess I need to start with the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. Absolutely, we want to see this move on to committee, and there's a very simple way of doing that: Stop the debate. The only people who are continuing to debate are the Progressive Conservatives. That's what we're saying.

We in the New Democratic Party are saying we want to get things done. The place to actually amend and look at strengthening this bill is in committee. The PCs are holding it up. The question is, why? Why are the PCs holding it up? I'm going to send that out there.

Of course, I have to now add my congratulations, as I did personally, to the new members who have been elected.

I want to correct something, too, that the member from Halton said. Actually, the New Democratic Party in Canada has the best record of balancing budgets of any of the political parties. I think Tommy Douglas ran 17 balanced budgets. The only exception to that: Bob Rae. I won't go into where Bob is now, but we wish him a good retirement. The only exception to the good track record of the New Democratic Party in balancing budgets was his government.

Moving forward on this bill, yes, we want to move forward on this bill, we want to see it get to committee, we want to see it strengthened. Goodness knows, I remember tabling a bill myself on payday lending and payday lenders like Money Mart, etc., it was mentioned

here earlier, who charge—let me correct mistaken impressions of payday lenders—about 544% interest. That's what they really charge, annualized. People think they charge \$21 for every \$100. Annualized, it's 544%, not 21%, just to correct that. We should be looking at issues like that.

Maybe, again, in a discussion at committee around this bill, we can start to look at issues like that, because certainly Quebec does not have them. Certainly we need to move forward to protect consumers from them, among others. So, yes, let's get it to committee. Yes, let's not obstruct it any more by debate. We've had enough. Let's get on with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. We return to the member for Simcoe North for his reply to those questions and comments.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the member from Oakville, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the member from Parkdale–High Park for their comments.

I want to go back to the comments of the member from Parkdale–High Park for a minute. We're so thrilled to be back here. It's such a problem in our caucus, because everybody wants to speak to every bill, and it's a problem because the whip has a hard time getting everyone here. You know what? Some of you other caucuses may not want to speak to this legislation, but we do. It's a fight every meeting to make sure that everybody gets to speak to legislation every minute they can possibly speak to it. Even though it might seem a little boring at times or repetitive, we all want to be getting into Hansard and talking about the importance of this particular piece of legislation.

Kidding aside, though, Bill 55 obviously is a decent bill. I'm back, though, to waiting for it to get to committee. When it does get to committee, I'd like to hear the comments. I think, Mr. Speaker, some of the comments I'm most concerned about are around enforcement. They really are. I can't say that enough, in that when we create this legislation and create these new laws, there's always so much opportunity for people outside of that to continue to break the law. How do you enforce everything that's in a piece of legislation like that, or even in the regulations that they come up with to follow through on the legislation? It becomes a big problem, and I hear it continually with so many of the bills that are passed through this House: You find later that it doesn't have the teeth you thought it might have had, that you might have wanted it to have when it was originally introduced.

I appreciate the time today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much for this opportunity, and I look forward to further debate and making sure that all of our members get their voices of concern in there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join the debate today on Bill 55, the Stronger

Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. This bill amends three acts: the Consumer Protection Act, the Collection Agencies Act and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. It addresses consumers' concerns in three areas: debt settlement, the sale of water heaters, and regulations for real estate brokers.

I'm a big believer in consumer protection, not just for my constituents but all Ontarians, so I do welcome this bill, and any bill, for that matter, that aims to achieve this goal. It's certainly hard to be critical of such a cause, but this bill isn't perfect. While I do support it in theory, I look forward to getting it to committee, where amendments can be made.

It's the government's duty to protect consumers, to create clear, concise and easily accessible rules so we can all understand our rights and ensure that those we are doing business with are providing fair and beneficial services. At the same time, we also have to ensure that businesses are given the same courtesy so they can best create the environment that is most conducive to their consumers. They need certainty in the laws so they know what to expect and are able to plan for the future. This government is often quick to introduce regulations or make changes without looking at the big picture, so it's good to have clear, concise laws that can't be changed on a whim.

One obvious question I have for the government concerning this legislation is, why only these three issues: debt settlement, real estate brokers and the sale of water heaters? They are all fair subjects, and it's certainly a healthy process for any society to revisit laws and regulations as industries evolve and change, but there are many areas in the province that would benefit from updated consumer protection. Why the minister just chose these areas is a complete mystery to me, as I'm sure it is to my colleagues and Ontarians across the province who have their own nightmare stories of things they've had to deal with and perhaps may not have had to deal with had there been better consumer protection.

The bill certainly would be more effective if it had addressed consumer protection in more areas or in a more thorough way, but it's neither here nor there. I do appreciate the interest in addressing these issues, and I'd be pleased to briefly touch on them today.

I must say that I think the opposition has done a good job of thoroughly examining this legislation and that we do offer a number of excellent recommendations that I hope the government will consider.

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As I mentioned, the first schedule of the bill amends the Collection Agencies Act to regulate debt settlement services that a collection agency or other collector provides. Mr. Speaker, as an aside, I find it incredibly rich to be getting any kind of debt advice from the Liberal government. As we all know, they're responsible for creating our debt crisis and doubling Ontario's debt over the last 10 years, not to mention the huge amounts of waste with the gas plant scandals, eHealth, Ornge, and the list goes on and on. I think consumers across the

board would be better off if the government would focus on cleaning up its act and reducing its deficit before it does anything else.

Nonetheless, protecting consumers is important, so back to debt settlement. If we look at the current framework in Ontario, it's clear that consumers are not protected thoroughly. These services are intensely advertised and marketed to people who are vulnerable, and in a way they can be misleading, often making empty promises and keeping the consumer in a vicious cycle of debt. Ontarians who resort to these services are usually under intense pressure to find a resolution.

One local case that comes to mind is a constituent of mine who came to my office in tears. She was a single mom struggling to pay for the increasing cost of hydro, rent and her student loan. She was making minimum wage and was doing everything in her power to meet the constant demands of various collection agencies. She had been told so much rubbish that she was even hesitant to accept any help at all from my office. Every debt service agency she had listened to prior only made her situation worse. She even refused to give my office her phone numbers out of fear that they would somehow be passed on to a collection agency. If I remember correctly, Mr. Speaker, this lady had lost a job due to calls from collection agencies at her workplace, which is completely unacceptable, extremely unfair and must be outlawed.

A definite weakness of this bill is that it does little to ensure that consumers aren't targets of bully collection agencies after a debt settlement is signed. An improvement would be to ensure that a debt settlement contract makes the chosen settler—after all, this is what you pay these companies for—the recipient of the collection calls after the contract is signed. This bill doesn't do that.

The second act this bill deals with is the Consumer Protection Act and stricter laws for door-to-door water heater sales. While absolutely a great initiative in theory, as we've all heard stories about door-to-door sales tactics, there are weaknesses to this part of the legislation as well. To begin with, I'd like to reiterate that I find it odd that the government has singled out water heater sales. While important, this bill would be much more effective if it addressed all types of door-to-door salespeople, but again, it's something that I think could be dealt with at committee.

Too many of my constituents, mostly seniors, have been taken advantage of by door-to-door water heater sales workers. How it usually works is that they sign a contract at the door, the new tank is immediately installed and their old tank is removed almost immediately. If the homeowner has second thoughts and wants to exercise the right to cancel the contract within the current 10-day cooling off period, they're stuck, as they no longer have a hot water heater; it was removed right away. Creating stricter restrictions for cancellations and returns of water heaters is something that this bill does not address.

Another amendment in the bill is the doubling of the cooling-off period from 10 to 20 days. I believe this is

also short-sighted and needs some work. While I can understand the intent of the change, I don't think it accomplishes anything or, for that matter, was entirely thought through. Similar to a 10-day cooling-off period, which is the current period, the 20-day cooling-off period still rests on the assumption that the consumer will agree to the contract, because that's when the cooling-off period begins, and then during that period go back and research what it is they just signed. Twenty days is not long enough for a problem to materialize in most cases. In fact, in 20 days, they won't even have their first bill. If the consumer were willing to sign the contract in the first place, they likely had trust in what they were signing and wouldn't necessarily question it right away. Ten days, 20 days, there's really no difference to me, and it's something that I think needs to be revisited, and we'd like to hear more from the people of Ontario.

Another huge problem that I don't think this bill does too much to deal with is high-pressure sales tactics that exploit consumers. If the bill were to focus more on ensuring that people are being told honest, true and correct information in the first place, then there would be no need to create regulations to help cancel contracts at all—or very little need. The problem is that workers are going door to door using high-pressure sales tactics. Full cost disclosure and cancellation fees and penalties are not a big part of their sales pitch, Mr. Speaker, as you can imagine. This bill needs to focus more on ensuring that consumers are given full disclosure about what they're getting into before they even sign the contract. The government has not inserted any mandatory follow-up or cost disclosure in a door-to-door contract into this legislation but, rather, has simply created regulation-making powers to do so. So, once again, we have to trust the government.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm hesitant to support regulation-making powers for this government, as they often are quick to introduce regulations or make changes without looking at the big picture. It's good to have clear, concise laws so they can't be changed on a whim. It's also most fair for businesses this way.

In addition, I am concerned that these types of door-to-door salespeople have made it different for legitimate canvassers like the cancer society or March of Dimes. I find that, as a society, we have become weary of anyone approaching us, and for charities, for example, it has likely resulted in fewer donations at the door. This is a definite result of poor consumer protection, and it's a big problem.

Rather than just extend the cooling-off period, that I don't think does too much of anything, we need to come up with a real solution.

All in all, I think this legislation is a good start but, not unlike many bills past and current from this government, we have yet another piece of legislation that is heavy on presentation but light on content. We all agree that improvements to consumer protection are in the best interests of everyone—that's a given—but it's the meat and

bones of the bill that really do matter. In my opinion, as I said before, we've got some work to do.

I'll be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker, but I look forward to further discussion in committee and, in particular, discussion around what my colleague from Simcoe North said in his remarks a few minutes ago, around enforcement of the bill. We have thousands of bills and hundreds of thousands of regulations on the books in Ontario, and so often you find they're not enforced; they're not known about. People don't know their rights and they don't know where to turn. In turn, they turn to us, and we turn to police, and they're far too busy.

I don't know who's going to be the consumer protection people out there, but it's weak now in the province. It's based on a complaints basis or it's based on, "You get screwed and then you try and get a resolution."

We need proactive legislation that gives full disclosure at the door, cleans up these industries and covers more than the hot water industry.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again, I'm faced with the same difficulty at this point in the day. We've discussed this bill to such a degree that it calls in question if we're really using our time here efficiently.

I ask the members of this chamber to assess whether or not we need to continue the discussion. I think we can move on to other issues. There's a number of issues, I think, that are quite relevant and are quite demanding and in need of discussion.

One of the issues is, when we talk about protecting our consumers, another area that we need to protect is our labourers. An area that needs great protection is precarious employment. I spoke about it earlier today during my member's statement, the fact that we have a province where there's a vast number, a majority of people, who don't have permanent employment. More people in this province are working in temporary positions than are working in permanent positions. That's a serious problem. If we want to see our province advance, see our province progress, then we need to have a province in which people have permanent, full-time jobs.

There was a great study released by United Way, in coordination with McMaster, discussing the connection between well-being, sense of identity and the protection against poverty: the link between all those factors and whether you have permanent employment or not.

These are areas and discussions that we should be having in this House. Discussing this bill any further, in my humble opinion, is not necessary, so let's move this on to second reading and continue with some other robust discussions about how we can improve this province.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm glad to add my comments to this discussion on Bill 55.

We have debated this bill for almost 18 hours now. This bill is about stronger protection for Ontario con-

sumers. This is what we're discussing here. I think we've debated this at length at this point. We want to move on and perhaps take some action in committee in improving the bill. I would encourage all my colleagues to send this bill to committee as soon as possible so that we can make all the improvements that we've been talking about here during second reading and we can get that stronger protection to Ontario residents as soon as possible. I think they deserve that. That's what they expect from us.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: Let me, first of all, begin by congratulating the newly elected members. I haven't had a chance to do that yet. John Fraser, Mitzie Hunter, Percy Hatfield, Peggy Sattler and especially, of course, from our PC Party, Doug Holyday—congratulations to all the newly elected members.

The member for Simcoe–Grey, I think, made a lot of good points in his speech to Bill 55, in particular talking about the narrow scope of this bill that deals with water heaters. Certainly, there is a problem with water heaters. My own mother had a rental water heater in her home and had a heck of a time being able to get rid of it when she did want to end the contract. We've all heard horror stories, but I would agree with the member from Simcoe–Grey that it shouldn't be just about water heaters. It should be about all door-to-door sales that go on.

I also agree with him—I think he made an excellent point—on the change this bill makes for the cooling-off period from 10 days to 20 days. While that may be a positive move, it really, as he pointed out, doesn't even get beyond the first bill, and that's likely when the consumer will recognize what they've signed, when they get their first bill. So I think this should deal more with all high-pressure sales tactics. As the member for Simcoe–Grey said, there should be more full disclosure before they sign a contract. I do agree with him; the bill is light on content. I think he has made a lot of good points.

I look forward to this bill wrapping up shortly and going to committee so these changes and others might be put forward and hopefully adopted so it actually has some meat to it and gives more consumer protection than the narrow focus that it has right now.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, we've heard some rumblings about, "Let's get your bill moved on," and, "We've got to carry on the business of the House," and that's right. We all have to do that. But we are here today, discussing this bill, and a lot of the members opposite in the Conservative Party have spoken to the bill, and I'm glad to hear what they have to say.

There is something, though, that we should address, too, that we kind of maybe overlooked right now: that consumer protectionism is going to affect everyone. It affects us now, it affects seniors and it affects the generation coming, which is our children. So we need to have

legislation that is going to protect consumers so that when they are being taken advantage of, then people have some kind of recourse to say, "You know what? My rights have been violated. This is a law, and I can act upon it."

Another thing we should be doing, Speaker, and there has been some discussion about it, is educating the generation that we have now. Our children, our grandchildren, should be educated on contracts, on consumer services, on how to manage their money a little bit so that way they don't face themselves having to go to a debt-settlement service agency, on how to interpret a contract so they're not going to end up signing on the dotted line and having to pay thousands of dollars out that they weren't aware of.

Part of that, as well, I think, when we get to committee—it would be a good discussion to have—is talking about passing on our knowledge to the generation coming forward, so that we can have better awareness of consumer protectionism overall, because we're all debating this legislation, but we need to bring awareness to it so that people can use it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Simcoe–Grey for his response.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I appreciate the comments about the bill and about the business in this House, as the PC House leader. I just tell those who are growing impatient on the first day back after three months of not being here: Jesus, people. I know you don't like to work, some of you, but we've only been debating for two hours and five minutes this afternoon, and I guess a lot of that time was taken up with petitions and routine proceedings.

I guess the first hour and three quarters is killing some of you. That's fine. You don't have to be here. You can tell your constituents you don't want to be here and you don't want to debate important bills.

I assume the bill is important because we've debated it for quite a few hours and the government, rather than doing anything about the half-million people who woke up without a job this morning, or having a new jobs plan, a debt-and-deficit crisis plan or bringing in legislation to freeze wages right across the public sector, including our own for a couple of more years, to deal with the real issues of Ontario—what did the Premier say over the last two weeks and again this morning about her priorities? It's the Local Food Act. But if you wanted some things to speed up here, why doesn't the government House leader say, "Let's agree to pass the Local Food Act with the member for Sarnia's amendment, which deals with giving a 25% tax credit to food banks"? That's how you negotiate with the opposition. Throw in the member for Nepean's farming literacy section, and then we could get that bill through real quick.

But your House leader doesn't do that. Maybe he doesn't tell you that. He doesn't deal with us. He just acts like the government and says, "There's the bill, and on its merit you should pass it. By the way, we're the government and we have a right to pass legislation." Well,

folks, you're in a minority. If you want us to do some other acts, why don't you come forward with the member for Whitby–Oshawa's disability all-party committee that we want to set up and exchange that for some co-operation in the House? Co-operation's a one-way street here, and that should be the nickname of the Liberal Party.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's really great to see you back—

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Oh, this is 10 minutes. All right.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I can do 10. I can do an hour. I could filibuster this, but I certainly won't because—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I am advised that you've already spoken to the second reading of this bill and, therefore, I must ask you to sit down.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Good afternoon. It is good to be back here at Queen's Park with, of course, many of my colleagues, and a special mention to those new colleagues who are joining us from the five ridings across Ontario. I know they'll be excited on their first day. I know when I first showed up here at Queen's Park, I was excited to stand up and most proud to do so, representing my community of Kitchener–Conestoga, and I know they will too when they have their opportunity to speak, if they've not already done so today.

Bill 55 has many good propositions which attempt to add some clarity for consumers looking for debt settlement services, buying or selling a house and protecting them from misleading salespeople. Although Bill 55, Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, sounds like it would benefit a great deal of consumer transactions, it is quite limited to debt settlement companies, hot water tank salespeople and speaks to the real estate industry. Of course, we look forward to working with this bill in committee, to add the other products and services to ensure that this bill is all that its name says it is. After all, we wouldn't want to write legislation that sounds great while it lacks the protection, accountability and transparency consumers are expecting with Bill 55.

All irony and joking aside, Bill 55 attempts really to tackle three key objectives: first, protecting Ontarians from debt settlement companies; second, giving greater rights to consumers who are approached by door-to-door hot water heater salespeople; three, then changing the restrictions on homebuyers and sellers to ensure that each party is getting the good, quality real estate service at the best possible price.

First, I'd like to discuss the credit counselling portion of the bill. I'm sure we can all recall a debt settlement commercial on television: big promises, little input, large gains. It often leaves us scratching our heads on how this company can help you pay down your debt with no extra cost. In times of desperation, however, these statements

are enough for some to be convinced to reach for the phone. The result: Far too many people losing a wad of money and not getting anything resolved but, rather, getting sued by their creditors, having nowhere to turn. Unfortunately, Ontario lacks legislation to prevent companies from making these idealistic yet unrealistic claims. Ontarians are entering debt settlement contracts embarrassed, lost and uninformed. With the average Canadian consumer debt load hitting a new high of \$27,000 just this past February, 2013, government must ensure that there are mechanisms in place to protect those whose judgment is clouded by desperation.

1510

Bill 55 would mandate that all contracts be in writing, set a cap on the fee that may be charged for debt settlement services, and prohibit debt settlers from charging upfront fees. It establishes a 10-day cooling-off period. It would forbid collection agencies or collectors from making false, misleading or deceptive statements in any type of media, and it establishes penalties.

As I mentioned before, it also attempts to address the hot water heater sales that I know Ontarians are concerned about by putting greater regulation on door-to-door sales, specifically with regard to hot water tanks. Just last summer, the government issued 400 charges to two hot water tank companies. The charges included failure to deliver a valid contract, failure to refund, unfair practices dealing with payment for home energy audits, misleading deals through false government rebates, false incentives, and fake signing bonuses. On top of that, these companies did not deliver on contracts to install water heaters after payment for consumers across southern Ontario.

I've spoken to many seniors, in fact, in my community of Kitchener–Conestoga about it, and clearly, you know what? These folks have shown up at the door, and they will do or say anything, really, to get this transaction. You know, when seniors in their own homes who want to continue living there in their senior years are intimidated, the first thing they do is reluctantly agree, and they find themselves in this mess.

In fact, in my own riding, as I had mentioned, Kitchener Utilities has taken over 600 complaint calls from their customers being told they must switch to another water heater company due to several misleading or false statements made by salespeople from another company. In fact, they said a few examples that they used in going door-to-door: "Your water heater is not glass-lined," which is, of course, false, because all water heaters are or else the water would be rusty.

They say or they try to claim that the water heater is not an Energy Star, which, of course, all Kitchener Utilities water heaters are. They've even used fear tactics, saying that if the homeowner didn't change their water heater, it could explode like the one on Activa Avenue. We had a house that exploded just recently in Kitchener. This strikes one's emotions, and reluctantly they agree. Of course, that case is still under

investigation, but you can imagine what a senior living alone, if they were told this, would think.

Another was that they had claimed Kitchener Utilities was going out of business and they were taking over their services, and that they could die from carbon monoxide poisoning with the venting on their current water heater.

The list of deceptive statements and fear tactics goes on, to the point where customers feel harassed or even threatened.

I actually had the opportunity to meet with a representative of Kitchener Utilities, and they said that their customers would come into the office sometimes in tears because the harassment from these other salespeople was in fact so bad. Some of the homeowners who were pressured into buying a new hot water heater were left stuck in a contract that was not the one they had signed up for, or even had two contracts, one with the original company and the other, of course, with the new. When customer would call or write to cancel their new contract, customer service would simply avoid responding.

Needless to say, Kitchener Utilities and many residents in Kitchener–Conestoga are happy to see Bill 55 move past second reading.

Of course, the final section with the bill relates to real estate and restrictions against charging both a fee and a commission for selling or buying a home. Ontario is the last province in Canada to have a restriction against custom charges in real estate. Allowing a combination of fees and commissions to be charged on a real estate transaction will allow agents to compete more freely in hopes to gain more business. This will also allow buyers and sellers to receive the highest-quality work at the best possible price.

The last part of the section of the bill deals with phantom bids and protecting buyers. With the housing demand going up, of course, in my region, and the supply going down, homebuyers already carry the stress of not finding a home to fit their lifestyle and budget. Some realtors use this to their advantage, knowing that bidders are likely to respond emotionally rather than rationally when put under pressure. We've seen that this is the case through many of the stories we've already heard throughout the debate. Realtors create phantom bids, raising the price of the house to receive a higher commission in the end. Being a "phantom bid" means that the bid does not exist, but the buyers don't have proof of this.

Bill 55 would make law what the Real Estate Council of Ontario has tried to make code in the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. Unfortunately, this hasn't stopped all realtors from pocketing a higher commission off of a fake competitor in a bidding war. Right now, RECO has the power to investigate so-called phantom bids, but only four agents have ever been disciplined for the practice over the last decade, while the cases of overbidding are, in fact, numerous.

For most of us, a home is the largest, longest and most important transaction, in fact, we will ever make. That is why there should be laws in place to make this process as transparent and accountable to the seller and the buyer as

possible. We have all heard of the phantom bid in Toronto that was about to swindle \$90,000 over the \$1-million asking price. Well, just imagine you have been searching for a new home for over a year in a new city, your job starts in two weeks, and your kids' schooling starts in a week. The perfect house comes along, your agent is preparing the paperwork, and everything seems to be falling into place—until another offer comes knocking. Examples like these make buyers act in haste.

RECO says that phantom bids are more than financially straining; they pressure buyers to forgo a home inspection in anticipation of being beat out in the competition. So maybe you didn't end up paying \$90,000 more, but you did end up buying a new home that perhaps needed a new roof just a few years down the road or that didn't meet the electrical code.

I know I'll have more time in my two-minute summary to finish my remarks on that. Those are some of the concerns that I have heard on this particular bill, especially from those folks at Kitchener Utilities whom I had the opportunity to meet. I'll conclude in the next two minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments: the member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, and it is great to see you in the chair, as it is great to see all of my colleagues here, who I'm sure are excited to get back to work, as I am today. I'm excited to welcome some new colleagues, in particular the two who have joined our caucus—Percy Hatfield from Windsor–Tecumseh and Peggy Sattler from London West—who I'm certain will make an indelible mark on this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I stood to speak, just prior, thinking that I was able to do a two-minute hit. As you indicated, I've already spoken to this bill, as have many members in this Legislature. We are all, I think in the majority, on the record as offering our ideas, our comments and concerns about the nature of this bill. I think it is due time that it proceed on its way to committee, where various amendments that have been proposed throughout the debate can be debated once again at committee. It's high time that members of our communities, from Essex to Windsor–Tecumseh—all throughout Ontario—see some real action out of this Legislature, action that is matched with expediency, that is cognizant that, for far too long, this Legislature has been mired in a stalled position, as we debate various scandals and expenditure scandals that have arisen.

I don't think people have the time or the appetite for that any longer. They want to see us get through legislation, work it out, well-nuanced, put it forward for a vote and make it happen. That is certainly what our caucus intends to do throughout this session in order to deliver results for the people of our province.

I'm certain that members heard this time and time again over the summer recess: that life really isn't getting better. Jobs still haven't surged to the point where we

need them, to create good, sustainable communities. There's so much work to be done.

Certainly, we on this side of the House are ready to do that. Expediting this bill through the chamber is one measure that we can infuse some confidence back into the House.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his comments today, but like others—for reasons known only to the official opposition, the Conservatives continue to rag the puck on this particular piece of legislation. As I understand it, the total debate time has approached somewhere in the area of 18 hours now.

1520

For people that are interested in following this issue on TV, this is a significant piece of consumer protection legislation that, in my time here—and others have spoken to this in the previous session—I haven't heard anything of consequence that people are concerned with.

We're not sure why the Conservatives will not allow this legislation to get into committee. If there are issues of consequence that the official opposition would like to deal with, they could certainly deal with it there. We could expedite this consumer protection legislation back into the House for third reading and get it passed in no time.

For people that are following, I just want to mention what it is, with a little bit of detail. High-pressure door-to-door sales: Whose constituency office, of those here in the Legislature, has not had to deal with this huge issue on a regular basis? I can certainly tell you that mine, in Thunder Bay–Atikokan, has spent a great deal of time on door-to-door salesmen issues. It's a very high-pressure situation. Quite frankly, most often it seems that the seniors in our communities are the ones that seem to be most vulnerable. In my riding, in Thunder Bay–Atikokan, it's most often seniors who come into our constituency office, that I and my office staff have been trying to help. This is a piece of consumer protection legislation that would help them in that regard.

It also deals with debt settlement services and the very difficult circumstances that the indebted constituents and consumers in the province of Ontario find themselves in, as well as other issues with the real estate field.

Speaker, we're proud of the legislation as a government. It's a great piece of consumer protection legislation. We would really appreciate the co-operation of the opposition to get it into committee, make changes as we see fit and bring it back to the House for third reading.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to bring remarks on behalf of my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga. I think he does an exceptional job on behalf of his constituents to make sure we hold the Liberals to account at every opportunity.

The Liberals and the NDP have stood in this House today and criticized us for coming here and doing our jobs, and that's to debate legislation that they're putting forward on the docket. We're going to do that. What it also affords us is a chance, and it's important that we make sure we look at consumer protection and accountability very clearly.

In today's media package, there was a story here about Premier Wynne's life partner being involved in the Osborne Group and taking a fairly significant salary out of there for a number of years. That money did not go to kids with some autism challenges.

This opportunity, when we stand and rise in this House, is the time for us to make sure that people at home do know we're holding them to account. We are paying attention on the bigger issues—not just those that today are on the docket, but on the bigger issues, and this is one of significant concern.

It should be noted that the McGuinty government fought a move in court to extend intensive therapy for autistic kids beyond age six. We still don't know why that is, because they're not forthcoming in telling us. A salary of the CEO of \$200,000-plus: That money could be going to autistic kids.

We do need consumer protection. We need protection for everyone out there, and that's what we're here to do, to ensure that the Liberals can't just keep slamming stuff through like the Green Energy Act, which they floated through during the cover of darkness and is significantly, negatively impacting our communities across this great province.

We need to ensure that there's accountability. We need to ensure that there's consumer protection at every stance. My colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga has done it. My colleague from Simcoe–Grey, I think, had a great line: This is heavy on presentation, light on context.

We want to get it to committee so that we can actually have some advancements made and make sure that it truly does. There needs to be enforcement, which my colleague from Simcoe North also said. We do want it to get there, but we want to make sure that we're doing our job. We'll stand here every day, protecting the people that sent us to Queen's Park, and we'll be proud of it.

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

I recognize the member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Bill Walker: The Chi-Cheemaun is running.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, it is. The Chi-Cheemaun is running. I want to thank my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. We did some fantastic work on that together. It just goes to show that when you work together, you can accomplish quite a few things.

I also want to thank the minister for having listened to both of our messages—and not just our messages; it's the people that sent us here to actually do our job. We did do our job—kudos to you—and I'm doing my job here today.

We work great together, but we also criticize each other quite well as well. I always enjoy it when my friend tells me that the NDP are trying to push this into committee. I just want to remind my colleague here that I'm always in my chair, listening. That's also part of this job: Listening to what people are saying. That's from the opposition; that's also from the government and from your colleagues. These wonderful things we have on the sides of our heads—I remind people of this every single opportunity that I have—are called ears. Some of us hear with them; others listen with them. And there is a difference. Listening is that you actually appreciate what people are saying and you start understanding and really listening to what the message is that people are bringing forward. I'm listening to you, my friend, I really am, every opportunity that I have. I enjoy listening to everybody in this House. Although sometimes I don't rise on every occasion, I am always listening. That's my job. People from Algoma–Manitoulin appreciate, when I go back home, that we can hold a dialogue; we can have a discussion. And when we're talking about consumer protection, we are listening. I am listening to them.

It's very important that we get this back to our constituencies. Working together—all of us here—is what Ontarians want us to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you for those questions and comments. I return to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for his response.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm happy to conclude my remarks with regard to Bill 55. Of course, I'd like to thank my colleagues who have had the opportunity to provide some comments to my initial 10 minutes on this piece of legislation.

I do find it a bit disturbing when members of the government say we shouldn't be taking our opportunity to stand up and speak on behalf of our communities with regard to a specific piece of legislation. I know that when I met with stakeholders on this particular bill in my riding and in my constituency office, I did tell them point-blank that I would be speaking to the bill; that I would be communicating some of the concerns they had and, of course, some of the examples they highlighted that there is a need for this. And here is my opportunity to do that. To suggest that I not do that would be, I believe, in fact letting my community down.

They're the ones who sent me here to stand up and speak on their behalf. I've taken that opportunity now to have those comments on the record in this forum and communicate or relay those important messages that were communicated to me. I won't hesitate to continue to speak to bills of all nature to ensure that my community in Kitchener–Conestoga, the constituents there, have that mechanism or forum to be able to communicate their concerns and comments, good or bad, with regard to a certain piece of legislation.

There's no doubt that there's consensus that we need to get this into committee. I look forward to working with the government on, in fact, building this bill to not only include door-to-door salespeople of hot water heaters, but

other services that I believe we've heard as well, like paving companies, vacuum salespeople, energy offsets and lawn care.

Of course, I want to thank the minister and member from Pickering–Scarborough East for bringing forward this piece of legislation. I look forward to adding my further comments in committee.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be here, to rise today and to debate. I want to thank my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga for his enlightened remarks. I can tell that he spent a good deal of the summer break in his constituency talking about these very matters with his constituents. I know him to be a very valued colleague, and I appreciate his comments.

Just a quick one to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan earlier in debate: The reason we are discussing this bill is so that we can debate it and each member has an opportunity to provide insight and have the time to speak and consult with their constituents over such matters. I think that is why I like to take the time to be part of a political debate such as this one, particularly as it pertains to stronger protection for Ontario consumers.

Before I get into my remarks on some of the areas that I'd like to talk about, today was a special day in this assembly when we welcomed five new members to this chamber, to this place. I would like, on behalf of our colleagues, to congratulate Doug Holyday, the former deputy mayor of Toronto, for joining us. Mr. Holyday provided our party with, I think, an excellent injection of excitement and enthusiasm, particularly given the fact that he is from the wonderful city of Toronto, where many of us spend a great deal of our time. Of course, he brings with him, I think, a background and record of achievement that many members in this assembly would like to emulate, particularly as it comes to consumer protection and taxpayer protection. I admire the work that he did at the city of Toronto, I'm delighted that he is on our team and I want to thank him for being here with us today and for every other day moving forward. It is with that in mind that I think I will bridge my remarks to this consumer protection act and just some of the things I think aren't here.

1530

In general, obviously, Speaker, I support this. I think the title says an awful lot: the protection for Ontario consumers act. But I looked through the bill, and I looked through some of the initiatives that are going to be undertaken, and I do notice that there are some glaring absences. I will say this: In terms of the consumer protection act, I think that we have an opportunity as an assembly to do a little bit more in teaching young consumers how to prepare for the world after high school, after university and to buy their first home; and teach them how to read the fine print in contracts, whether that is with a bank, whether that is with another corporation, or whether that is simply understanding whatever they're doing in terms of their own family budget. We're not

doing that, and as the Ontario PC education critic, I have advocated for greater reforms in financial literacy in our school system. I think that has been met with a great deal of support.

I know that in our recent white paper that I had provided to the assembly, but also more directly to our PC caucus, I called for those types of reforms. I was pleased, recently, Speaker, to work with the Economic Club of Canada and their Jr. Economic Club, as well as many corporations like Visa, Scotiabank, CIBC, Sun Life and Porter air, to talk about how we can encourage younger students to carry on a lifelong love of learning about financial literacy so that when they are consumers with big cellphone contracts and homes, they will actually understand the contracts that they are signing—what those terms are and why interest rates will go up. I think that's where we have to start, so when you talk about, for example, door-to-door sales, debt settlement and even real estate, they are in a better financial position because they understand the gravity of these contracts that they will be signing. I think that is a key, and one very absent area, that we could be building upon right here, so I would encourage the minister, Ms. MacCharles, to consider talking to the Minister of Education and possibly even the finance minister in order for us to develop a made-in-Ontario curriculum that will help students across Ontario.

Now, Speaker, I know you're aware that I've had, from time to time, a private member's bill on grow-ops and clandestine drug operations, as it pertains to real estate, and the homes that have been resold that were actually occupied by somebody with a clandestine drug operation and how unhealthy that is for children who either live around or in one of those grow operations. It's very dangerous for our police—many of them are booby-trapped—and for the next owner. There is significant damage to the structure, both through mould and through the air particles that are there. I noticed in this bill, for example, that we're not talking about that extended consumer protection for homeownership in order to ensure that those houses are sound and that they are remediated. So I think that there was an opportunity here for the minister to have that included in the bill or at least to have that abridged discussion on this floor so that we could ensure that children in our communities who are either exposed to or living in a clandestine drug operation are protected and the future homeowners are actually protected as well.

But I do notice that there is a desire here by members of all parties to enhance consumer protection in our province, and that is something that we can build upon, something that we should be discussing. That's why I take exception to the comment by the member from Thunder Bay. I think that it is incumbent upon all of us as members of the assembly, particularly on this very first and important day back in the assembly, to talk about issues we were dealing with, with our constituents.

I would be remiss, Speaker, if I were not to mention hydro prices in terms of consumer protection. One of the

things I heard time and time and time again over the last few months has been about hydro prices and protecting consumers who are dealing with these and struggling with these high hydro rates. I will go back to the fact that we still have to have a very honest and open discussion on those cancelled gas plants. We still don't have all of the details, nor do we have all of the information in terms of how much this is going to actually cost the taxpayer base or, in my opinion, the consumer of our hydro. That's why today I had a question in question period, and I asked the Premier if she would release the information and the results from the Auditor General's report. Now, of course, she's going to say, "I don't have it." But we all know that she has seen a draft of that; that's how it works in government. The Premier and the minister's office see that. In addition to that, in that very critical information, I think we will find that it will be better to protect consumers in the long run through government accountability measures.

That auditor's report is important, but so too is what I would consider a hallmark of accountability on this issue, which is what my leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for, and that is a judicial inquiry. I think that would support consumers who are consuming hydro in this province and who are bearing these incredibly high energy rates as a result of mismanagement by the government. I think that is something that we should be exploring here. That is why I took the opportunity, after being away in my community for the past several months, in Nepean–Carleton to talk to the people of the city of Ottawa and others who were concerned that they have not received the level of protection of their taxpayer dollars that they expect of a government.

Speaker, I recognize, with the short time that I have left and the limited time that I have left, that we have an opportunity, as we move forward in this assembly with five new members and a desire from all members to seek consumer protection, and that there are other serious matters that we must also include in this discussion and in this debate. As I said, we are in a very good position with people like Mr. Holyday, who has joined us from Toronto City Hall, where they were able to protect the taxpayer or, as we would say here in this debate, the consumer.

We do know that there are opportunities with financial literacy that should be explored and enhanced in this province, and we do know, for example, that in real estate there is more that can be done with clandestine grow operations—all absent from this bill. If we were to have a sober second thought, look at some of the enhancements that we could make to this legislation once it goes to committee and have a renewed focus on consumer protection as a whole, I think that we could get somewhere as an assembly.

Speaker, in the short minute that I have left, I want to thank you for the opportunity to debate here today. One of the greatest experiences any member of the Legislature can have is to stand on this floor and bring their views and the views of their constituents to the great

debate in this great House, which has withstood hundreds of years, many debates, many political parties and many various governments.

With that, I again want to thank you. It has been a pleasure to engage in this debate, and I would be remiss not to acknowledge the hard work of my colleague and next-door neighbour in eastern Ontario, Jim McDonell, our critic from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, for the great work that he has done in looking into this bill, analyzing it and providing our caucus with a briefing. Thank you very much, Speaker. I look forward to any questions my colleagues may have.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013. I hope it's 2013, because we have to move this forward to committee. We've been talking about it long enough. It deals with consumers who are getting taken by certain businesses, and we have to protect the consumer. We can't keep talking about it. We can't miss 2013. We have to get it into legislation. It's good legislation.

It was a major issue. I heard about people in the military getting taken with this in my own riding of Ottawa–Orléans; they ended up with two hot water tanks. These people are just not very professional in what they're doing, not very concerned about the ethics of their work.

I think we have to get it in place. We have to bring this legislation forward. We can't keep talking about it. Let's get it into committee. If there are issues that have to be improved, that's the time to do it. Get the issues improved, and get it into law in this province so that we protect our consumers. This is something to do.

1540

You start talking about clandestine grow operations and other things like that. That's not part of this bill, and we have to deal with what we want to do here, deal with protection under door-to-door sales and debt settlement services. These are areas which require our attention and require our work. Let's get the talking stopped and get this into committee, make the changes we have to and get on with legislation that's going to protect the consumers, that's needed by the consumers in the province of Ontario. Every one of us knows how people have been taken under both these areas that we're going to correct. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to take a second or two just to welcome the five new members to the Legislature. In my short time here, it has been a real privilege to represent the people of Ontario. I know that they'll look forward to it and do their best at it.

On our bill here, Bill 55, stronger protection, there are some issues here that we have to bring forward. I know there's some discussion from some of the members about pushing this bill through. I think it's important that we

talk about this bill. I think that we're elected here, as these new members would see, to have the opportunity to bring the views from our ridings. The honourable member from Nepean–Carleton, whom I worked closely with this summer in many of the activities, is well respected in her riding. For her, her attention to detail and to the response that she gives to her residents, because I think it's important that—I try to work as hard and try to fill some big shoes there.

We look back. Going around in the summer, I heard a lot of people talking about things. Unfortunately, you would think they'd be talking about some of these existing bills like consumer protection, because it is important. But no, they were talking about scandals at Queen's Park, gas plants, wanting to know what we were doing to get to the bottom of it. They're getting tired of it. I think that that talks about the politics of Ontario. They've taken them off where the politicians should be, but they're reflecting on what's happened in this government over the last 10 years as colouring us all in the opposition parties, and I guess I take an insult to that because I don't think that's what we're about. I think we are about accountability and we are about things like consumer protection. We want to move on with those things and we want to see it get to committee. But many people on this side want the opportunity to stand up and talk for their constituents as well. Thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Out of respect to the member from Nepean–Carleton, I get up and acknowledge the remarks and the passion that she puts forward in this House. When it comes to an activist on our side of the House, Ms. MacLeod certainly takes issues very strongly, very seriously and very competently I should say. In talking about this consumer protection bill and the three schedules, I think clearly, at the end of it, it all comes down to the idea of being accountable because that's what these three pieces of a consumer protection bill really are about, is protecting the consumer.

Now, who is the consumer? Ultimately, at the end of the day, the taxpayer, indeed the young pages, the new pages here, are why we're here. Now we do want accountability, but when I look at some of the clippings, and the three schedules here aren't directly related, but I was so disappointed when I saw this clipping from the Toronto Sun today. Maybe some of the Liberal members, the few that are here, would listen. The title is, "Meanwhile, Wynne's Spouse Cashed In." This article is from the media, so it's partially if not totally true. "Jane Rounthwaite—Premier Wynne's partner of 25 years—not only served for ... two years—during 2010 and 2011—as the interim director of program services for" an agency, Osborne Group. During that time, the government moved the funding to that agency by 60%.

At the same time, we have complaints in this article about children with autism not getting coverage. That's the kind of consumer protection I'm here to fight for.

That's the kind of consumer protection our education critic is here for. This government should be held accountable for their lack of respect for consumers in Ontario. Just look at the outrage in Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The new government whip, Mr. Flynn, is talking here, and he should more frequently listen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I just caught the last part of the member from Durham's comments. He's always a passionate spokesperson for his party and certainly for his riding. I appreciate his comments. He spoke to the fact that this government should be held to account for a whole host of issues, many of which we've talked ad nauseam in this place. But that's what we are doing here in the New Democratic Party. We have introduced something that's quite novel, quite pragmatic and quite practical in the Financial Accountability Office—a third party, independent watchdog that has the legislative teeth to scrutinize the expenditures of this government, of this House. And, my goodness, isn't it about time?

So when it comes to plugging those massive holes and those gaps in accountability and opening up the doors to transparency, we in the New Democratic Party are using our voice, our effort and our time to do that. I think, as indicative of those efforts, we were rewarded with two new members in this Legislature. I think the people of this province can see and appreciate that above all—above the rancour that happens in this place—we can still get some things done, accomplish some of those goals and set priorities for this House and for this province.

Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you how happy I was to walk into this place today, well rested, exuberant and filled with a renewed sense of optimism coming from my riding that things can get done. I hope that's the spirit that guides us throughout this second session of the 40th Legislature, and one that I'm certainly willing to put all my effort into.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I'm pleased to return to the member for Nepean–Carleton for her response.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. It was a real pleasure to hear the comments from my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans, obviously my next-door neighbour in Ottawa. I have one of these interesting ridings in eastern Ontario. I'm almost adjacent to all of the 13 ridings, with the exception of three, and so I do get to see all of my colleagues from time to time. It's so unique in the way that it's situated.

I would like to say thank you to my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who is also adjacent to my riding. My colleague from Durham, I think, has unparalleled passion in this place. I thought his fiery speech, particularly his defence of autistic children, was very admirable and I think very important. I know I speak for my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa as well.

She and I have had, from time to time, our own voices in that debate, and I know that we're very proud that he added his voice as well. And to my colleague from Essex, it was good of you to join the debate. I appreciate that. I was getting very nervous that you weren't going to step up and that we would have been one person short on the questions and comments, but I see your passion and I appreciate it.

Obviously, consumer protection is something that we all get behind. It's just how it is done. There's a lot of window dressing from time to time but at the very heart of the matter sometimes this government isn't prepared to do that legwork. That's why I'm simply appealing to them today on a bill that I effectively can support. The challenges, though, run much deeper than just this piece of legislation, and the solution is actually starting in high school and perhaps even younger, in elementary school, with a strong and robust program for financial literacy for our children and our young adults so that they are prepared, when those contracts come, to understand the consequences of them when they sign on the dotted line.

I appreciate once again the opportunity to debate on this matter, but if I could leave one, single statement for my colleagues, it is this: Financial literacy will be the key to good consumer protection, and we can all start on that right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this House today to speak to Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act of 2013. Through this bill, the government is proposing to address consumer concerns related to three industries: the water heater, debt settlement and real estate industries.

Let me begin by stating that Progressive Conservatives understand that for a free market to work and for Ontarians to prosper, consumers require confidence and trust in the companies that they do business with, and trust that the government will enforce the rules when businesses engage in deceptive and misleading practices. In addition, it is essential that Ontario have a simple, understandable regulatory framework that provides transparency and accountability to consumers, and certainty and fairness to business owners and operators.

1550

The vast majority of businesses in Ontario are run by decent, hard-working people who deserve our praise and respect. Unfortunately, there are a small number of bad actors in every industry who use misleading and deceptive practices which often damage the reputation of their industry.

That said, as industries evolve, legislation needs to evolve to reflect changes in business practices, particularly when there are widespread reports of mistreatment and abuse of consumers. We want to be careful, though, that we do not adversely impact honest, hard-working Ontarians in an effort to shut down those few bad actors.

Debt settlement: For example, a vulnerable Ontarian who needs to tackle their debts will sometimes resort to hiring a debt settler. Honest, diligent and experienced debt settlers can be a godsend to consumers in trouble. They bring a wealth of experience, contacts, and alternatives to bankruptcy. For that reason, we must ensure that consumers have access to the goods and services that they desire, including debt settlement services.

As is true of any industry, debt settlers can be honest or not, but currently it is somewhat difficult for the consumer to judge their motives. Ideally, consumers looking to hire a debt settler would do their due diligence, research a number of companies and choose the most appropriate one for their needs. Unfortunately, this is not always how it happens. Debt collectors call, the pressure to find a solution builds, and the thought of bankruptcy terrifies the average consumer, so the promise of a fast, painless, inexpensive resolution is more than a little attractive to consumers in trouble. While no settlement is ever painless, we need to see some serious steps in the legislation to ensure that once a consumer has resorted to a settler, at a minimum they are protected from debt collectors.

As well, I understand that this ministry has heard of issues with respect to agreements between lenders and debt settlers. To that, I would say: One cannot have two masters. Either debt settlers are working for the lenders or they're working for the debtor. They cannot work for both, as it is a conflict of interest. Therefore, consumers deserve to know, before entering into a contract involving their debt, whose interests the company is serving.

The confidence of Ontarians in the ministry and its legislative remit would be better served by enshrining the principle of transparency and requiring the full disclosure of the company funding and directorships to the consumer. However, the minister has chosen to defer such policy to regulations. This is problematic as, with legislation, the opposition parties have an opportunity to publicly identify issues of concern and provide the government with advice on improving the legislation. Regulations, on the other hand, are made behind closed doors and, as such, are much more vulnerable to influence.

With respect to water heaters, we must maintain the focus on what is wrong: the deliberate deception, the hiding of costs, the high-pressure tactics and the exploitation of customers' vulnerabilities by certain bad actors in the door-to-door sales sector.

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

Once a new water heater is installed, following 20 days, if the consumer has not sorted out matters with

their current supplier, they often face severe penalties. Cancellation charges can run into the hundreds of dollars. Moreover, the suppliers are free to charge outrageous amounts for damages such as small scratches on 10-year-old tanks.

Aggressive sales tactics are certainly a concern, but let's remember that consumers are taken advantage of in more ways than one. The fact of the matter is that you cannot legislate away deception and vulnerability. We have many laws against undesirable actions. That does not mean people stop behaving badly. We need to strengthen the ministry's enforcement tools and ensure consumers have recourse beyond the court system, since often the ones who are most vulnerable are also the ones who are least able to access the courts.

Doubling the cooling-off period and requiring plain language rests on one assumption: The consumer will understand the ramifications of their actions if they are given 10 additional days to consider the contract. Remember, people tend to complain when things go wrong, which usually means they've encountered difficulties well past the cooling-off period.

Full disclosure and cancellation fees and penalties are also of concern. Many consumers do not complain until a problem materializes, and this bill does not resolve these issues. Consumers need clear rules and open and fair competition.

For example, we've heard of equipment that's been installed for longer than its recommended life. We have heard of the difficulties consumers incur when they try to cancel unwanted services. We've heard that equipment is not maintained or serviced until it malfunctions, often accompanied by a flood leading to property damage. I would have expected some words in this bill to address these issues.

The two largest players in the field are both under investigation by the federal Competition Bureau for steps that they've taken to make it very difficult to cancel long-term contracts. I wanted to point out that one of those players supports this bill.

Prosperity depends on free markets, which foster competition and innovation. This Liberal government does not have faith in free markets and competition, instead believing that centrally planned economies is a better approach. Picking winners and losers is a favourite Liberal pastime. For that reason, I fear this bill will be used by the government to shut down competition, versus the stated claim of protecting homeowners or consumers. We have seen this before: hard-working, honest and dedicated small and medium-sized enterprises regulated out of business for no other reason than bad legislation and regulation. We must be wary of the impulse to micromanage every aspect of the economy if it means shutting down good, honest companies who are providing services that are in demand by consumers.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I, too, would like to extend my congratulations to the new members who have joined us

here today. It was just under a year ago that I sat in my seat for the first time, so I understand what you're feeling. But it's a warm welcome you received today, and hopefully that spirit actually continues on as we try to move some legislation forward.

I'd like to say that it's a pleasure to stand up and discuss this particular piece of legislation on consumer protection, but this is the 10th day that we have discussed and debated this piece of legislation. That would be okay if we were saying new things about it, if there was new information, but there isn't. We know that this piece of legislation in particular—these are really just small steps to strengthen consumer protection. We know there's a number of issues that don't even go to the core issue of protecting consumers in the province of Ontario. So it would make sense if we would all come to some kind of consensus to get this to committee so that we can actually make it a strong piece of legislation. That is certainly what we are committed to doing on this side of the House.

1600

The member from Windsor–Essex actually makes a really good point: that we've come to this House in this renewed Legislature, the 40th Legislature, to try to get some results. We've introduced, in the last budget session, the information on the Financial Accountability Officer, which makes sense. We're pleased, actually, that it came forward today because, unlike the PCs, we are actually trying to get some work done for the people of this province. How could anyone not support the concept, in principle or otherwise, that this Legislature, that this government—based on eHealth, based on Ornge—needs greater financial accountability? You can't. So let's work together. Let's make sure that we have that financial accountability piece in place going forward, so that people can once again have trust in this Legislature.

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

Ms. Mitzie Jacquelin Hunter: Thank you again for the opportunity to address this House for the second time today. There are many businesses in Scarborough–Guildwood that would see the benefit from this added protection that this bill would provide. The Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act provides better protection and, therefore, clearly this bill is going to benefit from further consideration and thought if brought to committee. So I would certainly urge us to move forward and advance this bill so that our businesses and consumers can receive that added benefit and that added protection.

I know from having gone door to door and talking to so many individuals that this type of accountability is what they're seeking and what they're looking for. So, if that is what we desire, I would really urge us to get on with this and move it forward to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm proud to get up to address my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. I think he

always has many good things that he brings to this House from his constituents, and we're here to listen to what he's heard, especially over the summer.

He's right. Consumers must trust the companies that they buy their services from. If we don't, it's the ruin of our economy. We have a province with a reputation of good services, good products that is really looked upon around the world with envy, and I'd like to make sure that we keep that type of reputation.

Debt settlers, water heaters and real estate are all issues that need consumer protection. We're here. We want to see this bill go on. There's no question.

I heard somebody mention today that what we really need here is some protection against this government, some of the laws that are going through here. I don't see any laws on the docket to deal with jobs. We've got half a million people in this province who aren't working, so it makes you wonder if there's a need to run through these bills without some closer scrutiny because there's nothing on the docket.

The member from Nepean–Carleton talked about, in the vein of consumer protection, the need to educate our students in high school today towards good financial literacy. I think that's an important point, and we'll look at that in committee.

Issues like the Financial Accountability Officer—my view on that is people elect us to have that position. We're here to hold the government to account. Hiring somebody else who supposedly will have information deleted in front of them and not know—co-operation will do nothing as far as making this government accountable. It's just another person that we'll be paying six figures to, and we could be spending that money in health care or autism or something that they have not done yet.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to comment on my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. He brings his passion to the House every day and always holds the government accountable. I'd like to say that he is so bent on making sure he does the job well that he has his number one consumer critic in the world, his wife Janet, here in the House to make sure that he's doing his job today. We'd like to welcome Janet to the House, holding him to account as well.

I've spoken on this topic a couple of times today, and I'm going to be consistent with what I've said earlier. We need to ensure that the consumer is protected at every step along the way. We need to ensure that this gets to committee. It needs some improvements. They've done some decent work in trying to put some cooling-down periods and some other clauses in, but really what we need to do is get it to committee and ensure that it gets passed quickly and actually in place.

I heard actually not too far back that the Local Food Act was written about eight or nine years ago, and we're still waiting to get that one through, even though they had two majority governments to push that bill, which is their bill, through. Yet they're calling us obstructionists. This

is one of those, Speaker, that I hope we don't go through the same thing with.

As my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry just said, we need to ensure that there's a lot of accountability in any legislation that we're passing. There should have been more accountability in things like the gas plant scandal and eHealth, because then those dollars that they boondoggled and wasted, \$600 million—I trust it will be \$1 billion before we get done—could be going to things like hospitals, to our education system, to mental health, which is drastically needed.

I'm really getting inundated recently with people from my riding calling me, saying that they have not gotten services for their children that are drastically needed. Our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, is pushing that forward as much as she can to ensure that we start to address those really significant health care concerns that are out in our communities, and we need to do that.

That is a form of consumer protection as well, ensuring that every dollar that comes into this sacred House is spent in a value-added way, not wasted on partisan need. We need consumer protection at every step of the way. Let's get it to committee. Let's ensure that it puts good practices in place. Let's get it passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills for his reply.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I would like to thank the people who made comments: our member from Kitchener–Waterloo; the member from Scarborough–Guildwood, who, for the second time today, spoke to the House for the first time—I welcome her to the Legislature; our member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who is our critic for this area; and the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who is my noble seatmate. Thank you very much.

At first glance, one could think, well, this is a bill that doesn't have much depth or much need or all that kind of language, when really we have a large, vulnerable group of people in our community—many different groups. Senior citizens are probably the group that most people would think of first. People who have white hair would be called senior citizens. Sometimes they're very vulnerable, and we need to help these people and protect them, sometimes even from themselves.

But we have others. As mentioned, we have the mentally ill, autistic folks. There's a family in my riding that has an autistic child. Their other child has Asperger's. The cost of looking after their children has bankrupted them twice. They've lost their home. They're in dire financial straits. We have wasted money on all kinds of things like the Green Energy Act etc., when we need to be looking after people.

This bill is aimed at looking after people who are vulnerable, whether they be the families of handicapped folks, the developmentally disabled, the mentally ill or senior citizens. They need our help. Especially the senior citizens group is growing as our population ages. Look around at the white hairs in this room. Many of them are

entering that senior citizen group. We need to help and protect these people. So it's a good bill that, as our population, the baby boomers, grow and become older, there will be more and more need of.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments with respect to Bill 55. But before I do that, I would also like to extend my congratulations to the five new members who took their seats in the Legislature today and want to wish them well in the work that they are going to be doing in the future here in this Legislature on behalf of their constituents. Certainly, I think we're off to a great start with everyone having been on their feet and speaking today, so we look forward to their continued input on the various matters that we're presented with.

1610

With respect to Bill 55, we've had a lot of speakers this afternoon. This is of course 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. The short title of this, of course, is the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, and this bill was introduced by the Minister of Consumer Services here in the Legislature on April 18 of this year.

Of course, as my colleagues on the official opposition side have indicated, we are going to be supporting this bill because anything that strengthens the position of consumers and protects them from fraudulent or improper activities is something that we should support. But, I think, as you will note from some of my comments, we do believe that there are some changes that can be made to this legislation and we will be discussing them once we get into committee, with a view to strengthening this legislation and, of course, giving it more teeth so that it can be fully enforced.

The concept of consumer protection, generally, in the province of Ontario is relatively new. In fact, the first consumer protection legislation was introduced in 1966 as the original Consumer Protection Act. It contained only 35 sections and is vastly different from what we see today, but I think it's fair to say that until fairly recently, as far as consumer sales were concerned, the whole concept of caveat emptor, or buyer beware, was the rule rather than the exception. That still applies to many different consumer transactions today because not all of them are covered by this act or even the amendments that we are proposing to make now.

The concept of a cooling-off period, which is really central to a couple of the sections of this act, was really introduced fairly recently and applied in the context—if I remember correctly, and this goes back to 100 years ago when I was in law school—to deal with high-pressure tactics in door-to-door sales of vacuum cleaners. Now, we have it applying to different things today—to water heater contracts and so on—but that's what it was originally meant to be dealing with. Of course, times change,

but the reality remains the same: We want to make sure that vulnerable people are protected from high-pressure sales and that they have the opportunity to back out of a transaction if, upon second thought, they realize that this might not be to their advantage or even financially affordable for them.

So, what does this act deal with? As I said, it isn't a complete protection in all consumer transactions. It deals with several main sections: One, it amends the Collection Agencies Act, specifically with respect to debt settlement service agreements. It really talks about some of the specific provisions that need to be contained in this agreement and, again, provides a 10-day cooling-off period wherein a debtor can cancel the transaction within 10 days if they feel, upon reflection, that this isn't going to be in their best interests.

The act also amends the Consumer Protection Act with respect to unsolicited water heater sales. As I mentioned before, this is like the vacuum cleaner sales from 30 years ago. Again, it specifically indicates some of the things that need to be included in this contract and the kind of disclosure that has to happen, and provides, in this case, a 20-day cooling-off period. We've heard a lot of pretty egregious stories from across the province with respect to the sale of water heaters and water heater contracts, about returning equipment and all sorts of issues relating to that, so this is certainly a welcome protection, although I hope it will be comprehensive. That will be something that we will have the opportunity to talk about once it gets into committee.

Bill 55 also deals with the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. This is one that I am somewhat familiar with, having practised real estate law for a number of years, and I can only say that the whole concept of dealing with a real estate transaction, particularly when it's the first home that you're buying, is very daunting to consumers—to understand, first of all, what you're buying, especially when you're buying a new home, where there are all kinds of warranties that are going to be included with it; what you do and the steps along the way; who does what? What does your lawyer do for you? What does the bank do for you? How do the two of them work together? How does the closing happen? It's really important that the language be in plain language, that people understand exactly what it is that they're getting and, when it comes to things like commissions, that they understand how the commission is set up.

I would say that the vast majority of transactions that certainly I've been involved with really involve a commission based on a percentage of the sale price. It used to be sort of a standard 5% or 6%. That's gone down fairly dramatically in recent years with competition. I think it's lower than that; 3% or 4%, I think, is more the norm now. But in any case, people at least have knowledge about what the commission is going to be. They're not very happy about the HST part of it, but they know what the base amount of the commission is going to be. But there are some contracts that also provide for a combination, where there's both a set amount as well as a

percentage of the sale price. That's what this particular legislation aims to deal with. You can have one or the other, either a set amount or a percentage commission, but you can't have both. I think that will rule out any confusion in those sorts of contracts.

The act also deals with the concept of the so-called phantom offer. We've heard that in some situations, there are cases where the real estate agent might say to a prospective purchaser, "You'd better get your offer in on this right away or else you're going to lose out, because we know somebody else is bidding in at a higher price." What this act does is require that copies of written offers be kept by the real estate brokerage for a certain period of time so that if someone wants to check to make sure that in fact there have been other offers that have been submitted at higher prices, they will have the opportunity to do that. So it is certainly hoped that that is going to cut down on this sort of feeding frenzy that sometimes happens in real estate transactions, and the concept of a phantom offer that might not actually be the case will be something that consumers can actually check on.

Some of my other colleagues have mentioned that the whole basis of this legislation is to protect vulnerable people in the concept of consumer sales. We certainly support that, but I think it's also important that we note that the needs of vulnerable people in many other aspects of our society are not being dealt with.

I would like to come back briefly; several people have mentioned the private member's bill that we brought forward, just before we broke for the summer, that would have established a select committee on developmental services, which would have brought the needs of people with developmental challenges and dual disabilities with respect to both mental health challenges and developmental services challenges, to talk about the many issues that they and their families are facing in terms of housing, in terms of education, in terms of inclusionary opportunities—in terms of having an opportunity to have a life instead of not finishing school at age 21 and ending up in your parents' basement watching TV or being on the computer.

It had been my hope—because all parties had agreed to this service and this committee being established—that we would have had the opportunity to sit during the summer and complete an interim report to be submitted to this Legislature by October 31. Unfortunately, the government did not see fit to strike this committee by the time we broke in June, so it is something that I have continued to hear about from many people, not just in my riding of Whitby–Oshawa but across the province; and my colleagues have reiterated the concerns that they've heard expressed to them. So it is something that I feel very strongly about; we are going to be bringing this forward again. We are going to continue to press the government until the select committee has been established because there are so many issues that need to be dealt with.

There are people who cannot speak for themselves and who are vulnerable, for whatever reason. That's our job:

to speak up for them in the Legislature, whether it's through their needs through disability services or the needs in the context of consumer protection, and that is something we certainly intend to follow up on in the weeks and months to come.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to follow my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa in terms of this debate on Bill 55. I believe that this particular debate on Bill 55 is approaching 19 hours. I think it's prudent for this House to call the question and not to delay further conversation and debate on this issue. I'm encouraging members to do the right thing, because it is the right thing to support our consumers and every Ontarian across Ontario.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I appreciate the amount of time that has gone into this debate. It's interesting: Some of the rules are put in place to allow debate and to give members a chance to get up and talk about issues that they have in their riding, issues they'd like to see changed.

I know the member from Whitby–Oshawa brings up some very good points about the select committee on developmentally challenged residents, not only in her riding but across the province. I've had the opportunity to meet with a few groups at round tables over the years, and looking at setting up another one in October. This is a group that needs some protection, consumer protection, and just protection in general. They need our help, but this government has refused to put a select committee together that would look at some of the issues they face.

Of course, there are many issues as we go across this province, I think, that the people are wanting to see. We want to talk about some of the accountability issues. I'm sure that this has some consumer protection issues in it, but there's many more.

In my riding, the real estate agents have talked about the need—they know that there needs to be some credibility around, for instance, phantom offers. There are improvements that need to be made so that they're not tracking mounds of paper; for instance, making the package so that it's actually a one-page addendum that allows them—look for a workable solution.

I think we're looking for workable solutions that cut the cost of business, that allow the consumer to pay less for those services and that allow the consumer to have more money at the end of the day to spend on new products. That actually generates jobs.

Again, jobs are not something we're seeing in the Legislative Assembly agenda that's coming up. I think that's a key issue for the people in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Out of respect for my colleague from Durham region, the member from Whitby–Oshawa,

I'm standing to compliment her on her informed remarks. She did mention that she was a lawyer and highly regarded in the region, dealing with, in many cases, consumer protections, as a lawyer is there to protect the legalities of transactions.

I think the two points she mentioned that show her streak of compassion are the issue of the cooling-off period—I think that's very important because of today's barrage of sales tactics and techniques. Consumers, especially seniors, potentially, or other vulnerable people, might feel compelled to comply with the pressure tactics of some of these vacuum salesmen of today. It could be a cellphone salesman, for that matter, but in modern technology—but also the real estate brokers act, to clarify certain sections, with her experience in that field.

I think the most important thing is that she tried to bring the discussion around consumer protection back to one of her passions. That passion is this call for the select committee on developmental services—a review. I did hear comments during the summer about that.

Really, the point she made so eloquently was the sensitivity of some individuals, the need to be protected and the role of government, not just in this context of this bill on consumer protection but the other types of entitlements or services that people should be entitled to. Those consumers need a voice like Christine Elliott to be standing up for them, to make sure that their needs are heard by the government and, indeed, by all of Ontario and, more importantly, understood in the context that she brings it forward.

I think this bill has had a significant amount of discussion and needs to move swiftly and momentarily to committee to correct some of the shortcomings of the bill itself that have been pointed out during these debates over the last few days.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment, if there is any.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to offer comments on my esteemed colleague from Whitby–Oshawa. She has been an absolutely tireless champion for those from the mental health and special needs sectors, and she continues to do that. I think that she has been very eloquent again today in bringing this about with a very specific consumer protection area, that being we need a select committee for the developmental needs of others.

This is something that—more and more people in our communities are falling through the cracks. They're not getting the care they need, and it's something we all have to collectively address in this House.

As my colleague points out, over the last eight years, it has gotten worse, not better, and part of that is because of the waste and the scandals and the boondoggles. The money that something like the gas plant could have gone towards—it could have cleared up those wait-lists.

People in my riding are having two-and-a-half to four-year waiting lists to try to get those most vulnerable into some kind of care, some kind of service that will ease the burden. The family members that have been providing

that care are getting very elderly. They're coming to my office in tears. They don't know what they're going to do. They don't know who to turn to. They don't know what's going to happen to their children when something, unfortunately, will happen to them. It's something that absolutely should be a priority.

While I agree that we're standing in this House, debating this, for over 17 hours, the key is that we have to make sure we bring debate on behalf of our constituents. They need to know that they're sending us to Queen's Park with their messages, and these are the types of messages we need to—so although this debate was more about gas heaters and real estate, we've taken the opportunity to bring other things to the light of the government opposite, so that they will make sure they are addressing those and, hopefully, as they look at their agenda for the coming months and coming years, that they'll make sure that mental health and those with special needs are definitely at the highest priority.

Speaker, those more vulnerable, those that need help, are the reason all of us come to this place to make a better world for everybody, and every day that we're here, we will continue to do that. I will stand here proudly and bring those types of concerns to the House, to your attention, Speaker, and most importantly, to the government, who truly is responsible for setting the agenda and fixing these glaring gaps in service delivery for those less fortunate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Whitby–Oshawa for her reply.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to thank my colleagues who have commented on my remarks: the members from Scarborough–Agincourt, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Durham, and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

To the member from Scarborough–Agincourt: I agree with you. We have had a lot of discussion on this bill. I think it is important, because it does deal with several different areas, but I think that we are getting to a resolution of this quickly, and I hope that we will have this in committee very soon. You're right: It is the right thing to do, and we should get on with it.

To my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry: He talked about developing workable solutions to make sure that businesses can deal with this, to make sure that we retain this essential information but that we do it in a way that makes sense. Can we summarize it? What's the best way in order to do it so that we get the essential information contained and retained but that it

doesn't provide undue problems for those who are retaining those records?

The member from Durham talked about the importance of cooling-off periods. I think there is a preponderance of high-pressure sales going on in various different aspects of Ontario today, and we need to do whatever we can do to protect vulnerable people, particularly vulnerable seniors.

Finally, my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound again talked about vulnerable people generally. Though this is only dealing with vulnerable people in the context of consumer protection, again, we need to turn our minds to the needs of other vulnerable people.

I think that there is some private members' business that's going to be coming up later this week, and the member from Oakville is going to be bringing forward a private member's bill to deal with psychological issues in the workplace. That's something that makes a whole lot of sense. I think that we should be protecting those people, but I would ask all of the government members to also reconsider the select committee on developmental disabilities. This is something where there are a huge number of needs in a huge number of areas. I ask you to reconsider it and support it.

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

Ms. MacCharles has moved second reading of 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. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received from the chief government whip a request to defer the vote until deferred votes tomorrow.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Naqvi has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1630.

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Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
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Jonah Schein
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Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Steve Clark
Grant Crack, Vic Dhillon
Garfield Dunlop, Cindy Forster
Lisa MacLeod, Amrit Mangat
Michael Mantha
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, Jerry J. Ouellette
Jagmeet Singh
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
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John Fraser, Randy Hillier
Rod Jackson, Monte Kwinter
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
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Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
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Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon
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Helena Jaczek, Jane McKenna
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Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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